

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Consultancy

Title	Evaluation of biochar effectiveness on soil health and cocoa performance in Vinh Long and Ho Chi Minh
Project	Circular Economy Cocoa - From Bean To Bar
Budget Line	6.1.2.1
Date	24-09-2026

Helvetas invites interested parties to provide consultancy as described below.

1. Timetable

Detail	Date	Time (GMT+7)
Tender announcement (first call)	25/09/2026	Hanoi Time
Deadline for submitting offers to email account ¹	30/09/2026	23:59
Contract implementation (tentative)	Oct 2026 to March 2027	Must be completed before Mar 31, 2027

2. Nature of the contract

A Consultancy contract in which partial or entire sub-contracting to another legal person is not allowed.

3. Eligibility conditions

Consultants included in an offer cannot be part of other bidders' offer, in which case they will be excluded from the procedure without further evaluation.

Civil servants and persons elected or appointed in a public function are eligible to participate as consultants in the tender procedure for this contract provided that approval for working for the project out of their official duties is granted by their managing agency. Individuals working at financially autonomous academies, universities, or other equivalent entities may also participate as consultants for this contract.

4. Scope of Work

Term of Reference (TOR) is attached as Annex 1.

5. Offers

a. Technical Proposal

- CV(s) of the consultant(s) with relevant expertise and experience;
- Proposed approach and methodology, detailed work plan with timeline, quality assurance measures

b. Financial Proposal

¹ Any application received after this deadline will not be considered.

- The financial proposal must be developed based on actual daily rates, clearly indicating the fee rate of each expert participating in the assignment.
- The financial proposal may include estimates for related costs such as travel, accommodation, and other reasonable expenses necessary for the implementation.
- Implementation costs related to demonstration activities—such as input materials and soil laboratory testing—will be covered by HELVETAS, project partners, and participating farmers. These costs should not be included in the financial proposal.
- The financial proposal shall be in Vietnamese Dong (VND) and shall be inclusive of VAT/PIT.
- Bidders may apply the latest European Union Financial Norms (EU Cost Norm 2022).
- Expenses will be settled based on actual costs supported by relevant and valid financial invoices and documents.
- The Contractor shall be responsible for all taxes and other obligations and/or Helvetas will deduct personal income tax (if applicable) in accordance with current laws.
- Helvetas shall not cover any costs incurred in the preparation of the proposal and contract negotiations.

6. Submission of Offers

Proposals must be submitted via email: procurement.vietnam@helvetas.org. Proposals submitted after the deadline mentioned in Section 1 above will not be considered. The official receipt time shall be determined by the time displayed on the Helvetas email.

Note: The Technical Proposal and Financial Proposal must be password-protected to ensure confidentiality². Bidders will be requested to provide the passwords during the bid evaluation³.

Links for password creation guide:

[How to set up password for Word](#)

[How to set up password for PDF](#)

[How to set up password for Excel](#)

7. Operational language

All written communications for this tender procedure can be either in English or Vietnamese.

8. Evaluation of offers

The entire evaluation procedure is confidential. The Purchasing Panel (PP) decisions are collective. The evaluation reports and written records are for official internal use only and may be communicated neither to the bidders nor to any party other than Helvetas.

1.1 Eligibility and Suitability Evaluation Criteria

- Bid dossier includes all required documents specified in Section 5.

² Password – protected offers are to ensure the confidentiality. Any problems with password set-up can be reached to Helvetas prior to the submission deadlines.

³ If the bidder is not reachable to collect the password during the evaluation process, the offers will not be considered for evaluation.

- Proposals submitted on time in accordance with Section 1.
- Proposals must be password-protected.

1.2 Technical offer Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Documentary Evidence	Weight
Qualifications and relevant experience of the Consultant(s)	Profile/CV	35%
Relevant assignments conducted and evidence of results	Profile/CV	15%
Technical Methodology and Work Plan	Technical Proposal	40%
Reporting and communication skills	Technical Proposal	10%
TOTAL		100%

Note: The bidders that pass the Technical evaluation (min 70% of technical evaluation scoring) will be processed for further evaluation.

1.3 Financial Offer Evaluation Criteria:

Criteria	Documentary Evidence
Cost effectiveness	Financial Proposal

Offers will be evaluated using the Weighted Value for Money method based on the criteria and weightings stated above. Helvetas reserves the right to procure/contract a part of the required services or cancel the procurement process if the technical quality is found to be unsatisfactory.

9. Contract Negotiation

Helvetas reserves the right to negotiate with all or part of the eligible bidders to modify and/or finalize their initial proposals.

Negotiations may cover technical, financial, legal, and other contractual aspects.

10. Alteration or withdrawal of applications

Candidates may alter or withdraw their offers by written notification prior to the deadline for submission of tenders. No offer may be altered after this deadline.

Helvetas retains ownership of all offers, which have not been withdrawn. Consequently, bidders do not have the right to have their offers returned to them.

11. Terms of payments

The payment will be made via bank account transfer to the winner of the tender in VND in accordance with contract payment provisions.

12. Terms of cooperation

- Helvetas has the right to increase or decrease the number of ordered items.
- Helvetas has the right to choose a supplier/ implementer on the given offer according to its own discretion.
- Helvetas has the right to re-formulate the Request for Quotation (RFQ), Invitation to Bid (ITB) or Request for Proposal (RFP) to its own discretion, if any additional items are needed.
- In the case of a contracting, the parties will have to perform according to the established time and in accordance with Helvetas. In case of failure or non-compliance with contractual obligations, Helvetas has a unilateral right to terminate the contract without incurring any legal obligation.

13. Ethics clauses/Corruptive practices

- Bidders making false declarations may be subject to financial penalties representing 10% - 20% of the total value of the contract being awarded.
- Any attempt by a company/organisation to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the PP or the Helvetas during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating and comparing offers will lead to the rejection of its offer and may result in penalties as described above.
- Companies/organisations must not be affected by any conflict of interest with other bidders or parties involved in the project. Helvetas reserves the right to suspend or cancel the RFP procedure and/or purchase order/contract if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the execution of a contract.
- Companies/organisations will be rejected or purchase order/contracts terminated if it emerges that the award or execution of a contract has given rise to unusual commercial expenses. Such unusual commercial expenses are commissions not mentioned in the main contract or not stemming from a properly concluded contract referring to the main contract, commissions not paid in return for any actual and legitimate service, commissions remitted to a tax haven, commissions paid to a payee who is not clearly identified or commissions paid to a company/organisation which has every appearance of being a front company/organisation.
- Contractors found to have paid unusual commercial expenses related to this project are liable, depending on the seriousness of the facts observed, to have their contracts terminated and/or be penalised.
- The Helvetas reserves the right to suspend or cancel the procedure, where the award procedure proves to have been subject to substantial errors, irregularities or fraud. If substantial errors, irregularities or fraud are discovered after the award of the purchase order/ contract, Helvetas may refrain from concluding the purchase order/contract and/or terminate the purchase order/ contract.

14. Additional information

The conclusion of the tender and the award of any purchase order/contract are subject to the availability of funds.

Helvetas reserves the right to annul this tender procedure at any time, without any liability on its side.

15. Annexes:

- **Annex 1:** Term of Reference (TOR)
- **Annex 2:** Technical Proposal (template)
- **Annex 3:** Financial Proposal (template)

TERM OF REFERENCE (TOR)

Consultancy

Title	Evaluation of biochar effectiveness on soil health
Project	Circular Economy Cocoa - From Bean To Bar
Budget line	6.1.2.1

1. BACKGROUND

HELVETAS is an independent development organization based in Switzerland with affiliated organizations in Germany and the United States. HELVETAS has been active in Vietnam since 1995, working in areas such as agriculture, biodiversity conservation, forestry, ecotourism, and rural economic development.

Under the European Union's SWITCH-Asia Programme, HELVETAS Vietnam is implementing the project "Circular Economy Cocoa: From Bean to Bar." The project aims to promote circular economy solutions in Vietnam's cocoa and agri-food sectors to improve resource efficiency, environmental sustainability, and farmer livelihoods.

Since 2024, the project has piloted small-scale biochar application at 24 demo farms involving enterprises, cooperatives, and farmers. Initial field trials in Ben Tre Province (now part of Vinh Long Province), using a soil improvement formula combining biochar, humic acid, organic fertilizer, and lime, have shown encouraging results, including improvements in soil conditions and cocoa performance. Building on these preliminary findings, Helvetas, in collaboration with Marou Chocolate JSC, will further demonstrate and assess biochar-based soil improvement practices at 03 cocoa sites in Vinh Long and suburb of Ho Chi Minh City.

We are seeking consultancy to provide site-specific soil assessment and biochar-based application recommendations, practical technical guidance for implementation and monitoring, and evidence on soil and cocoa yield performance. The findings will support continued use and wider adoption of appropriate biochar-based soil improvement practices and project-supported biochar production technologies.

2. OBJECTIVES

The consultancy aims to assess the practical **effectiveness of the existing biochar-based soil improvement solutions on soil health and cocoa performance** across three (03) cocoa demonstration farms, review and refine the site-specific formulas, and provide practical recommendations for their continued implementation and potential wider adoption in cocoa farming.

3. LOCATIONS

The activity will be implemented at the following location:

No.	Site Name	Total demo area	Address	Existing formula applied
1	Demo 1	1.1 ha - 600 cacao trees	Phú Mỹ hamlet, Phú Túc commune, Vĩnh Long province	Applying formula per tree: 2kg Biochar + 1kg Lime + 5kg Organic Fertilizer + 0.05kg Humic Acid.
2	Demo 2	1.2 ha - 1200 cacao trees	Phú Hòa hamlet, Phú Túc commune, Vĩnh Long	

			province	
3	Demo 3	1.5 ha - 800 cacao trees	Tan Hiep Quarter, Tan Dong Hiep Ward, Ho Chi Minh City	Limited, farmer-led application of biochar over several years, with no standardized application formula.

4. SCOPE OF WORK

The service provider will work closely with HELVETAS, Marou Chocolate and farm's owners to conduct the assessment of biochar application for soil improvement in cocoa farming systems across the three demonstration sites. The main tasks include:

- **Soil Sampling and Analysis:**
 - Propose a set of key soil indicators to be tested for evaluating soil health and soil improvement effects.
 - Conduct baseline and endline soil sampling at the three demonstration sites and coordinate laboratory testing through accredited laboratories.
 - Analyze and compare soil testing results across demonstration sites and regions.
- **Field Monitoring Support:**
 - Provide technical guidance for the application and supervision of biochar-based soil improvement practices at the demonstration sites.
 - Monthly monitoring the progress basing on data and updates provided by Marou & participating farmers, and provide additional instructions as necessary.
- **Reporting and Recommendations:**
 - Identify practical implications for adapting biochar-based soil improvement approaches in these different regions.
 - Develop a simple and practical monitoring framework for continued observation of soil conditions and crop performance.
 - Prepare a final report summarizing methodology, soil testing results, key findings, lessons learned, and recommendations for scaling up.

Note: Due to the short implementation period, endline soil sampling will mainly capture short-term changes in selected soil indicators. Longer-term soil health and crop performance will continue to be monitored by HELVETAS and Marou after the consultancy period.

5. DELIVERABLES

Main tasks	Deliverables
Soil Sampling and Analysis	• A set of key soil indicators adapting to the requirements of cocoa plantation. • Soil testing results at 03 demo sites. • Soil analysis & result interpreting report (in short)
Field Monitoring Support	• Monthly reports updating the progress (via email) on both soil improvements and cocoa production performance. • A monitoring framework as a guideline for Marou staff and farmers in the future.
Reporting and Recommendations	• Final Report with fact-findings and key recommendations.

6. REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

The consultant/team should meet the following requirements:

- **Team Leader:** Minimum Master's degree in soil science, agronomy, environmental science, or a related field, with at least 7 years of relevant professional experience in soil health, soil fertility, sustainable agriculture, or biochar-based soil improvement.
- **Team Member (if any):** Minimum Bachelor's degree with relevant academic background and professional experience in agriculture, soil management, laboratory analysis, or related fields.
- Proven experience in soil analysis, soil health assessment, and developing site-specific soil improvement or fertilisation recommendations, preferably for perennial crops or cocoa.
- Experience working in cocoa sector, working with farmers or agricultural development projects is an advantage.
- Good analytical, reporting, and communication skills in English and Vietnamese.

Note: *The team shall consist of no more than two (02) members, including the Team Leader. Proposals should clearly indicate team members' roles, qualifications, and relevant past assignments.*

TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

FINANCIAL PROPOSAL



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