

Terms of Reference (TOR) for an Independent Intermediary for the Digital Agriculture Ecosystem (DAES) Public Private Partnership Project in Nigeria

1. Project Context:

The Gates Foundation has committed to a 20-year effort to catalyze agricultural transformation across Sub-Saharan Africa. Given that smallholder farmers (SHFs) constitute the majority of agricultural producers on the continent, strengthening their access to localized, data-driven knowledge systems is pivotal to unlocking improved productivity, resilience, and income growth. The convergence of widespread mobile phone penetration with the rapid development of artificial intelligence presents a transformative opportunity to address long-standing extension system bottlenecks—namely, the high farmer-to-extension worker ratio, limited site-specific advisory services, and the absence of sustainable delivery models. In this context, the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), together with Sahel Consulting, Africa Practice, Sasakawa Africa Association, and Nigeria Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (NIFAAS), have completed a comprehensive scoping exercise. This foundational effort included:

- An assessment of private sector demand and willingness to co-invest,
- A mapping of smallholder realities in key states (Oyo, Gombe, and Kaduna),
- The design of an initial product profile aligned with public-private delivery mechanisms.

This planning phase will lay the groundwork for successful implementation by resolving outstanding pre-operational issues, fostering deeper stakeholder alignment, and ensuring institutional and operational readiness.

The Digital Agricultural Extension Solution, currently facilitated by the Gates Foundation (GF), is envisioned to be sustained through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. This initiative aims to establish a collaborative framework with various entities across the agriculture ecosystem, including governmental bodies, small-scale producers, farmers, research institutions, private agri-businesses, and civil society, to ensure the long-term success and widespread adoption of digital agriculture extension services. The formalisation of this partnership, particularly concerning regulatory and policy alignment, will likely involve a key governmental anchor via a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Justification for intermediary: Given the complexity of navigating a diverse range of digital agriculture ecosystem stakeholders, including mobile network operators, digital systems developers, the private sector, as well as addressing varied regulatory requirements, and facilitating a comprehensive MoU/ Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), an independent intermediary can significantly streamline the process. This entity can help build consensus on roles and responsibilities, ensure effective stakeholder engagement across different types of organizations, and bridge communication gaps between the Gates Foundation /AFAAS and the various partners.

2. Project Objectives

The primary objectives of engaging an independent intermediary are to:

- Assist in the planning of multi-stakeholder workshops that will result in the drafting of Memoranda of Understanding/Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

- Assist in facilitating consensus building on roles, responsibilities, and regulatory alignment among the digital agriculture extension ecosystem stakeholders.
- To finalize the MoU and support signing within the agreed timeframe and scope.
- To assist in developing a go-to-market (GTM) strategy based on the priority value chains identified through the multi-stakeholder workshop.
- To assist in finalizing and aligning the technical and business planning required for the 5-year investment phase after the workshop.
- Serve as the product owner for the Digital Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) platform. This encompasses taking responsibility for coordinating its governance, managing content, ensuring regulatory compliance, and facilitating inclusive digital advisory services for farmers across Nigeria, in collaboration with public and private partners.

3. Scope of Work

The selected independent intermediary will undertake key actions and roles, initially supporting the Planning Team during the planning grant activities and subsequently extending to the full product lifecycle:

A. During the Planning Grant Phase

- I. Pre-Workshop
 - Collaborate with AFAAS to design a tailored workshop strategy, approach, and agenda.
 - Prepare pre-reading materials reflecting regulatory reviews, DAES mapping, and proposed MoU content for participants.
 - Support workshop logistics, including invitations, materials distribution, and stakeholder engagement.
- II. Workshop Facilitation
 - Support the Planning Team in facilitating the multi-stakeholder workshops. This includes guiding discussions effectively to achieve defined outcomes, mediating diverse viewpoints, and facilitating consensus among participants on key terms, clauses, and regulatory compliance aspects of the MoU and SOP.
 - Support the iterative drafting and refinement of the MoU and SOP documents during the workshop, incorporating real-time input and securing alignment from all key participants. Additionally, establish a small, representative task force responsible for finalizing and signing off on the documents post-workshop.
- III. Post-Workshop
 - Support in the finalization of the formal MoU and SOP documents based on the workshop outcomes, ensuring all agreed-upon changes are accurately incorporated and the documents are legally sound and comprehensive.
 - Assist in facilitating the final signing of the MoU with the identified governmental anchor(s) and relevant private sector partners, ideally within a predefined timeframe agreed upon during the workshop.
- IV. Product Design Alignment
 - Collaborate with the Planning Team to co-facilitate technical and business planning sessions with identified product partners.
 - Provide inputs to ensure that commitments made in the MoU/SOP translate into actionable product and service delivery plans for the DAES platform.

B. Post-Planning Grant Phase

Following the planning grant, the independent intermediary will transition to a broader, ongoing role as the product owner of the DAES platform, responsible for:

- I. Governance Management:
 - Serve as the convener and coordinator of a multi-stakeholder governance body (DAES Steering Committee) comprising government, private sector, farmer groups, and civil society organizations.
 - Lead the co-creation and implementation of a shared governance framework, ensuring continued institutional alignment and accountability.
- II. Product Ownership and Technical Operations:
 - Act as the neutral product owner of the DAES platform. Oversee platform development, rollout, and maintenance.
 - Manage platform infrastructure, ensuring data security, system interoperability, and seamless integration with partner systems through APIs.
 - Oversee the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) components, including the development, training, and refinement of machine learning models to support personalized advisory services and predictive analytics.
 - Coordinate data collection and ongoing dataset updates required for effective model training, ensuring data quality, relevance, and representativeness across geographies and user segments.
- III. Content Management:
 - Ensure content development follows a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach, incorporating user research, feedback loops, and methods such as A/B testing to validate effectiveness and relevance.
 - Develop a diverse content pipeline that includes text, images, audio, and video formats, tailored to local languages and cultural contexts to maximize accessibility and impact.
 - Establish a structured system for developing, reviewing, and approving farmer-facing content in collaboration with technical experts, user representatives, and government bodies.
 - Coordinate with telcos and agri-tech firms for content deployment and set up an editorial board or process to ensure agricultural advisory content is accurate, locally relevant, gender-responsive, and inclusive.
- IV. Regulatory Compliance and Data Governance:
 - Liaise with national regulatory authorities, including the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC), Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS), to ensure platform operations and content management comply with national regulations and data privacy frameworks.
 - Support the development of SOPs for data sharing, user consent, platform access, and content curation.
- V. Inclusive Access Design:
 - Design and implement an inclusion-focused outreach plan that prioritizes women, youth, and low-literacy users.
 - Guide development of multilingual and multimodal access solutions (e.g., IVR, USSD, SMS) to reduce access barriers and promote equitable participation.

- VI. Stakeholder Coordination:
 - Maintain structured engagement with key stakeholders, including federal/state governments, telcos, agri-input providers, fintechs, and farmer groups.
 - Mobilize and manage a Private Sector Working Group to contribute to platform innovation, sustainability, and service delivery.
- VII. Public Reporting and Monitoring:
 - Develop dashboards and public reporting tools for real-time tracking of reach, performance, and impact.
 - Co-design key success indicators and MEL systems in collaboration with AFAAS and the Gates Foundation.
 - Set up feedback loops with end users and stakeholders to inform iterative improvements and ensure transparency.

4. Deliverables

The intermediary is expected to deliver the following:

During the Planning Grant Phase

Support the implementing partners in delivering key pre-grant activities by providing coordination, documentation, and facilitation assistance, while also learning from emerging findings to inform the post-grant phase. This includes

- Pre-Reading and Foundational Materials: Assist in the preparation of all necessary documents for workshop participants to facilitate informed discussions.
- Facilitated Multi-Stakeholder Workshop(s): Provide support for the successful execution of the collaborative workshop(s) leading to consensus.
- Draft MoU and SOP Documents: Contribute to the iterative refinement of drafts of the MoU and SOP with direct stakeholder input and consensus.
- Finalized and signed MoU: Support the process of finalizing and obtaining a signed Memorandum of Understanding with private sector partners. Finalized SOP: Assist in finalizing a comprehensive, legally reviewed, and agreed-upon Standard Operating Procedures document with relevant government regulators.
- Finalized Technical and Business Plan: Support the development of a comprehensive plan for the DAES PPP products/services, incorporating consortium/partners' input.
- Workshop Report(s): Assist in the creation of detailed reports summarizing discussions, decisions, action points, and outcomes of all facilitated sessions.

Post-Planning Grant Phase: Product Owner and Operational Lead

- Technical Operations: Serve as the product owner of the white-label DAES platform. This involves managing the core infrastructure, ensuring security, interoperability, and seamless integration with partner systems through APIs.
- Content Vetting and Delivery: Establish robust systems to review and approve all farmer-facing content for the platform. This includes ensuring technical quality, accuracy, and alignment with national policies.
- Data Compliance and Privacy: Liaise with national regulatory bodies such as NDPC (Nigeria Data Protection Commission), NIMC (National Identity Management Commission), NCC (Nigerian Communications Commission), and NAERLS (National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services) to ensure full compliance.

- Stakeholder Coordination: Maintain strong, structured relationships with public agencies, technology providers, telcos, and farmer networks.
- Inclusive Access Strategy: Design and implement an inclusive outreach plan specifically targeting women and youth.
- Public Reporting: Enable regular reporting mechanisms, dashboards, and feedback systems to allow effective oversight from civil society and government actors.
- Transparency and Monitoring: Co-develop clear success indicators with the Gates Foundation and the AFAAS consortium.

5. Reporting and Communication

The intermediary will report directly to the designated Project Lead at AFAAS. During the planning stage, the intermediary will also have dotted reporting lines to key partners (SAA, AP, and SAHEL) implementing the planning grant. Regular progress updates (e.g., weekly calls, bi-weekly written reports) and ad-hoc communications as required will be expected. The intermediary will also be responsible for maintaining clear and consistent communication channels with all involved stakeholders throughout the engagement.

6. Duration of Assignment

Estimated 6-7 months covering pre-workshop, workshop delivery, and post-workshop support. A detailed work plan with specific milestones will be agreed upon at the start of the engagement.

7. Qualifications and Experience

Technical Capacity

Focus: The intermediary's expertise and knowledge relevant to the project's subject matter, its strategic planning, and specific deliverables.

Criteria	Description
PPP Coordination and Facilitation Expertise	Demonstrated experience in leading the coordination and facilitation of multi-stakeholder Public-Private Partnerships, particularly in complex or emerging sectors, and a proven track record in multi-stakeholder coordination and PPP facilitation.
Digital Agriculture Ecosystem (DAES) Knowledge	Proven understanding of digital agriculture platforms, extension service delivery, and the DAES landscape in Nigeria or similar ecosystems, and demonstrated experience with digital agriculture, AI tools, and advisory systems.
Experience in Digital Platform Management	Proven track record and minimum of 5 years' experience in managing digital platforms and AI tools, particularly those involving multi-stakeholder participation.
Technical Expertise in Open-Source Infrastructure	Demonstrated technical capacity in designing, developing, and managing open-source infrastructure, modular platform management, and data interoperability solutions.
Regulatory & Policy Navigation Expertise	Proven track record of navigating and integrating complex regulatory frameworks across agriculture, technology, and telecommunications, combined with extensive experience facilitating consensus with government regulators to develop aligned policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs).
MoU/SOP drafting & regulatory alignment	Ability to lead the iterative development of MoUs and SOPs during workshops, integrating regulatory frameworks and stakeholder inputs in real time.

Legal and public policy understanding of the digital and data ecosystem	Strong grasp of legal aspects of MoUs, SOPs, data governance, and public policy, especially in the Nigerian regulatory context, as well as legal and regulatory literacy in Nigeria's digital/data ecosystem.
Technical & Business Planning for Product Design	Demonstrated capacity to lead and facilitate technical and business planning processes related to product design and development, especially in a digital/tech context.

Operational Capacity

Focus: The intermediary's proven ability to execute the project's detailed activities, manage logistics, and drive deliverable completion.

Criteria	Description
Project planning and coordination	Proven ability to lead the full workshop planning cycle from pre-engagement to delivery and MoU coordination with AFAAS using strong project management methodologies and tools to ensure timely and effective delivery of all project phases.
Workshop Design & Facilitation	Proven expertise in designing and professionally facilitating high-impact workshops aimed at achieving specific outcomes (e.g., consensus on MoU terms, detailed SOP design).
Local operational presence or partners	Presence in Nigeria/Africa or strong local partnerships to ensure timely coordination, logistics, and culturally grounded stakeholder engagement.
Product planning collaboration	Ability to support AFAAS and technical partners in finalizing technical and business plans following MoU discussions.
Experience in PPP Coordination	Strong experience coordinating Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), especially in agriculture, technology, or rural service delivery contexts.
Track Record in Inclusive Programming	A strong track record in implementing gender-transformative and youth-inclusive programming.
Partnership Management	Evidence of existing collaborations and strong, structured relationships with key partners such as telcos, Agricultural Development Programs (ADPs), or farmer organizations.
Transparency and Monitoring Mechanisms	Ability to propose and implement mechanisms for public feedback, data integrity, and robust monitoring and evaluation, including co-developing success indicators and client-driven feedback models.

Governance Capacity

Focus: The intermediary's ethical standing, independence, transparency, and trustworthiness, which is even more critical given their lead facilitation and mediation role.

Criteria	Description
Legal Standing and Organizational Structure	Legally registered in Nigeria or the West African region, with evidence of good legal standing, including corporate registration documents, board structure, financial accountability systems, and governance policies.
Inclusive engagement approach (gender equality and youth)	Demonstrated commitment to inclusive facilitation, ensuring voices from all stakeholder groups — especially smallholder representatives (especially women and youth) and regulatory actors — are meaningfully incorporated.

Ethical conduct and transparency	Clear history of transparent processes, including workshop facilitation, stakeholder feedback integration, and MoU/SOP drafting.
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Financial Capacity

Focus: The intermediary's financial stability and ability to manage project funds responsibly. No changes are needed here based on the new role description.

Criteria	Description
Cost-efficiency and value-for-money	Competitive pricing in line with scope, while ensuring delivery of high-quality facilitation, documentation, and coordination services.
Sustainable financial standing	Financially sound with the capacity to manage the engagement from planning to post-workshop coordination, including the ability to advance logistics if necessary.
Familiarity with donor compliance	Experience working under a development partner or donor funding, and the ability to meet associated financial reporting and procurement standards.
Financial Accountability	Demonstrated robust financial accountability systems.
Capital base	Must have handled a project of at least \$5 million
Tax compliance	Tax clearance from government authorities where the company/organization is registered.

8. Application Requirements

Interested individuals or firms should submit a proposal addressing their qualifications against the criteria outlined in Section 7, along with:

- **A Statement of Interest/Cover Letter and Understanding of Assignment:** A concise document (maximum 4 pages) outlining interest in this engagement and demonstrating a clear understanding of the assignment's objectives and scope.
- Institutional Profile and Organogram.
- **Evidence of Relevant Past Experience:** Provide detailed evidence of relevant experience in managing digital platforms and multi-stakeholder relationships. This should include project descriptions, achieved outcomes, and verifiable contact information for at least three (3) project references from similar engagements.
- **Declaration of Neutrality and Absence of Conflict of Interest:** A formal statement declaring the absence of any conflict of interest. If any public or private sector relationships exist that could potentially be perceived as a conflict, these must be fully disclosed.
- **Detailed Technical Proposal:** A comprehensive response describing the applicant's proposed solution, including
 - Methodology for delivering the assignment.
 - Work plan with key milestones and timelines.
 - High-level vision or architecture for DAES product development.
 - Stakeholder engagement and facilitation strategy.
- Detailed Financial Proposal: A comprehensive budget breakdown.

- CVs of key personnel (if a firm, highlight the proposed lead facilitator).
- Evidence of legal registration and tax compliance in Nigeria /Africa (if applicable).

9. How to Apply

All submissions should be sent via email to enquiry@sahelconsult.com by **15th August 2025** with the subject line: **Application – DAES PPP Intermediary Partner.**

10. Selection Process

Shortlisted organizations may be invited for a virtual presentation and Q&A session. Final selection will consider technical expertise, alignment with project goals, organizational capacity, and value for money.

11. Contact Information

For inquiries, please contact:

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Scoring Matrix for Evaluation of Proposals: Independent Intermediary for DAES PPP Project

This scoring matrix will be used to evaluate proposals received in response to the Request for Proposals (RFP) for an Independent Intermediary for the Digital Agriculture Ecosystem (DAES) PPP Project in Nigeria. The evaluation will be conducted by a dedicated selection committee.

Overall Scoring Breakdown:

- **Technical Proposal:** 70%
- **Financial Proposal:** 30%

Technical Proposal Evaluation (Total Weight: 70%)

Each criterion within the Technical Proposal will be scored on a scale of 0 to 5, where:

- **0:** No evidence / Does not meet requirements
- **1:** Poor / Minimally meets requirements
- **2:** Fair / Partially meets requirements
- **3:** Good / Meets requirements
- **4:** Very Good / Exceeds requirements in some areas
- **5:** Excellent / Significantly exceeds all requirements

The score for each sub-criterion will be multiplied by its assigned weight to get a weighted score.