

Request for Proposals – Producer Unit Rescoping Pilot - MEL Consultancy and Data Collection India

RFP n#: 2023-10-SA-PUR

Location: Telangana, India

Start date: 01 December 2023

End date: 29 February 2024

Better Cotton key contact:
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All applications must be submitted via [this form](#).

[You may submit questions to tender@bettercotton.org](mailto:tender@bettercotton.org)– RFP n# 2023-10-SA-PUR.

Questions, requests, and applications sent after the deadline (23 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. In difficult times, we are meeting the challenge head on. 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.

Producer Unit Rescoping Pilot -MEL Consultancy and Data Collection India
Applications deadline: 20 November 2023



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.

More information about Better Cotton can be found on our website: www.bettercotton.org

Background

We are seeking proposals from skilled individuals or organisations interested in supporting Better Cotton with MEL for an innovative pilot project that aims to trial a new, landscape-based approach to implementing the Better Cotton system at the farm level.

Under this 'Producer Unit Rescoping' (PURE) pilot, all farming households within a defined geographic unit would be considered the focus for Better Cotton intervention, rather than the current approach which focuses only on named (typically male) farmers on a defined list.

The objectives are, firstly, to improve the effectiveness of capacity strengthening by supporting more holistic, community-based approaches – especially around natural resources (water, biodiversity, soil health), integrated pest management, decent work, gender equality, and sustainable livelihoods. These areas require interventions beyond individual farms or farmers, and this approach will lead to longer-term and more effective field-level sustainability impact.

Second, the pilot aims to improve the efficiency and scalability of Better Cotton, by reducing data administration associated with farmer lists, and using alternate methods to monitor implementation (such as government data, gin procurement volumes, or periodic baseline studies). Within the pilot, the scale of each producer unit would also be increased, meaning greater participation and volumes under a single, unified management system.

Third, the pilot aims to support Better Cotton's overall goal towards traceability by facilitating stronger farm-to-gin traceability and eliminating the need to segregate cotton from individual farms. This will also help enable the related objective of using traceability to deliver greater value to farmers, thus supporting them building more sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

Please see elements of the full project proposal in Annex 1.

Scope of Work

We expect the consultancy to be carried out in a collaborative manner with the Better Cotton team as well as with our Programme Partner, WWF Telangana, who will have an active participation in the project work.

The area we expect to cover is roughly 5,000 hectares, and it includes two well established Producer Units (PUs) (as per our current implementation model). Currently, the PU covers 7300 farmers – a number that is expected to go up to roughly 9000 under the pilot concept.

The overall objective of the project MEL is to:

- Evaluate the feasibility of replicating or scaling up the pilot.
- Evaluate project against its defined objectives (see Annex).

- Check whether key project assumptions can be verified.
- Identify the both the drivers of success and the challenges faced.
- Compare the cost-effectiveness of our current approach with the newly piloted one.

Measures of success including

The Key Performance Indicators of this project will include at least the following, but they can and should be completed by the consultants, after discussion with the Better Cotton and Programme Partners team before the pilot's monitoring starts.

1. Number of farmers and workers trained disaggregated by gender.
2. Number of agronomists, extension workers and experts trained disaggregated by gender.
3. Area of cotton production land and area cultivated with other crops.
4. Area covered with cotton production in alignment with the Better Cotton farm-level standard.
5. Volume of Better Cotton eligible for licensing in the same project area *cost efficiency of the project approach*.
6. Percentage of women having access to activities and benefits of the Better Cotton System through the pilot.
7. Number and % of men and women who have increased their agricultural knowledge and skills, disaggregated by gender.
8. Administrative and data collection efforts spent by field staff.

The baseline data collection should take place and the report be finalised before End of February 2024.

This assignment entails the following two phases, with two deliverables.

Please note that while this project will only be covering the baseline assessment, we kindly request the applicants to also include a monitoring approach as well as the endline evaluation in the proposal for completeness and better assessment of the overall project proposal. The endline evaluation will be addressed under a separate contract.

Phase 1: Initial project set-up & consultations – 1 -31 December 2023

Consultation with the Programme Partner, with the Better Cotton India and global Programme teams will be necessary to understand well the context of the Project. The consultant will be expected to refine the scope of work and timelines, as well as propose a methodology to be used, including the sampling and a draft version of the data collection tools (i.e., surveys, interview questionnaires, etc.). We expect the baseline study to include at least a qualitative survey with the Project Partner staff as well as Focus Group Discussions with farmers, but other methods might be added depending on the initial conversations.

Activities:

- Engage in discussions with relevant stakeholders and develop a methodology and associated tools.
- Identify opportunities for digital data collection, in collaboration with the Digital Farm Data Manager.

Expected deliverables due by 31 December 2023.

1. Inception report, inclusive of the methodology, sampling plan, updated timelines, and the data collection tools.

Phase 2: Data collection & reporting – 01 January - 28 February 2024

Based on the methodology and sampling proposed and agreed by Better Cotton, the consultants will carry out the data collection at field level. We expect it to include interviews and/or surveys with the Programme Partner and PU staff, as well as farmers Focus Group Discussions.

Expected deliverables:

2. Survey and interview tools validated by Better Cotton team and WWF Telangana.
3. Completion of qualitative surveys, interviews, and any other data collection activities, along with the sharing raw data and notes.
4. Submission of final report, inclusive of the analysis of findings, key learnings and recommendations. The final report should also include an outlook on how a potential evaluation of the project based on the baseline would be conducted. An executive summary will be included in the report.

High-level Timeline

23 November 2023	Applications deadline. <i>All applications must be submitted via this form.</i>
20 – 24 November 2023	Applications review, shortlisting and interviews.
By 28 November 2023	Notification of the successful applicant, contract signed. Unsuccessful <u>shortlisted</u> applicants will also be notified.
01 December 2023	Start of the consultancy
By 31 December 2023	Phase 1 completed and draft inception report submitted.
By 29 February 2024	Phase 2, including data collection and preparation of final report.

Required Skills & Knowledge

Skills, Knowledge and Experience of the lead consultant
<i>Essential</i>
A postgraduate qualification in a relevant field such as agriculture, environment, sustainability, research, or social sciences.
A minimum of 7 years of professional experience in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, including conducting baseline and evaluations of development projects, with both quantitative and qualitative research, and using digital tools.
Experience in project development and evaluation in India, ideally Telangana.
Excellent written and verbal communication skills in English and Telugu.
Excellent facilitation and coordination skills.
<i>Desirable</i>
Knowledge of Better Cotton and Better Cotton Project Implementation.
Experience working with other Standard Systems.
Fluent in relevant local dialects.
Working knowledge of the cotton sector.

In addition to skills, competencies, and expertise, we will consider value for money and demonstrable commitment to the field of sustainability to evaluate applications.

Application Requirements

Proposals sent to respond this Request for Proposals must include the following:

- A succinct, well-documented Technical Proposal that includes:
 - Understanding of the assignment including a summary of tasks and main objectives.
 - The proposed approach and methodology – both for baseline, internal mid-term progress, and endline.
 - Activities and their corresponding timeline.
 - A clear description of the project team members with details of their relevant experience and their CVs.
- 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).
- A Financial Proposal: please provide a detailed budget including the time allocated for each activity and the daily rates per person, respecting the overall budget available for the assignment, approximately 10,000 to 12,000 EUR. Please note that ALL costs must be included in the detailed budget including expenses, traveling costs, and taxes.

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.

Annex 1: Project proposal

3.2 Problem statement

Under the Better Cotton standard system, smallholder and medium farmers are currently organised into Producer Units (PUs), based on a defined list of participating farmers. The farmers on this list are then considered participating in Better Cotton and eligible for licensing. However, in some cases, farmers are included on the list even if they are not actively participating in Better Cotton activities or trainings. In other cases, farmers who benefit from Better Cotton capacity strengthening activities (e.g., village level awareness-raising) are not formally included on the farmer list.

Focusing on main decision maker as the ‘farmer’ also means that in most contexts the male head of household may be the primary focus for Better Cotton activities, while women and partners (considered co-farmers), young adults and other household members may not receive as much support. Under this current approach, capacity strengthening activities are often designed primarily to benefit the listed farmers, rather than engaging the whole community in awareness raising and solutions (which is especially relevant for issues such as decent work, sustainable livelihoods and gender, as well as soil, water, biodiversity, and integrated pest management).

Each season the PU is responsible for updating this ‘farmer list’, which is an excel sheet that can contain more than 40,000 data points for a smallholder PU. Updating this list requires significant time and effort, which limits the time field staff can spend on capacity building and other activities to support.

Better Cotton looks to continuing growing the programme but also deepening impact at field level, this concept of PU Rescoping (Geographical scoping) is one approach that is being explored with an aim to improve efficiency of implementation and enable more impactful, community-level approaches to capacity strengthening. It is expected that this approach will also support alignment and partnerships with other existing community-level initiatives and organisations, and hence reduce duplication and fragmentation of efforts. impact.

Better Cotton already runs a very resource efficient assurance system in comparison with many standard schemes, in order to manage costs and keep participation accessible for smallholders. Other assurance improvements underway are largely aimed at further improving the effectiveness of the system; for example, piloting direct farmer and worker mobile phone surveys to enable better feedback and risk identification, or investing in social audit skills for verifiers. These initiatives could be complementary with a more landscape approach as under this pilot.

Furthermore, the current farmer list approach means that only some farmers in a specific region are participating and thus eligible for licensing. As Better Cotton pursues traceability, this would require costly and complex processes to try to segregate out ‘Better Cotton’ farmers between point of sale and gin. Under the rescoping approach, geographic areas could be tied into gin sourcing, enabling more cost-effective traceability between farm and gin, and supporting the related objectives of delivering value back to farmers through traceability.

3.3 Project objectives

Describe the specific objectives for the project, which should be clear, measurable, realistic and achievable within the duration of the project. They should address the issues described in 3.2.

3.3.1 Expected benefits

Please specifically refer (with evidence, when possible) to the livelihoods benefit for the farmer, community, or producers that the project will deliver.

Benefit for the farmers, communities, or producers	Expected benefits: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased participation of farming households in the pilot region in capacity strengthening activities, with a specific focus on participation of women. 2. Increased awareness and changed attitudes amongst participants related to key themes of capacity strengthening (e.g., non-chemical methods of pest control, water efficiency, benefits of biodiversity, regenerative agriculture practices, awareness and mitigation of risks of child and forced labour, strategies to reduce input costs and improve livelihoods).
Benefit for the environment	Expected benefits: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase in awareness and adoption of sustainable farming practices to improve natural resources promoted through capacity strengthening (e.g., reduced chemical usage, improved water efficiency, protection and restoration of biodiversity and natural habitats, improved soil health). Note: exact practices to be promoted will depend on local context and needs, and adoption of practices may not be. 2. Community-based collaboration to impact (especially on water and biodiversity).

3.3.2 Criteria/M Measurement of success

What criteria should be met to measure if the project has been successful? Please use metrics (e.g.: “the project would be considered successful if farm-level productivity is increased by at least 15%”).

The project will be considered successful if it delivers the following metrics of success:

1. 15% increase in participation of Better Cotton activities amongst women members of farming households in the project area, compared to the traditional farmer list approach. *[greater engagement of women leading to more awareness and -over time – practice change at farm level].*
2. 15% reduction in data collection and administration effort for field staff; enabling this time and effort to be spent on other activities more closely tied to impact. *[greater ability to focus resources on impact, improved cost efficiency].*
3. Increase in volumes of Better Cotton eligible for licensing in the same project area, without increase in project cost. *[improved cost efficiency and scalability].*

3.4 Concept or approach

Describe and explain the overall concept or approach underpinning the project. Describe the main ideas, models or assumptions involved. If a theory of change/ logframe for the project is available, please add it here.

This premise of this project is to shift the lens of focus for Better Cotton implementation from a defined list of farmers to all farming households in a defined area. This will enable new ways of working for Programme Partners around:

1. Capacity strengthening and other activities to drive impact at field level – moving from training targeted at specific, mainly male named farmers, towards community-based campaigns, with enhanced access for women and other vulnerable groups.
2. Data collection/ Monitoring and Evaluation - replacing an annual, time intensive exercise to update and verify the farmer list, with more periodic baseline surveys or community-level monitoring.
3. Capacity strengthening and other activities to drive impact at field level – moving from training targeted at specific, mainly male named farmers, towards community-based campaigns, with enhanced access for women and other vulnerable groups.
4. Segregating Better Cotton between farm and gin – new geographical boundaries will reduce the need for complex segregation measures between farm and gin, and support more credible traceability of Better Cotton.

Expected Theory of Change for PU Rescoping Pilot Phase:

Activity	Annual farmer list collection and verification process is replaced with periodic baseline assessments and regional monitoring.	Community-based capacity strengthening approach is implemented, with particular focus on women.	Rescoped PU boundary enables all cotton in a sourcing area to be eligible as Better Cotton.
Output	Reduced time and effort by Field Facilitators to collect, update, verify and report farmer list data each year. Increased number and depth of capacity strengthening activities (enabled under existing budgets/ resource levels).	Increased participation by farming households and especially women in capacity strengthening activities. Improved awareness around sustainable practices and improvement of sustainable livelihoods and resilience.	Reduction/ elimination of additional measures required for segregation of Better Cotton between farm and gin (cost and effort savings).
Outcomes	Improved cost-efficiency of Better Cotton implementation (reduction in administration costs, greater impact per unit of investment).	Improved environmental sustainability of cotton farming. Improved sustainable livelihoods and resilience for farming households.	More cost efficient and credible traceability systems.

Vision and target	If the 2024-25 season proof of concept demonstrates that this rescoping model can deliver equal (or improved) programme implementation and capacity strengthening as well as volumes under the same programme costs (freeing up costs currently used for data and administration for enhanced capacity strengthening activities), the aim would be to begin scaling this model further from 2025-26 season, focusing first on Pakistan and India, and converting a selected number of specifically selected projects each year. Prioritisation would consider the current level of Better Cotton farmer
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	saturation, relevance for traceability, and interest/ commitment from Programme Partners. Estimated timeline for scaling post-pilot:												
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2024-25</th> <th>2025-26</th> <th>2026-27</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Pakistan</td> <td>REEDs Proof of concept: 12,000 farmers.</td> <td>3 Rescoping areas = 30,000 farmers</td> <td>6 rescoping areas = 60,000 farmers.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>India</td> <td>Telangana (partner TBD) – estimated 10,000 farmers.</td> <td>6 Rescoping areas = 60,000 farmers.</td> <td>15 rescoping areas = 150,000 farmers.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	Pakistan	REEDs Proof of concept: 12,000 farmers.	3 Rescoping areas = 30,000 farmers	6 rescoping areas = 60,000 farmers.	India	Telangana (partner TBD) – estimated 10,000 farmers.	6 Rescoping areas = 60,000 farmers.	15 rescoping areas = 150,000 farmers.
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The idea/innovation/model	Rescoping of Producer Unit boundaries for Better Cotton implementation, shifting interventions from a defined list of farmers to all farming households within a defined geographical boundary.												
The enabling conditions	Programme Partners need to see the value and benefits in the model. Credible assurance and licensing will need to be demonstrated in the proof-of-concept phase.												

4. Monitoring & Evaluation

4.1 Key Performance Indicators

Please describe how you will measure and monitor achievement of your objectives and results of your activities by filling out the key performance indicators table (Annex 4).

Expected Deliverables as part of the Projects include the below:

- *New assurance model developed, tested, and evaluated.*
- *New MEL system developed, tested, and evaluated.*
- *Project Partner capacity has been built on new assurance model and MEL system.*
- *New traceability model tested and evaluated in the context of a rescope PU area.*
- *Baseline conducted in both pilot regions - to confirm the feasible geographic boundaries, population and profiles of cotton farming households in the area and to gather information on baseline performance in key areas of the Better Cotton Principles & Criteria.*
- *Percentage increase of women having access to activities and benefits within the Better Cotton System through the pilot (Target 15%).*

As such, the project will also contribute to the following RMF KPIs:

9. Number of farmers and workers trained disaggregated by gender.
10. Number of agronomists, extension workers and experts trained disaggregated by gender.
11. Area of cropland and other non-timber commodity production under sustainable (intensification) production and management practices.
12. Increase in volumes of Better Cotton eligible for licensing in the same project area, without increase in project cost [*improved cost efficiency and scalability*].

Other KPIs

- Percentage of women having access to activities and benefits within the Better Cotton System through the pilot.
- Percentage of enrolled women farmers who attend scheduled training sessions or workshops.
- Percentage of women who have increased their agricultural knowledge and skills.
- Number of men and women who have increased their agricultural knowledge and skills.