**SCOPE OF WORK FOR TOLL-FREE FARMERS HOTLINE OPERATIONAL IN SOUTH KORDOFAN, BLUE NILE AND KHARTOUM STATES.**

**SOW Objective**: **Provision of a toll-free Hotline for farmers and livestock producers to access agricultural advisory services.**

Establish and deliver a Toll-free Farmers Hotline that provides agriculture advisory for smallholder farmers and livestock producers at no cost to the farmers. The Hotline will host a search engine that makes pre-recorded audio content accessible to callers for free. At a moment of need, smallholder farmers and other livestock producers can use their own simple mobile phones to proactively retrieve information across a range of topics to inform their decision-making. Callers dial the toll-free number in their moments of need and, in a series of “listen, then choose'' steps, use their mobile phone’s keypad to select the information they need from a library of pre-recorded voice messages. This solution can be inbound (receive calls from the target audience) or outbound (calling the target audience) to provide the same information or digital training. This solution can be accompanied by a Facebook and/or WhatsApp chatbot that provides the information in different forms of multimedia (audio, video, images, text, and avatars) and will target farmers with access to smartphones and internet. Youth engaged in agriculture are expected to be especially receptive to information provided via the use of Hotline and SMS.

**Key activities: Establishment of a toll-free Hotline to provide advisory services for farmers and livestock producers.**

**Project Location**: South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Khartoum States.

1. **Introduction:**

Sustainable AgriFood Systems Approach for Sudan (SASAS)’ program aims to promote gains in food security and livelihoods through a demand-driven approach, with locally appropriate value chains developed in a co-creation process with communities and organizations. SASAS will deliver a range of activities engaging private and public sectors to create demand-pull agricultural development, induce technology change and sustainable value chain development. The project is funded by USAID

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

1. **Purpose / Project Description:**

The SASAS program’s overall goal is to reduce vulnerability, increase income and food security of small-scale farmers in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Khartoum States. This program is not implemented through an approach which is based on buying and distributing goods and services to its beneficiaries. It is being implemented through an approach which seeks to improve the way the agribusiness companies and institutions in the agricultural value chain market operate and engage with their customers to ensure farmers are better served.

This approach aims to support these agribusiness companies and institutions which buy products from or provide goods and services to farmers to enable them to expand their outreach to farmers and adapt the way they work with them so that more farmers receive better services. In doing this, the program will facilitate long term development of the agricultural market systems resulting in greater benefit to all parties involved in the system.

1. **Toll-free Hotline:**

Smallholder farming is by far the most common profession among families living in poverty in Sudan. Smallholder farmers produce far below their potential yields, often due to poor farming practices and poor access to extension services and inputs. Improving the productivity and success of smallholder farmers is essential to improved livelihoods, poverty reduction and increased participation in markets. Incremental increases, even modest ones, in productivity would significantly improve local food security and smallholder incomes.

Training in good agricultural and livestock practices to help farmers learn how to competently manage the health of their land and animals, effectively cultivate their crops, and increase their harvests is crucial to better outcomes for both the smallholder and the agrifood system overall. More specifically improving knowledge and skills around topics such as improved seeds, planting techniques, crop rotation, pesticide and fertilizer application, post harvest handling and animal health will enable farmers to improve their yields and better cope with climate related stresses.

To help farmers improve their knowledge and build their skills a toll-free Hotline will be established with the purpose of helping them learn about best practices by giving them somewhere to turn when they have questions about their crops and livestock. The Hotline will be available for access 24/7 to allow for ease of access and convenience based on when they require information. It is expected this will be particularly useful for women farmers who generally have more constraints placed on their time and less flexibility to attend in person training.

The Hotline will also compliment and further reinforce some training being offered by other program partners. For example, improved seed companies will set up demonstration plots and farmer field schools.

1. **Statement of Opportunity for Hotline provider:**

This is an opportunity for a solutions provider to either create a new Hotline or enhance an existing similar advisory solution. This can be done by adding an agricultural advisory component to an existing Hotline by further developing and expanding the functionality and geographic reach of their current to solution to better serve farmers.

The Hotline is envisioned to provide the following benefits:

1. Provide farmers and farmer groups with on demand information relating to agricultural practices and topics especially youth involved in farming.
2. Educate and inform farmers on agricultural practices, thereby increasing adoption of improved practices and ultimately better outcomes seen through improved yields, animal health and incomes.
3. Allow for increased female participation by allowing flexibility to make calls at their convenience and select topics most of interest to their needs.
4. Increase digital and mobile literacy. While this is not the main purpose of the Hotline the use of the Hotline will build confidence and knowledge in using mobile technology.
5. Provide valuable data analytics on topics most of interest. This information can serve to further develop and tailor content to support need.

**Note: the toll-free Hotline belongs to the company which developed it, and this company should have a plan to commercially sustain and keep improving the Hotline. Mercy Corps’ role will be to provide funding for provision and scaling of the Hotline and linkage to farmers and their associations participating in the program.**

1. **Proposed activities to be carried out by the selected hotline provider:**

The company selected by Mercy Corps to create a Hotline or expand an existing solution is expected to conduct the following activities in collaboration with Mercy Corps:

1. Hold consultations with farmers, associations, and cooperatives to determine needs. What subject matter is most needed by them. Consultations should involve youth and women to ensure inclusivity and relevance of topics to them.
2. Curate and/or develop pre-recorded content (in Arabic) on agricultural advisory topics. This should be guided by the needs determined in point “a” above. It is expected topics such as improved seeds, planting techniques, crop rotation, pesticide and fertilizer application, post-harvest handling and animal health would be among them.
3. Hold meetings with other SASAS project partners and private sector companies to determine if they have relevant content that can be incorporated into the Hotline. (Mercy Corps has entered or is in the process of entering into agreements with companies such as seed companies, produce buying companies, and banks/ MFIs to promote development of the agriculture sector and increase productivity smallholder farmers. These partnerships complement each other and improve outcomes for business and farmers. The provider of the Hotline may be able to incorporate content these providers have if it is deemed relevant.)
4. Publicize and promote the Hotline service and deploy the service to farmers and farmer groups, through means such as meetings, sensitizations, promotions, advertisements etc.
5. Provide ongoing support to the Hotline and implement improvements to increase adoption and uptake by targeted audiences.
6. Provide a feedback mechanism for users of the Hotline to respond to their questions and the overall user experience.
7. Provide reporting and analytics showing Hotline participation numbers by age, gender, feature, time of day, etc.
8. **Outputs from activities carried out by the Hotline provider:** 
   1. Curation of advisory content complete and available in Arabic by May 30, 2023
   2. Provision of toll-free number with inbound and outbound functionality. Messages can be scheduled and sent by provider (pushed) and content can be retrieved (pulled) by users by June 15, 2023
   3. Searchable pre-recorded audio content applicable to farmers and herders (in Arabic) by June 15, 2023
   4. Facebook and/or WhatsApp coupling with Chat box functionality to allow information in different multimedia formats (video, images, audio, etc.) to be targeted to those with smartphones by July 15, 2023
   5. Monthly activity reporting to MC showing: Calls made, time of day calls made, gender of caller, topics accessed with month on month and over time comparisons. Monthly reporting to begin one month after toll-free Hotline is launched.
9. **Support from Mercy Corps for the listed activities:**

To facilitate the listed activities, Mercy Corps will:

1. Meet up to 70% of the cost of the budget for undertaking the activities and the company is expected to meet the 30%
2. Provide guidance when requested by the company or deemed necessary.
3. Provide the forms and reporting which Mercy Corps deems necessary for recording progress.