



Market consultation:

**Accelerating Digital Small and growing business (SGB) Investment Readiness
Ref. 202607035**

Organisation: The Netherlands Enterprise Agency

The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (in Dutch: Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, RVO) supports private and public organisations with funding, international business partners, knowledge, and regulations. More information about RVO can be found on: www.rvo.nl and <http://english.rvo.nl/>.

Africa-Europe Digital Innovation Bridge

The Africa-Europe Digital Innovation Bridge (AEDIB) connects African and European partners to strengthen Africa's digital small and growing businesses ecosystem. It supports innovation, investment, and job creation, with a focus on women-led digital entrepreneurship and digital solutions that advance the global green transition. The programme is co-financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Union, and is implemented by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency.

Background

Digital small and growing businesses (SGBs) under AEDIB are defined as small to medium-sized (with a financing need of 50k-250k EUR), innovation-driven businesses leveraging digital technologies as a core component of their operations, products, services and/or business model. With clear growth potential, these businesses drive innovation, job creation and economic transformation in sectors such as agriculture, water, health, e-mobility, waste management and renewable energy. Many African countries have adopted ambitious digital transformation strategies and the number of Digital SGBs is growing accordingly. However, the adoption and scaling of these innovations remain challenging. First, access to finance remains a major barrier, particularly in pre-seed and early stages, as digital SGBs typically require longer investment horizons and substantial upfront investment in R&D, technology development and market validation. Second, weak connections between entrepreneurs and investors, generic rather than technical business support and limited access to technology partnerships and markets further constrain growth. Female-led businesses face additional challenges as gender biases and structural barriers continue to limit their ability to raise capital and scale their businesses.

Despite significant investments in entrepreneurship support, many Entrepreneurial and Innovation Support Organisations (ESOs/ISOs) often lack curricula and support offerings tailored to these specific constraints. As a result, many Digital SGBs successfully validate their products but struggle to become investment-ready and secure the financing required to scale.

Purpose of the notification

The purpose of the market consultation is to gain insight into which parties are interested to participate and able to qualify in this intended assignment and to gain additional input from these interested parties on the possible upcoming open European tender procedure.

Extent and duration

The total assignment has an expected starting date of 6 January 2027 up to and including 31 August 2029.

Budget indication

Max. €639.793 excluding Dutch VAT and including (if applicable) local VAT and all other costs and fees. Of this budget indication 20%-30% must be allocated to the (to be selected by Contractor and approved by Contracting authority) local partner I/ESO's to compensate for the time and effort spent on the project. This compensation is intended to cover all costs incurred by the local partner(s) I/ESO(s) in relation to the implementation of the Investment Readiness Cohort, including but not limited to: participant outreach and selection, coordination and engagement of participants, preparation, organisation and delivery of (part) of the training activities, mentoring, coaching and other support provided to the participants, any other personnel, operation administrative and implementation-related costs.

Purpose of the assignment

This assignment seeks a service provider to (jointly) develop programmes for selected Digital SGBs, improving the assessment and investment-readiness of these early-stage ventures (the missing middle: 50k-250k), while strengthening the capacity of local I/ESOs to provide effective, sector-specific support. This in collaboration with (European) investors with a focus on green innovations and/or women-led initiatives.

Goals and deliverables

The assignment aims to strengthen entrepreneurship support ecosystems in 1) Senegal, 2) Mozambique and 3) Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to better support digital SGBs, including female-led ones. The assignment includes designing, piloting and implementing specialised investment readiness (IR) curricula and business support services/tools tailored to digital businesses moving from early validation to growth, in partnership with local I/ESOs, with part of the budget allocated to these partner organisations to support their involvement in the activities. It also includes the establishment of ecosystem activities and strengthening of linkages between Digital SGBs, I/ESOs, investors, private sector and other relevant (financial) actors*. This will ultimately build stronger growth strategies and have them engage (more) effectively with actors such as financial institutions, venture capital funds, angel investors and development finance institutions. Gender-specific barriers in accessing finance, networks and scaling will be addressed.

**In Senegal, consortium partner Expertise France (EF) will implement complementary activities under AEDIB, focusing on relationship-building between digital SGBs, I/ESOs and investors, as well as facilitating uptake of IR knowledge, methodologies, and tools. As a result, the aforementioned activities specific to Senegal fall outside of the scope of this assignment. This is not applicable to phase 1, 4 and 5.*

The following results per phase are an indication of what is to be achieved:

Phase 1: Inception Period (Preparation and design)

The assignment is to start with an inception period. During the inception period the following results will be obtained at minimum:

Result 1.1 For each of the 3 anchor countries a detailed roadmap (incl. timeline) is delivered.

Result 1.2 Relevant stakeholders in each anchor country are informed and engaged. A kick-off workshop is organised in DRC, Mozambique and (depending on the need) in Senegal.

Result 1.3 A total of at least 6 local I/ESO's are selected across the 3 anchor countries to partner with to further develop and implement the project, with at least 2 from each anchor country.

Phase 2: Design Investment Readiness Curriculum

Result 2.1 At least 6 selected I/ESOs in the 3 anchor countries indicate increased knowledge and skills to support digital SGB's in becoming investment ready.

Result 2.2 At least 6 selected I/ESOs in the 3 anchor countries demonstrate strengthened sector-specific expertise and show ability to provide strengthened investment-readiness support to digital SGBs in the target sectors.

Result 2.3 At least 6 selected I/ESOs in the 3 anchor countries indicate increased sustainable connections with local and international investors that improves their support to digital SGB's to obtain (commercial) funding.

Result 2.4 A (localized) IR curriculum for digital SGBs is developed and validated in collaboration with local I/ESOs, financial actors and digital SGBs.

Result 2.5 A mid-term report is submitted, reflecting on the implementation of Phase 2 and providing an outlook on the implementation of Phase 3.

Phase 3: Curriculum deployment with entrepreneurs

Result 3.1 At least 48 digital SGB's (minimum 30% female led) in the digital transition across the 3 anchor countries demonstrate strengthened IR, business growth capabilities and access to strategic networks.

Result 3.2 At least 6 selected I/ESOs across the 3 anchor countries have successfully delivered an IR curriculum. They have received support, both financially and on content in the implementation of an IR curriculum to digital SGB's.

Result 3.3 A mid-term report reflecting on the implementation of Phase 3 and providing an outlook on the implementation of Phase 4.

Phase 4: Toolkit and online platform

Result 4.1 Improved access for I/ESOs to high-quality, standardized support materials and training resources across the 3 anchor countries through a toolkit and digital platform and infrastructure.

Result 4.2 Increased awareness among I/ESOs in the 3 anchor countries of available IR support methodologies and tools for Digital SGB's.

Phase 5: Final Report & Evaluation

Result 5.1 A comprehensive final report is delivered with a summary of the project's tangible outcomes, including:

- Reporting on the results (outputs) including the M&E indicators;
- Lessons learned and key insights on the implementation of the project (process);
- Lessons learned and key insights from I/ESO's, digital SGB's and other stakeholders.

Main activities

The activities/tasks per phase requires producing the desired results at minimum:

Phase 1: Inception Period

The assignment starts with an inception phase aimed at developing a country-specific approach and roadmap for each anchor country, building on existing (ecosystem) mappings, research and consultations with local stakeholders to ensure a context-driven and coordinated implementation approach. This first phase will also culminate in partnerships with local I/ESOs and prepare the formal launch of the programme in each country. Coordination with AEDIB's local focal point during Phase 1 is strongly recommended.

Phase 2: Design Investment Readiness curriculum

The exact outline of the activities in this phase are to be proposed by the tenderer and can be re-shaped with the insights gained during phase 1. The expertise, networks and contextual knowledge of the AEDIB local focal points should be leveraged throughout this phase, including in identifying relevant financial actors, informing curriculum development, and facilitating connections between I/ESOs, investors and other ecosystem actors.

Phase 3: Curriculum deployment with entrepreneurs

The exact outline of the activities in this phase should be proposed by the tenderer and can be re-shaped with the insights gained during phase 1 and phase 2, but includes at least:

- Deployment of the curriculum with selected digital SGB's in partnership with local I/ESOs, with part of the budget allocated to these partner organisations to support their involvement in the activities.

Phase 4: Toolkit and online platform

The exact outline of the activities in this phase is to be proposed by the tenderer and can be re-shaped with the insights gained during previous phases.

Phase 5: Final Report & Evaluation

Deliver a final report with impact achieved and relevant lessons learned.

Assignment requirements

Requirements relating to the implementing team :

1. The team must have at least five (5) years of demonstrable experience in developing and implementing IR activities for entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa, including experience in at least one of the target countries.
2. The team must have a relevant professional network in at least one of the target countries.
3. The team must have at least five (5) years of demonstrable experience working with Innovation/Entrepreneurial Support Organisations (I/ESOs) in Africa, including experience in at least one of the target countries.
4. The team must have at least five (5) years of demonstrable experience supporting small and growing businesses (SGBs) in Africa, including experience in at least one of the target countries.
5. The team must have demonstrable experience integrating gender equality and women's economic empowerment into entrepreneurship support and IR programmes, with a particular focus on women-led businesses.
6. The team must include members who are proficient in English and either French or Portuguese (minimum C1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), depending on the countries of implementation.
7. The Project Coordinator must be a qualified senior professional with at least seven (7) years of demonstrable experience coordinating complex international, multi-stakeholder programmes, preferably in the field of private sector development.
8. The team must demonstrate sufficient capacity, systems and experience with the different aspects of project management, such as monitoring, evaluating and learning (MEL), marketing and communication, human resources and other kinds of administration.

Requirements relating to the implementation:

9. Implement the agreed activities in accordance with the approved work plan.
10. A fair compensation for the time spent and activities implemented by the selected local I/ESO's.
11. Establish and maintain a formal coordination mechanism with Expertise France (EF) (or EF's contracted party) to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication in Senegal.
12. Submit an interim report upon completion of each project phase.
13. Organise at least three (3) online deep-dive sessions for the (internal) AEDIB consortium for learning purposes.
14. Provide content for RVO's quarterly AEDIB newsletter and other communication material.
15. Participate in monthly progress update calls with RVO.

Questions

The interested parties wishing to participate in this market consultation are requested to respond to the questions below, providing complete and concrete answers*.

A. General information

1. Name and address of your organisation;
2. Contact person (name, function, e-mail address and phone number);
3. Short description of why this assignment is relevant for your organisation and why your organisation is equipped to implement the assignment.

B. Assignment specific questions*

*Please answer the following questions within the applicable limit of max. 1.000 words in total.

Nr.	Question	Answer
1	Tendering authority is inviting interested parties to elaborate on how the upcoming tender should be organised, based on the three mentioned anchor countries of this assignment. For coordinating purposes, one overarching contractor is preferred by tendering authority. However, this needs to be feasible for the contractor. Please indicate in which of the three anchor countries you wish to carry out these activities – in one, two or all three and briefly explain why, based on local expertise, network and capacity. If you propose to work in fewer than all three anchor countries, also briefly explain what drives this preference.	
2	Provide an indicative time estimate for the assignment's mentioned (five) main phases, with a brief explanation based on experience.	
3	Which implementation approach would you envision / propose: starting in all three countries at the same time, or phasing the implementation country by country? Please explain briefly the main reasons for your preference.	
4	To what extent will your organisation carry out activities directly on-site versus through digital/remote collaboration? Which mentioned tasks can be performed digitally, and which require physical presence?	
5	What opportunities do you see for collaboration with European investors and European private sector partners? How would you involve them in the various phases of the assignment?	
6	What opportunities and chances do you see in integrating access to market activities within the assignment?	

7	In general, do you have any concise advice we have to keep in mind in writing the tender document?	
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Application

Interested companies are invited to send an expression of interest and answer the aforementioned questions to the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), by sending an e-mail to Quintin.Stoutjesdijk@rvo.nl and Havaf.BenTouhami@rvo.nl of the Procurement Office.

Results of the market consultation

As a result of the market consultation, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency can decide to start a follow-up process.

The follow-up process will most likely be a European (open) tender procedure. In case of a follow-up process, no distinction will be made between parties that have or have not participated in the market consultation.

The Netherlands Enterprise Agency can use the information collected as a result of this market consultation when formulating an assignment. Parties should note that information they provide in the context of this market consultation may be made public (albeit in anonymised form).

Deadline

The deadline for responding to this market consultation is set at **10 September 2026, 12:00 CEST**.