

Request for Proposals:

Better Cotton India First Mile Supply Chain

Research

RFP n#: 2023-11-FMTRC-RESEARCH

Location: India

Start date: 13 December 2023

End date: March 2024

Better Cotton key contact:

Himaya Patel

First Mile Traceability Coordinator



All applications must be submitted via [this form](#)

You may submit questions to tender@bettercotton.org, quoting "RFP n# 2023-11-FMTRC-RESEARCH"

Questions, requests, and applications sent after the deadline (**10 November 2023**) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Description

Better Cotton is the world's largest cotton sustainability programme. Our mission: to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Through our network of field-level partners we have provided training on more sustainable farming practices to more than 2.9 million cotton farmers in 26 countries. More than a fifth of the world's cotton is now grown under the Better Cotton Standard and our membership network includes more than 2,400 members. We have brought together cotton industry stakeholders to drive our common goals, from ginners and spinners to brand owners, civil society organisations and governments. Everyone who cares about cotton and its sustainable future can now be part of something better.

There is a growing demand for traceability as stakeholders worldwide seek more clarity over the social and environmental challenges associated with textile supply chains, and policymakers increasingly require businesses to demonstrate greater transparency. Better Cotton's Traceability Solution is an ambitious industry-leading initiative to meet the industry demand and demonstrate the origin of Better Cotton by providing greater supply chain visibility. The solution will be launched in late-2023, providing the opportunity for our Members to source Better Cotton with visibility of its country of origin.

By introducing traceability, we will generate additional demand for Better Cotton, supporting our core markets of apparel and textiles while contributing to systemic change in cotton production. We work with a wide variety of farm types and sizes in multiple countries and cultures. It is crucial that these producers, and the Better Cotton they produce, continue to meet customer requirements and rapidly evolving international regulatory frameworks.

One of the key challenges with achieving traceability in small farm contexts such as India, is ensuring first mile traceability. First Mile Traceability refers to the way in which Better Cotton is segregated, traded, transported and traced from the farm to the gin. First mile traceability is more complex in this context given the role of informal economic actors, aggregators, transportation, and markets.

Better Cotton is therefore taking steps to build its knowledge and create an enabling environment for strengthening first mile traceability in India by delivering a pilot project to test process changes and technology to help inform how first mile traceability can be strengthened.

Background

We are seeking proposals from skilled individuals or organisations with expertise in the first mile of the cotton supply chain to conduct comprehensive research into the flow of cotton between the farm and the gin in India that will be used to inform the strengthening of first mile traceability.

Scope of Work

Please note that applicants may propose an alternative structure for the assignment with their proposal.

The purpose of the assignment is to research and gather a comprehensive understanding of how cotton flows through the first mile of the supply chain and to provide Better Cotton with visibility on the actors, processes, documentation, and technology necessary to deliver a robust first mile traceability system in India.

The flow of cotton shall be analysed and mapped from the farm level to ginner level. This includes ensuring information is provided about trading dynamics and behaviours and roles of middlemen/ agents/ intermediaries and transporters operating between the farm and the gin, as well as exploring the role of technology and digitisation in first mile traceability. The consultant should also provide an overview of the main challenges the India's cotton sector and Better Cotton is likely to face in strengthening of first mile traceability and share recommendations to address these challenges.

Each component of the research should consider and include details on the gender dynamics at play in the first mile of the supply chain in India.

To achieve this, the consultant will be required to:

- **Provide an overview of the first mile of the cotton sector in India.**

The consultant will provide a short contextual overview based on literature review and interviews outlining the key regulations, key stakeholders and influencers, production trends, traceability

initiatives, digitalisation uptake, access to finance, and any other relevant contextual information to the first mile of the cotton sector in India.

- **Map the first mile of the cotton supply chain and analyse how the movement of cotton is currently tracked and documented, and where there are gaps.**

The consultant will be required to produce a detailed first mile supply chain analysis and map, describing the key roles, responsibilities, and processes within the first mile of India's cotton supply chain, describing each typology of actor and how cotton moves from one actor to another. The mapping should clearly outline all formal and informal practices, including how any documentation is generated, used, and shared between each actor, especially highlighting areas where a lack of meaningful documentation (or no documentation) may present challenges to Better Cotton's [Chain of Custody](#) (CoC) system.

- **Map the actors operating in the first mile of the cotton supply chain across India.**

As part of the first mile supply chain mapping, a core focus of the research should be on those actors that are not already formalised within the Better Cotton CoC (Note: farmers, ginners, and programme partners are formally recognised). This especially includes those parties acting as intermediaries (formally &/or informally) including, but not limited to, middlemen, commission agents, commodity markets, brokers and transporters. The research should include the nature of the relationship between these parties, the basis (or understanding) upon which the business is conducted and whether this should be considered as playing a vital (necessary) role in Better Cotton's Supply Chain.

- **Analyse the operations of the first mile of the cotton supply chain to understand existing processes and potential challenges of physical segregation of cotton.**

Through a combination of desk-based research, stakeholder interviews, and visits to farming communities and ginning facilities, the consultant will be required to document the processes that occur when cotton is sold and transported between the farm and the gin. This activity should include, but is not limited to:

- A process map of the activities that occur between the farm and the gin, describing the cotton transformation, aggregation, and disaggregation processes that may take place.
- How cotton is currently identified at each stage including any associated documentation.
- A high-level assessment of the main complexities between the farm and the gin that could undermine the physical traceability of cotton.

Case studies should be added to this section to help illustrate the processes/ challenges with real life examples.

- **Analyse mobile phone penetration within the smallholder farmer communities and their readiness to embrace mobile-based technology for agricultural practices.**

The consultant will employ a multifaceted approach incorporating desk-based research, stakeholder interviews, and field visits to farming communities. This activity should include, but is not limited to the following key activities:

- Investigate the existing levels of mobile phone ownership and use within the smallholder farmer community. This involves determining the types of mobile devices in their possession, in particular differentiating between smartphones and feature phones.

- Assess the digital literacy levels of the farmers, including their proficiency in using mobile phones, engagement with messaging services, and access to the internet. Additionally, identify any barriers to technology they may face, particularly in terms of connectivity and affordability.
- Gauge the farmers' willingness and readiness to adopt mobile-based technology for their agricultural practices and purchases.
- Identify the specific training needs of the smallholder farmers necessary to strengthen their digital skills.

Note: each element of this mapping should be conducted on a state-by-state basis, and clearly account for variations in practices within states as well as between states.

Deliverables

Inception Report

Upon the review of available documents and an initial discussion with Better Cotton, the consultant should submit an inception report and give a presentation to the Better Cotton project team. The inception report and presentation will:

- Describe the approach that will be used to undertake each of the tasks described above.
- Include a detailed work plan and schedule.
- Include a list of stakeholders to be interviewed and engaged, and identify where the consultant will need support from Better Cotton to engage additional further stakeholders.
- Include an outline for the final report to be submitted.

Final report and recommendations

The full report and recommendations should include:

- Detailed analysis and mapping of how cotton moves through the first mile of the supply chain in India, including descriptions of actor typologies, roles, responsibilities, processes, documentation and any associated data, technologies, and systems. The mapping should include an outline and description of the processes happening at each stage and how these processes may impact the traceability of cotton.
- An analysis of how first mile processes (including physical segregation), data and documentation in India's cotton supply chain vary across regions.
- A series of detailed recommendations based on extensive research to assist Better Cotton in mitigating the challenges associated with first mile processes, data, supply chain documentation and technology to strengthen first mile traceability.
- Annexes including:
 - Required data points for enabling first mile traceability.
 - Key stakeholders to engage with to enable first mile traceability.
- Report should be no more than 25 pages.

Executive summary

The report should include an executive summary that is a maximum of four pages and contains the main findings and recommendations from the assignment. It should be accompanied by a PowerPoint slide deck (no more than 12 slides) summarising the same. The audience for the PowerPoint slide deck is the Better Cotton Leadership and global/ country first mile traceability teams.

High-level Timeline

10 November 2023	Application deadline – 17:00 GMT 10 November 2023. All applications must be submitted via this form .
10 November to 8 December 2023	Applications review & shortlisting / interviews
By 8 December 2023	The successful applicant will be notified. Unsuccessful <u>shortlisted</u> applicants will also be notified.
w/c 13 December 2023 (to be discussed)	Start of the consultancy – kick off meeting.
December 2023 - January 2024 (to be discussed)	Inception report.
By March 2024 (to be discussed)	Final report / deliverables.

Required Skills & Knowledge

Skills, Knowledge and Experience
<i>Essential</i>
• Good understanding of the cotton sector.
• Knowledge of traceability and associated technologies.
• Experience working in or extensive knowledge of India.
• Experience working with rural communities in India.
• Strong stakeholder engagement skills.
• Excellent written communication and report writing skills.
• Proficient IT skills, including but not limited to MS Office suite (PowerPoint, Word and Excel).
• Fluent written and verbal communication skills in English and Hindi, with the ability to communicate clearly and concisely.
• Excellent analytical skills.
• Confident ability to travel within India, specifically in areas where Better Cotton operates.
• Demonstrated integrity and business ethics.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-starter and problem solver, comfortable with uncertainty.
Desirable
It would be desirable for the lead consultant or another member of the named team to have:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existing knowledge and understanding of the Better Cotton system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experience in research of the first mile of cotton supply chains.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to communicate in multiple local languages.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experience working with farmers, informal intermediaries and ginners in remote areas of India.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good understanding of the Chain of Custody and traceability in agricultural commodities.

To Apply

Proposals responding to this Request for Proposals should include at a minimum:

- A succinct, well-documented technical proposal (maximum of 4 pages) that includes:
 - A summary of the overall purpose and each task to be completed.
 - An overview of the proposed methodology and approach.
 - Activities and a corresponding timeline.
 - A clear description of the project team, detailing the relevant experience of team members (especially in India).
 - Declaration of any potential conflicts of interest relating to this assignment.
- At least one sample of previous relevant work (the contents of which will remain confidential and will be used for the sole purpose of evaluating the submission). This sample report must be less than three years old unless particularly relevant to this assignment.
- Financial Proposal: Please provide a detailed budget in Euros including time allocated and daily rates, as well as any expenses that will be incurred.

Please note that ALL costs must be included in the detailed budget including travel expenses, translation costs and taxes.

Consultants are invited to submit their proposals before **5.00pm GMT 10 November 2023** via [this form](#).

We thank all applicants for their interest; however only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.

Better Cotton is committed to good practice and transparency in the management of natural, human and financial resources. All applications will be reviewed under the principles and subject to Better Cotton's policies on equal opportunity, non-discrimination, anti-bribery & corruption and conflict of interest.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Technical Evaluation Criteria

- Demonstrated understanding of this RFP.

- Quality and clarity of the proposed approach and methodology.
- Feasibility of the proposed activity plan and timeline, and appropriateness of time allocated to delivering each task.
- Relevant professional experience of the proposed consultant(s).
- Quality and relevance of the sample work submitted.

Financial Evaluation Criteria

- Quality and clarity of budget provided, and level of detail included.
- Alignment of the budget to the activity timeline detailed in the technical proposal.
- Value for money.
- Adherence to the available budget.

Envisaged working arrangements

The position is a consultancy for the duration of the assignment.

Travel to Better Cotton production areas in Gujarat and Maharashtra will be required.