

Call for expression of interest

Concern Worldwide Multi-Country Research Programme on Food Systems for Food Security (FS4FS)

Concern Worldwide is an Irish International Non-Governmental Organisation that works towards the elimination of extreme poverty in the world’s poorest countries.

With funding from Irish Aid, Concern is embarking on a multi-annual research project examining the barriers to economic improvement and livelihood strengthening within food systems in three locations where Concern is currently working, including in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Concern invites potential research partners to submit an expression of interest in leading this research programme over a period of three years. Integral to a successful bid will be the inclusion of national research partners in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger and the elaboration of a research approach based on co-creation and joint analysis between the research partners at all stages of the work.

Research Programme Overview

Objective	To generate learning and evidence on the barriers to economic improvement and livelihood strengthening for food systems actors living in extreme poverty and the links between food systems micro businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
Timeline	Expressions of Interest must be received by Monday, 21st October at 12.00 PM Noon Irish Standard Time / GMT + 1 The expected project timeline is from December 2024 – December 2027
Locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burundi • Liberia • Niger
Budget	Applicants should submit a proposed budget not exceeding €550,000, inclusive of any applicable overheads, VAT, travel, and dissemination costs, and should note that this will be a competitive process

Additional Research Partners	This research call is only open to research teams from institutions that already partner with, or are able to develop partnerships with, national research institutions in the listed countries. This should be in the form of sub-contracting arrangements, where the research body awarded funding will on-grant to the in-country partners identified.
EOI Queries	Interested applicants can submit any EOI-related queries to hannah.boles@concern.net

Research Background

Concern conceptualises extreme poverty as a lack of or low return on minimum assets that do not generate sufficient returns to meet basic needs, exacerbated by inequality and insecurity, risk, and vulnerability. Concern emphasises the importance of looking at and working with the assets people have, in other words, working with their strengths; with what people already do, with how they cope, and with what they can already access. Building on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, Concern identifies six categories of assets upon which individuals draw, or rely on, to pursue their livelihoods – Natural, Physical, Financial, Human, Social and Political. Concern recognises that extreme poverty cannot be solved by only providing assets. The causes, maintainers and obstacles that prevent people from escaping extreme poverty such as inequality and vulnerability to hazards also need to be addressed. Experience in the past ten years from our Graduation programmes (in Burundi, Rwanda, Haiti, Malawi and other countries) has shown that these are essential to addressing the root causes of poverty, and that our programming also needs to tackle issues of powerlessness, voicelessness, discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion.

With Irish Aid Long Term Development (LTD) funding, Concern implements two programmes to strengthen livelihood security in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger: the Food Systems for Food Security (FS4FS) programme (Liberia and Niger) and the Green Graduation programme (Burundi). The Food Systems for Food Security (FS4FS) programme aims to ensure vulnerable households experience increased levels of food and nutrition security by engaging in income generation along food value chains. The approach focuses on four pillars of food security: availability, access, utilisation, and stability. The programme encourages crop diversity for improved nutrition outcomes (utility), while at the same time, attending to value chains to increase the market options for more nutritious crops (access). The programme also seeks to support the improvement of markets to provide a more fertile environment for the sale of nutritious and diverse foods (utility), while simultaneously empowering farmers at the outset to produce more nutritious and diverse foods through the availability pillar. Green Graduation programmes nurture inclusive growth and poverty reduction through providing access to viable, diversified and sustainable employment opportunities whilst placing value on the natural environment (biodiversity/ecosystems) and conserving natural capital. The Graduation Approach encompasses four main pillars: social protection, livelihood promotion, financial inclusion, and social empowerment.

The UN World Food Systems Summit in 2023 highlighted many issues with the global food system and has been a driver of progress in food systems transformation at national and subnational levels. To date, such transformation has failed to accrue benefits to those living in extreme poverty. One potential reason for this is that the most vulnerable actors within food systems supply chains, such as smallholder farmers and micro businesses,¹ are blocked from economic progress due to a lack of access to necessary services and inputs. These services and inputs include transport; financial institutions; access to information, knowledge and networks; and access to material inputs such as seeds or tools. Moreover, when they can access inputs and services, smallholder farmers and micro business owners often experience low levels of bargaining power, which can result in adverse incorporation into food systems supply chains. This is particularly true for women, whose experiences within food systems supply chains is shaped by gender inequality and the terms of their incorporation into the market system.

¹ By micro businesses we mean the petty traders, those who sell surplus produce, or some of their produce because they need the money to meet other needs; those we support in our VSLA groups, business skills training, etc.

Understanding whether the commercial relationships between SMEs and micro businesses are empowering and strengthen livelihood strategies (e.g. by providing a return on assets) or disempowering and undermine livelihood strategies (e.g. by pushing them into debt and reducing their ability to negotiate fair terms of exchange) is imperative to designing programme interventions that address inequalities within food systems.

With the overarching aim of strengthening livelihood security for those living in extreme poverty, Concern seeks to understand a) What is preventing food systems SMEs² from providing goods and services to micro business owners and how can they be incentivised to change this? b) How can micro businesses strengthen the return on their assets through engagement with food supply chains without being adversely incorporated into the market system? and c) What is the role of policy and regulation in establishing an enabling environment for growth and expansion of a more equitable food system that reaches and benefits people living in extreme poverty?

Proposed Context

The research will focus on three countries in which Concern works – Burundi, Liberia, and Niger. The research aims to understand the links between micro businesses and SMEs and the barriers to economic improvement for food system actors (smallholder farmers and micro business owners) living in extreme poverty in different settings. It also aims to examine the unique challenges to food systems posed by these contexts and to propose potential solutions, including ones which can be operationalised within a pilot period.

Burundi ranked 187 out of 193 countries on the 2023-24 Human Development Index (HDI). In Burundi, 81 per cent of the population lives in poverty and 50 per cent in extreme poverty. It has a hilly topography, which is prone to landslides and erosion, making agricultural production to feed the growing population problematic. According to the FAO, 70.8 per cent (9.1 million people) experienced moderate or severe food insecurity between 2021 and 2023.³ The Famine Early Warning Systems Network currently classifies parts of Burundi as 'stressed', due to the rapid depletion of food stocks, below average crop production due to flooding, and price inflation.⁴ Concern has been working in Burundi since 1997 and currently implements programmes in four of the country's eighteen provinces. The main focus of Burundi's programmes are on livelihoods and health and nutrition. Concern Burundi's ongoing work includes Green Graduation, programmes to prevent malnutrition and strengthen resilience and to respond to the socio-economic needs of vulnerable urban youth through the provision of vocational training, life skills trainings, coaching, and support to create income generating activities, which is sensitive to gender and protection issues.

Liberia ranked 177 out of 193 countries in the 2023-24 Human Development Index. Food and nutrition insecurity are increasing. According to the FAO, between 2021 and 2023, 81 per cent of the population in Liberia experienced moderate or severe food insecurity while 38.4 per cent (2 million people) were undernourished.⁵ Access to clean drinking water and sanitation are significant issues in rural areas, as are high illiteracy rates, especially amongst women, gender inequality, and gender-based violence. Protracted civil war from 1989 to 2004 caused devastation in Liberia; Concern started working in Liberia in 1991 in response to the civil war. Concern Liberia is currently implementing programmes to improve food and nutrition security through sustainable agricultural interventions; improve access to safe water, sanitation and health (WASH) to support nutrition programming; and improve the nutritional status of children under 5 years of age through a multi-sectoral response. In partnership with six Liberian NGO partners, Concern Liberia is implementing a programme that links micro and SME sized businesses to try and improve livelihood and nutrition outcomes.

² SMEs we understand as more established business. They buy in larger quantities, stock items for resale, might have a shop or at least a stall at an open market, and sell different items throughout the year. Petty traders/ micro businesses will largely buy from the SME for resale in their communities but they will also buy from them tools and equipment they need for food production.

³ Global Alliance for Food Security, [Global Food and Nutrition Security Dashboard](#). Accessed 27/9/24.

⁴ FEWS Net, [Burundi | FEWS NET](#) profile, August 2024 update, accessed 27/9/24.

⁵ Global Alliance for Food Security, [Global Food and Nutrition Security Dashboard](#). Accessed 27/9/24.

Niger is ranked 189 out of 193 countries by the 2023-24 Human Development Index Report. In Niger, 50.3 per cent of the population (13.2 million people) experienced moderate or severe food insecurity between 2021 and 2023.⁶ Niger faces recurrent cycles of food insecurity, malnutrition, disasters (floods, droughts, locust infestations etc.), and epidemics. Desert encroachment into Niger is having a huge impact on arable land and leading to clashes between farmers and pastoralists. As the country is very dependent on agriculture, even minor climate shocks directly affect the livelihoods of thousands of households. This situation is aggravated by the presence of armed conflicts at Niger's borders (Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Mali) and terrorist groups operating within Niger, causing internal and external security and stability challenges and massive displacement (269,996 refugees and 335,277 internally displaced persons under UNHCR's mandate in 2023), which in turn increases vulnerability. Concern has been working in Niger since 2003. The main focus of Concern Niger's programmes are on health and nutrition, education in emergencies, integrated (health, education, and livelihoods programmes) and resilience building.

The planned research will take place in the context of these programmes and will directly contribute to programme outcomes including through a pilot process to operationalise promising findings from the initial phase of the research.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research will be to:

- Understand what is preventing SMEs from providing smallholder farmers and micro business owners living in extreme poverty with the goods, services, and market opportunities they need to strengthen their livelihood strategies and improve the return on their assets within the food system.
- Understand the terms on which integration into food systems supply chains can empower those living in extreme poverty and strengthen livelihood strategies and security, particularly for women. Understand how adverse incorporation into food supply chains, which can perpetuate the cycle of poverty and undermine livelihood security, can be avoided.
- Identify potential solutions to the barriers that prevent SMEs from engaging with micro businesses. These potential solutions should build on the learnings from the research into the barriers to engagement and the terms in which market inclusion can empower those living in poverty by ensuring a gender equity lens and consideration of ethical terms of trade.
- Develop a set of evidence-based programme recommendations to drive economic improvements for food systems actors living in extreme poverty, particularly women, that can be piloted by the country programmes.
- Assess whether the pilot of the proposed solutions increases access to goods and services for micro businesses, empowers or disempowers women within food systems supply chains, and contributes to a reduction in multidimensional poverty, and identify any unintended consequences.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of SMEs when it comes to supporting smallholder farmers and micro business owners to access the goods, services, and markets that they need for their increased engagement in food systems?
 - a. What do smallholders and micro businesses need from SMEs?
 - b. To what extent do microfinance institutions target or fund rural or agricultural based SMEs and/or micro businesses?

⁶ Global Alliance for Food Security, [Global Food and Nutrition Security Dashboard](#). Accessed 27/9/24.

2. What barriers do SMEs face in providing what is needed to micro businesses?
 - a. At the country level, what are the key factors preventing SMEs from providing micro businesses within the food system with necessary products and services?
 - b. Are there any common trends across countries?
 - c. What programmatic solutions could Concern and other organisations implement to remove or address some of these barriers for SMEs (country specific or across contexts)?

3. On what terms does incorporation into food system supply chains and markets empower and enable those living in poverty, particularly women, to strengthen their livelihood strategies and security?
 - a. How have power relations between SMEs and micro businesses/smallholders shaped engagement in food systems? Does this differ based on gender?
 - b. How do the terms of engagement and trade between SMEs and smallholder farmers and micro business owners shape whether incorporation into the market and food value chains empowers or disempowers small scale producers, processors, and traders?
 - c. What level of bargaining power do smallholder farmers and micro businesses have when engaging with SMEs?
 - d. What strategies can be adopted to strengthen their bargaining power and promote fairer engagement in food systems?

4. What policies, norms, and practices exist that enable or disable engagement between micro businesses and SMEs in the selected countries?
 - a. What national policies, norms, and practices exist to encourage or facilitate SMEs, micro businesses, and smallholder farmers to engage in food systems and what gaps exist in existing systems in each country?
 - b. On the ground, how do national policies translate in practice for SMEs, micro business owners, and smallholder farmers involved in food systems?
 - c. How does gender inequality intersect with these policies, norms and practices and how should gender considerations be built into potential strategies and solutions?
 - d. Who are the actors working nationally, regionally, and bilaterally on food system strengthening? To what extent do their policies and approaches strengthen or undermine the livelihood security of those living in extreme poverty?
 - e. What national, regional, and bilateral policies and approaches are undermining food system strengthening?
 - f. What is a) good practice and b) the role of national and regional policies in making sure food system SMEs can deliver goods and services to smallholder farmers and micro businesses as expected/needed?
 - g. What are the areas for policy influencing and advocacy at national, regional, and bilateral level to make it easier and more appealing for food systems SMEs to engage with micro businesses on terms that strengthen the livelihood security of those living in extreme poverty?

Proposed Research Approach

Phase 1: Desk Research

An initial inception phase will refine and hone the research questions and assumptions and build a clear pathway/theory of change linking SMEs, smallholders/micro businesses, and the food systems important for

households living in conditions of extreme poverty. Once the research questions and assumptions have been agreed, the first phase of the research will focus on a honed desk review, encompassing secondary data collection through a targeted literature review, a review of Concern documents, and a policy analysis, along with desk based primary data collection through stakeholder mapping and preliminary key informant interviews. Analysis should incorporate external academic and grey literature and approaches internal to Concern, identifying examples of best practice and highlighting gaps or differences where present.

- **Literature Review:** How is the role of SMEs in food systems in Africa and in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger described in the literature? What are the most common barriers and challenges micro businesses face when engaging in food systems? What research currently exists on the relations, including power relationships and commercial relationships, between food system SMEs and micro businesses? What is already known about enablers and blockers for SMEs in provision of goods and services to micro businesses, particularly within the food system? What indicators are in use to assess SMEs' ability to meet the needs of micro businesses?
- **Case studies:** What are some good examples of food systems SMEs (or larger businesses) that do provide goods, services, and markets to micro businesses in the target countries (e.g. mobile phone network providers, mobile money companies, seedling nurseries) and how have they managed to achieve this? What key factors in these case studies have empowered micro businesses and strengthened their livelihood security? How has adverse incorporation into food systems supply chains been avoided? How are other organisations working with SMEs and micro businesses to strengthen food systems and livelihood security in the three countries and with what impact?
- **Review of Concern's strategy working with SMEs:** How do the targeted countries aim to support SMEs engaged in the food system under the Irish Aid Long Term Development programmes (Green Graduation, Food Systems for Food Security)? What other programme approaches is Concern implementing in those countries? Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with key Concern staff and partners should be a component of this analysis.
- **Policy Analysis:** What is the policy landscape in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger that enables or blocks SMEs from providing micro businesses within the food system with the goods, services, and markets they require for strengthening their livelihood security? To what extent have grants, loans, bilateral support, and agreements, including trade agreements, with the governments of these countries included support for SMEs, particularly food system SMEs? How have these bilateral supports influenced the terms on which those living in extreme poverty are incorporated into food system markets and supply chains? How did the governments of the targeted countries translate the recommendations from the World Food Systems Summit into action (action plans developed, policy landscape revised, etc.)? What has (not) changed for micro businesses and SMEs within the food system since the World Food Systems Summit?
- **Stakeholder mapping (in conjunction with Concern country programme teams):** Who are the SMEs engaged in food systems in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger? What size are these SMEs? What goods, services, and markets do they provide? Do they engage with micro businesses and/or smallholder farmers? Who are the other key food systems and selected supply chains stakeholders who influence access, and the terms of access, to inputs, services, and markets? Who are the key policy stakeholders, influencers, and advocates at national and regional level? What other national and international NGOs are working with SMEs and micro businesses to strengthen food systems and livelihood security in the three countries? What is their thinking/approach?

Findings from the first phase of the research will shape the implementation of the second phase, including by determining specific areas, food supply chains, and actors to target during the primary data collection within each of the three countries.

Phase 2: Primary Data Collection and Analysis

The second phase of the research will focus on primary data collection with smallholder farmers, micro business owners, SMEs, other relevant food system actors, and policymakers in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger. The primary data collection should seek to analyse barriers at the country level, while also analysing trends in the barriers identified across the three countries. With the overarching aim of strengthening livelihood strategies to alleviate extreme poverty experienced by smallholder farmers and micro business owners within the food system, the focus will be on identifying the key factors 1) preventing SMEs from providing micro businesses with the necessary products and services they require and 2) limiting micro businesses' access to markets and ability to generate a fair return on their assets. The focus of the primary data collection should also be on identifying programmatic solutions and advocacy strategies that Concern and other organisations could implement to address some of these barriers, with a focus on empowering women within food systems and strengthening their livelihood security. A gender lens must be applied to the data collection and analysis, to disaggregate findings for men and women micro business owners, smallholder farmers, and SMEs owners.

Primary data collection methods should include, at a minimum, the following:

- **Micro level:** Focus group discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with smallholder farmers and micro business owners within the food system to understand what goods and services they require to be able to improve the return on their assets and the challenges to access that they face. It should also seek to understand the key markets within the food system that smallholder farmers and micro businesses sell into, their level of bargaining power within the market system, and the terms of trade and incorporation into food supply chains, with the aim of identifying the terms on which increased engagement in food systems strengthens livelihood strategies and security.
- **Meso level:** FGDs and KIIs with food system SMEs to understand the enablers and barriers to commercial engagement with micro businesses and the kinds of incentives or measures that would be necessary for them to better meet the needs of micro businesses. It should also seek to better understand the power relations between SMEs and micro businesses, including by exploring the terms of trade, the pricing, payment, and credit/debt negotiation process, and any existing strategies for strengthening the bargaining power of micro businesses, particularly women entrepreneurs (e.g. cooperatives or village associations). The findings of the stakeholder mapping during phase 1 will be used to support the identification of key informants and FGD participants, to ensure that interviewees include SMEs that engage with micro businesses and/or smallholder farmers and that do not, to better capture the motives and barriers to engagement with micro businesses.
- **Macro level:** KIIs with policymakers and other key food system stakeholders at national and regional level, including government stakeholders, IGAD, African Union, ECOWAS, development banks, and bilateral donors, to understand their perspectives on why micro business owners do not access the goods, services, and markets that they require to generate a return on their assets, and to ascertain what, if any, measures are being taken to address this. Where possible, the KIIs should seek to identify where policies and practices, including by bilateral donors, trading partners, and food system conglomerates, undermine food system strengthening. The KIIs should also include policy mapping and interrogation for information that could not be obtained through the desk research phase, validation of the policy analysis findings, and identification of the key people and groups that need to be targeted in advocacy strategies to drive systems level change.

Phase 3: Distillation, Validation, and Finalisation of Initial Research Findings

The third phase of the project will focus on the development and dissemination of research outputs. As Concern research outputs must, first and foremost, be of benefit to the communities that Concern works with and the country programme teams supporting them, the research partner will be expected to participate in dissemination events targeted at project participants and stakeholders, as well as dissemination events related to Concern's advocacy strategy. Ongoing learning sessions between Concern country programme, support office staff, and the research partners should be built into the project design.

The third phase of the project will likely entail:

- Data analysis and triangulation, drawing on findings from both the desk and primary research stages.
- Drafting and finalisation of three country reports, a report synthesising the overall findings from the three countries, short and easily accessible learning briefs on key themes or learnings (to be determined in collaboration with Concern) and presentations on the preliminary and triangulated findings. The four report outputs should include an executive summary of findings, in-depth analysis of the key findings, and programmatic and advocacy recommendations, including concrete measures that could be road tested by the country programmes.
- A validation workshop with SMEs and micro business owners to validate the barriers related findings and to discuss the proposed solutions and recommendations.
- External dissemination including presenting to key stakeholders in country, at regional/global fora, conferences, and webinars as appropriate.

Phase 4: Pilot study

Drawing on the programmatic recommendations proposed in the research report, up to two of the country teams, with technical support from the research team and Concern Technical Advisors as needed, will design a pilot initiative for enhancing the linkages between SMEs and micro businesses. This pilot project will seek to implement a set of research-based interventions to road test their effectiveness and practicality for future programming; this could be a modification of what is planned under the Irish Aid Long Term Development programme or a new package of activities to be added to the Green Graduation/FS4FS programmes. During the implementation of the pilot study, the research team will examine the effectiveness of the piloted measures at reducing multidimensional poverty and identify any unintended consequences. The details of this phase will be discussed and finalised with the Concern team following Phases 1-3, but may include:

- Inputting into the development of a set of interventions, based on the research findings, that can be piloted for enhancing the linkages between food system SMEs and micro business owners with the aim of strengthening livelihoods and return on assets. Designing a strategy, in consultation with local communities and Concern country programme teams, for road testing the study recommendations and assessing their impact.
- Analysing the effectiveness of the intervention in terms of improving access for micro businesses, the benefits/drawbacks for SMEs trialling the interventions, the effectiveness/impact of the interventions on strengthening livelihood security, particularly for women, and any unintended consequences.
- Writing-up and reporting of findings, including in a peer reviewed journal.

Specific Tasks and Deliverables to be undertaken by the Research Partner

The below is an indicative list of tasks to be undertaken by the research partner:

- Secure any necessary ethical approval.
- Develop a brief inception report that outlines the research background and focus, the honed research questions, methodology, research tools, detailed timeline, theory of change, communication and research uptake plan. The research protocol and tools should be co-designed with the national research partners, with input from Concern's country programme teams and key stakeholders (e.g. community representatives, policymakers, donors).
- Design and facilitate any enumerator trainings needed to deliver on chosen methods and research tools developed.
- In-person visits for the purpose of training, data collection, data quality assurance, and dissemination of learning.
- Communication, coordination, and relationship building with Concern teams in country and support offices, including sharing of ongoing learnings throughout the project.
- Sub-contract national research partners (which should include national researchers/research institutions and may include partners that work within the policy and governance space), and work with them to develop and deliver on the research protocol, project management, stakeholder and policy mapping, analysis and validation of findings, and the development and communication of results and recommendations.
- Hosting of periodic reflection sessions that bring together the research and programme team to discuss progress, programme adaptations, policy implications, and advocacy priorities.
- Ensure research findings and results are shared and discussed with research participants.
- Delivery of high-quality research reports at relevant points through the study cycle for the purpose of documenting the research process, sharing findings and how these can/should be used to inform programming recommendations, identifying policy implications, and for advocacy purposes.
- Communication of results in a manner that is relevant for a variety of target audiences (e.g. CSOs and CBOs, policymakers, sub-national public servants, donors). This could include design and/or delivery of presentations to diverse audiences, collaboration with Concern's technical advisors on learning briefs, policy briefs which have targeted recommendations relevant to national and sub-national policy development, implementation and governance processes.
- Development of a dissemination plan for sharing of findings, including practical evidence-based recommendations, for each of the three countries, along with a high-level dissemination strategy, in consultation with the Concern Advocacy team, that includes presenting the findings and recommendations in academic and (global) policy arenas.

The following deliverables are envisioned from the research.

Expected deliverable	Timeline
An inception report within the first four months	March-May 2025 (depending on date contract signed)
Three draft country specific reports on findings from Phase 1-3 for Burundi, Liberia, and Niger	December 2026
Finalised country specific reports, including detailed, evidence-based targeted recommendations for the pilot study, incorporating feedback	February 2027

from the validation workshops in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger and from the Concern teams in support offices, Burundi, Liberia, and Niger	
A synthesis report of key findings	March 2027
Short, concise, and easily accessible learning papers on key themes that country programme teams can use to inform future programming	2025-2027
A report examining the effectiveness and unintended consequences of the piloted recommendations	December 2027
A peer reviewed journal article	By end of 2028 (draft paper submitted to Concern prior to contract completion in December 2027)

Required Experience/Qualifications of the Research Team

- Demonstrated expertise/published peer reviewed research in the field of food systems, SMEs and market inclusion, and its relevance to poverty reduction and the strengthening of livelihood strategies and security
- Expertise in food system SMEs and micro businesses and their working relationships would be desirable
- Prior record of seeing research projects through to completion as Principal Investigator and in subcontracting and working effectively with national research partners
- Prior experience of working in partnership and co-creating research with research institutions, ideally in Burundi, Liberia and Niger or in similar contexts.
- Experience using in-depth qualitative methods and participatory approaches, particularly in complex and fragile contexts
- Experience analysing policy contexts, the stakeholders involved, and contributing alternative policy proposals/recommendations
- Demonstrable experience of disseminating research to different audiences and influencing policy and practice
- Experience of managing teams and research partnerships in complex contexts
- Affiliation with recognised academic/research institute
- Ability within the research team to work through French; each team member's level, if any, of French should be detailed within the proposal

Submission of Expressions of Interest

Applications must be submitted by **Monday, 21st October 2024 at 12.00 PM Noon Irish Standard Time (GMT + 1)**. Applications should be sent via email to hannah.boles@concern.net and be no more than 2,500 words (excluding CVs annexed to the proposal) covering the following points:

- Applicants should describe their proposed project sufficiently to allow reviewers to determine its feasibility and potential impact. This should include a brief description of the scope, proposed methodology, limitations, and ethical considerations.

- The expression of interest should include a timeline and a detailed estimated budget. The budget should include all overheads, VAT, and applicable taxes, along with an indication of what percentage of the budget will go to the national research teams; any submissions that seeks to add any applicable VAT or taxes after selection will be considered void. The review process will be price competitive, with proposals scored based on a 30/70 weighting for cost effectiveness/proposal quality and technical expertise. Please note that Concern will not pay more than 25% in indirect overheads. Please include how budget sub-granting will be managed in the proposal.
- Recognising that the research will be used to inform programming, intellectual property rights must not block the diffusion or use of the data generated during the research. The proposal should clearly state any institutional requirements on intellectual property arising from the study and how the research team intends to make the study datasets and findings publicly accessible to NGOs and international organisations working on poverty alleviation and the empowerment of smallholder farmers and micro business owners.
- List of potential research outputs and dissemination plan, to be finalised in discussion with Concern during the inception phase.
- Structure of proposed research team, including CVs of the research leads with a list of their relevant publications, must be provided along with a statement of ability of team to carry out the project to completion.
- Please identify in-country research partners for Burundi, Liberia, and Niger and the research leads for each country.
- Please declare any conflict of interest that may arise from involvement in the study.

The proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Evaluation criteria	Weighting (out of 100)
Rigour of study methodology <i>(most appropriate methods for answering the research questions; includes approach to data analysis and triangulation; addresses the intended scope; ethical considerations; and realistic within the project timeline)</i>	30
Qualification and relevant expertise of the research team <i>(PI with expertise in food systems and the role of market systems and actors in alleviating extreme poverty; national research partner in and from Burundi; national researcher partner in and from Liberia; national research partner in and from Niger)</i>	40
Financial proposal <i>(best ratio of covering the proposed scope to the proposed budget; fair distribution of project budget between PI's research institution and research partners in Burundi, Liberia, and Niger; percentage of budget that goes into implementation rather than overheads)</i>	30

Please submit any clarifying questions you may have about this opportunity and process to hannah.boles@concern.net by **Friday 11 October 2024 at 5 PM Irish Standard Time / GMT + 1**. Any questions submitted by COB Friday 11 October will have responses no later than Tuesday 15 October. Questions submitted earlier will be responded to on a rolling basis. Submitted applications will be reviewed and scored by a panel committee. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to a follow-up interview with the panel before final decisions are made.

Anticipated timeline	Activity
30 th September – 21 st October	Advertise the tender
21 st October – 24 th October	Review submitted proposals
25 th October	Contact shortlisted teams
7 th and 8 th November	Conduct interviews – please confirm availability on these dates
11 th November	Contact awardee
Nov-Dec 2024 (as soon as feasible)	Award research contract

Concern would like initial contracts to be signed by the year end, with the research programme commencing in early 2025.

Concern reserves the right to accept or reject any tender bids prior to the award of contract and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time.