

CARIFORUM



Caribbean Action under the Programme entitled Agriculture Policy Programme
with focus on
the Caribbean and Pacific under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF)



*Building capacity for sustainability of
small farmers, youth and women
in rural communities*

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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ENHANCING THE CARIBBEAN AGRIBUSINESS
INFORMATION PLATFORM WITH SPECIFIC
FOCUS ON THE NEEDS OF SMALL FARMERS



Funded by the
**10th European
Development
Fund (EDF)**

Terms of Reference

Consultancy to Enhance the Caribbean Agribusiness Information Platform with Specific Focus on the Needs of Small Farmers

1. Summary Description

Title: Agribusiness Information Consultant

Remuneration: US\$29,500

Reports to: Nigel Durrant, Agricultural Trade Specialist, CARICOM Secretariat

Duration of Assignment: 10 months

Duty Station: The duty station of the consultant will be home country of the expert.

2. Background

The role of information sharing in the development process has never been as important as it is today. The globalization of production and marketing systems has meant that the producer, whether large or small, has to be aware of a great number of variables that could affect the profitability of enterprises, and which, if not properly managed, could negatively impact on his or her very survival. CARICOM, at the highest levels, has recognized the need to promote ICT within the Region and to eliminate the digital divide. For example, in the Five-Year Strategic Plan for the Community (2015-2019), approved by the Conference of Heads of Government in July 2014, the establishment of a “single ICT space” for the Region was listed as one of the top priorities. More specifically, the Council for Trade and Economic Development [Agriculture] (COTED), endorsed the CARICOM Regional Agribusiness Strategy and Action Plan, a component of which is the development of a regional information platform. This project therefore seeks to act on those mandates by providing technical assistance to the development of the information platform with a specific emphasis on the integration of small farmers and other small entrepreneurs connected with the agricultural sector.

CARICOM, with assistance from UNDP-CARUTA and the EU-funded Caribbean Integration Support Programme (CISP), has put on line the *Caribbean Agribusiness* web site, at <http://www.agricarib.org/>. The purpose of this initiative was to address the fact that there was no regional site/portal that acted as a major conduit for agricultural information in all its dimensions. The site aims to include statistical, trade and marketing information, information on current events, and resources for the agribusiness community. As well, it aims to bring together on one site the many studies and other types of material that have been conducted around the region by the CARICOM Secretariat, government ministries, producer groups, donors, developmental institutions and others.

The first version of *Caribbean Agribusiness* is a commendable first step towards meeting the ambitious goal of providing a one-stop shop for the Caribbean agriculture/agribusiness community, including consumers. Several pages have been established and original content created for a range of products and topics. Pages have also been set up for each CARICOM country and an initial directory of agribusiness stakeholders has also been included. There is, however, considerable scope for further development of the site. The site itself would benefit from improved design, greater functionality and additional features. One of the features identified in the concept paper for the site is the establishment of a meeting place for

buyers and sellers of various products. Another is the intensive use social networking (web 2.0) features. Under the EU-funded Agricultural Policy Project (APP), funds have been allocated to assist in further upgrading of the site (including its management environment) so that a larger quantum and a better quality of materials and can be accessed, assembled and disseminated through this means. An important aspect of such assistance will be to ensure that mechanisms are put in place to ensure on-going updating of the site once project support has been completed. In this respect, the CARICOM Secretariat has already commenced identifying personnel from within the organization, and has obtained commitments from other regional organizations, in particular the Caribbean Agribusiness Association (CABA) and the Caribbean Farmers' Network (CaFAN) to provide support in the on-going management of the site. Indeed, CABA provided, for a period, personnel to do hands-on work on the site but was unfortunately forced to withdraw the support due to funding problems. It is important to conceptualize the initiative as a collaborative one in which all stakeholders have a direct role in contributing to the successful operation of the information platform.

The idea then is to create a major internet portal dedicated to Caribbean food and agribusiness, which integrates existing initiatives and relevant institutions and which serves as the hub for all matters in which all stakeholders in the agricultural sector have an interest – historical as well as up to date information, statistics, trade, access to financing and developmental support and investment opportunities, policy issues etc. Use would be made of a variety of internet-based methods as a means of creating a dynamic on-line community that considers itself loyal to the site.

At present, there is no regional website that acts as the major conduit for agricultural information. The portal will therefore serve this function. Given its neutral positioning, the CARICOM Secretariat an appropriate institution to act as the central hub for information gathering and exchange in this area. There must not, however, be any notion (either explicit or implicit) that the intention of the portal is to replace or supersede any existing information service. If, for example, an issue is being dealt with adequately through another institution's website then all that may be necessary is a link or links to that site together with some brief background information. On the other hand, where it is necessary to aggregate information on a regional or sub-regional basis, e.g. statistics on production or trade, the agriculture information portal will probably be the best place to have this done.

In the area of **statistical information**, much work needs to be done in terms of bringing together the bits and pieces of information that exist in regional and national institutions. In some cases, the information may already exist in an organized form but for one reason or another is not made available to the public. Under the APP, there is also a project aimed specifically at creating a regional agricultural database and the Caribbean Agribusiness website would therefore be an appropriate means for disseminating the information provided through that database. There are, in addition, datasets generated by the private sector that could also be incorporated into this module. The private sector, especially the larger organized sub-sectors and industries, conduct their business with information that they assemble through their networks and through their own research. Thus, a lot of information exists, which may have been assembled by less rigorous methods, which is outside the structured public sector databases, and which the portal needs to find ways to make available to a wider audience.

In respect of **marketing information**, there is a felt need to provide a forum for bringing together buyers and sellers of agricultural products. For decades, the marketing deficiencies have been recognized at the political level and in this context, the absence of a regional marketing information system has been highlighted. Another APP project is aimed at creating such a market information/intelligence system, which will build on existing national initiatives such as the National Agricultural Market Information System ([NAMIS](#)) of the Trinidad & Tobago National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) and the Jamaica Agriculture Market Information System ([JAMIS](#)). The Caribbean Agribusiness portal can contribute to filling this information gap by providing a common forum for the sharing of current information on availability and requirements for various products.

Another market-related issue has to do with providing **information on entry requirements** in CARICOM markets. Even with the free trade regime, the institutional and other conditions faced by exporters to any regional market vary considerably across countries. Technical measures, internal taxes applied at the border, customs service charges, import licensing and a host of other issues need to be documented so as to facilitate the operations of producers and traders. Such information services are provided in the external markets to which CARICOM exporters sell their products¹ and such initiatives should also be taken within the Region.

A crucial aspect of marketing is the interaction with **consumers**. To date, agricultural marketing efforts at the CARICOM level have not focused sufficiently well on engaging the consumer. Marketing initiatives have tended to emphasize trade policy instruments (tariffs, quantitative restrictions etc.), transportation, or market intelligence systems designed to predict the availability of products. While all of these issues are important, the absence of consumer-centered initiatives has meant that there has been insufficient buy-in from what is arguably the most important segment of production-marketing continuum. Efforts need to be made in terms of generating statistics and objective information on consumption patterns within the region, i.e. the focus must be on gaining a complete picture of the consumer basket as a means of positioning the regional producer in the mix. Here, agricultural traders at the wholesale and retail levels should be a key source of information and efforts would have to be made to bring them on board.

In addition, much can be done in terms of influencing consumer tastes by providing accurate and information about available regional foods, particularly in terms of nutritional content. Consumer tastes are, of course, made up of many factors, including price, convenience, culture and status. All these factors must be addressed in any information-based intervention. The objective here would be to provide a place where consumers of Caribbean food and drink can interact and exchange information with each other. As a result, agribusinesses will become better placed to respond to the needs of their ultimate clients. Providing Information on events centred on cuisine/food preparation, including those events targeted at the tourist market (food festivals etc.), will be an essential element of this module. The [Caribbean Food & Nutrition Institute](#) (CFNI)² has, for decades, generated much of this information and will therefore be a major partner in this effort.

¹ An external example is the EU Export HelpDesk for Developing Countries - http://exporthelp.europa.eu/index_en.html .

² The CFNI has now been incorporated into the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA)

There is a dearth of **technological information** that is specific to the region available on the internet. This assessment applies to primary production and even more so to processing and marketing. While MOAs, national research institutions and regional bodies continue to be the main sources of technology information, their output is often not made available via the web, or when it is, in a highly abbreviated form.

Technological information is generated from a variety of sources. For the most part, the public sector is the predominant source of such information on primary agricultural production, at the national, regional and international levels, at least insofar as basic food crops and livestock are concerned.³ However, as one moves higher up the ladder of value added activities (high value crops, processing, packaging etc), the picture changes significantly and the public sector institutions, with some notable exceptions,⁴ have not embraced the technological imperatives of the sector. To some extent, this derives from the traditional division of labour at the institutional level in terms of responsibilities for primary and secondary production.

The traditional focus of MOAs and their research arms has been at the farm level with all other activities and services being regarded as ancillary. On the other hand, agro-processed products, particularly at the more sophisticated end, have been the preserve of trade/industry ministries. At the regional level, there has been a similar focus on primary production with [CARDI](#), the only truly regional research institution, having been charged since its inception with increasing the output of the region's primary agricultural products. Apart from some forays into marketing, there has been little by way of resources allocated, or policy direction, that would support an integrated value chain approach to research. Many food processing technologies adopted within the region have been the result of private sector initiative and some will not be shared for that very reason. In addition, some publicly generated technologies may not be taken up by the private sector because of fear of imitation. There can be no doubt, however, about the value of public-private partnerships in technology generation and efforts must be made to provide information on successful partnership models and experiences.⁵

The role of facilitating the regional exchange of technology information should no doubt be that of [CARDI](#)⁶. What the portal can do, however, is to bring together the various internet sites within and outside the region that focus on that type of information and to place the issues in a policy context.

³ It should be noted, however, that even in the area of basic crop seed and animal genetics, the role of private sector companies (e.g. Monsanto) has increased dramatically in recent decades thereby diminishing the role of public institutions, such as the international research institutes that were responsible for the "green revolution" of the mid 20th century.

⁴ The [Scientific Research Council](#) of Jamaica and the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute ([CARIRI](#)) of Trinidad & Tobago have for decades pioneered many food processing and other agriculture-based technologies.

⁵ See Spielman, David J. and von Grebmer, Klaus "Public-private partnerships in agricultural research", International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), EPTD Discussion Paper No. 113, January 2004 <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/eptdp113.pdf>

⁶ The [CARDI](#) site focuses essentially on explaining its programmes but does not, for the most part, deliver actually technological content

Although there is a range of **general information** on CARICOM agriculture available on the internet, it would be extremely useful to have much of it assembled, sorted and contextualized. This applies as much to official information as it does to business-oriented and academic material.

A quick review of MOA and related websites reveals a wide disparity in terms of quality and currency. It is therefore expected that this project can serve as a vehicle for stimulating improvements to existing websites since it could help draw attention to the strengths and deficiencies of existing information products. Where necessary or feasible, project resources could be channeled to provide some specific support at the country level. The web sites of the various regional institutions (public, private and non-governmental) also vary in quality and content.

Agricultural events around the region are not sufficiently promoted and the portal can assist in plugging this gap. Each country has its designated agricultural dates and events but these are hardly known to those in other countries. Information on agricultural fairs, trade exhibitions and food festivals should be provided on a timely basis so as to encourage participation at various levels.

Bibliographic information on the sector – at least the key documents -- also needs to be assembled and made available through the portal. There have been many studies on agriculture done over the years (consultancies, academic papers and others) some of which have never been published. The portal will therefore act as a permanent virtual library for such documentation.

One of the main challenges faced by the **small farming sector** (and larger scale operations as well) is in terms of bridging the information gap as it relates to markets, sources of technology and business support. Modern information and communications technologies can help to fill these gaps as long as the required support is provided. The speed with which cellular networks have spread throughout the developing world, and the variety of uses to which they have been put, is indicative of the pent-up demand that exists for more rapid and effective communication at the level of the smallest and poorest units of society. These technological changes must therefore be harnessed to help bring about changes in production structures that will lift millions out of poverty and assist in providing sustainable livelihoods for large swathes of the population.

Traditional extension services depend on there being a sufficient number of trained technicians to service a manageable number of farmers, and that those workers have the required budgets to ensure their mobility etc. Those days, if they ever existed, will probably never return. There is therefore the need to build up digital data banks and communications systems etc., and translate technical information into user-friendly forms that can be accessed by a broad range of actors in the field. The Caribbean Agribusiness portal can play an important role in bringing together information that is tailored to the needs and circumstances of small producers, particularly through collaborations with organizations such as CABA, CaFAN, CANROP and WINFA.⁷

⁷ Caribbean Agribusiness Association (CABA), the Caribbean Farmers Network (CaFAN), the Caribbean Network of Rural Women Producers (CANROP), and the Windward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA)

3. Objective

The main objectives of the project are to provide assistance to an existing initiative – the Caribbean Agribusiness web portal – in improving its quality and effectiveness in performing its intended role as the major hub for agriculture-related information within CARICOM. Related to this, and in this specific context, the project aims at ensuring that small farmers and other small entrepreneurs are fully integrated into the channels for the flow of information necessary to underpin their productive activities.

4. Scope of Work and Expected Outputs

The consultant would be responsible for identifying, in consultation with appropriate organisations, all relevant materials and obtaining approval for their dissemination on the website, and for liaising with potential users regarding the methods of presentation they would prefer. S/he would liaise with relevant staff of the CARICOM Secretariat and collaborating organizations to develop the site and would also make detailed recommendations on arrangements for the site to be managed on a regular basis. The consultant would provide training to personnel identified by the CARICOM Secretariat in the technical and other aspects of site management. The consultant would also be responsible for proposing concrete mechanisms for promoting the site as well as assisting in developing a business plan for the operation. The consultant would be required to attend, and at least two meetings, to be organized by the CARICOM Secretariat, involving potential collaborators and users of the site, at which training, sensitization and other activities will take place. Part of the consultant's duties will be to assist in the technical preparation for those meetings.

The expected output would be an improved Caribbean *Agribusiness* web site/web portal that provides, in an easy-to-use form, access to a wide range of regularly updated materials generated by technical assistance projects, regional agencies and governments in the region, thus facilitating the exchange of information between such agencies as well as improved access to information by farmers and the private sector

5. Coordination

The activity would be administered by the CCS and would draw on internal IT and other resources for technical support. The project would be administered by the Caribbean Community Secretariat under the 10th EDF Agricultural Policy Programme (APP) under the supervision of an official to be designated by the Secretariat.

6. Timeline

Work days during the period March 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. The general sequence of work will be as follows:

- a) briefing by the CARICOM Secretariat

- b) preparation of an inception report by the Consultant (two weeks following commencement of activities) as part of which a detailed timeline of activities will be agreed
- c) preparation of mid-term report
- d) conduct of training and sensitization activities
- e) preparation and submission of final report (by 31 December 2015)

7. Qualifications and Experience

The Consultant should be an individual with the appropriate qualifications and experience in the operation of a development-oriented website. A background in agriculture or development would be an asset. The consultant must have excellent writing and verbal skills in English.

8. Selection Criteria

The consultant will be selected on the basis of, inter alia, the following criteria:

- Experience in developing and managing development-oriented or business websites
- Experience and qualifications in ICT applications and management
- Qualifications and background in agriculture, agribusiness, development or related fields
- Ability to write (in the English language) clearly and effectively on a variety of topics, especially those related to the areas of focus of the project
- Ability to work productively and maintain effective working relationships with people of different national and cultural backgrounds

9. Estimated Budget

The cost of the consultancy will be the global amount of **US\$29,500**. The consultant will be expected to fund all costs associated with the execution of the exercise, including professional fees and materials from the stated amount. The consultant will, nevertheless, be fully compensated for all approved travel, according to the established rules of the client organization with respect to such payments. No additional costs may be claimed.

Payments will be made over the period of the contract as may be agreed, according to the achievement of set benchmarks, and a final payment when the contract is completed. The consultant must submit the respective receipt for each payment received and will be personally responsible for complying with the social security and tax laws in the country in which he/she provides his/her professional services and/or resides.