Guidelines for assessors

Assessment of applications

Submitted under

Reference: EuropeAid/171607/DD/ACT/AL

**Toka Jone – Re-use of confiscated assets for social agriculture
Social Agriculture Development Fund (SADF)**

Deadline: December 15th, 2023

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1   INTRODUCTION

This guide is based on the practical guide (PRAG) and in particular its Chapter 6 and related annexes.

The purpose of this document is to guide assessors on how to conduct their evaluations so that all assessments are made in a coherent and consistent way.

It is recalled that the evaluation committee has to base its decisions on the individual assessments of the assessors and therefore needs to ensure compliance with the criteria defined in the call for proposals and that these are commonly understood and applied by all assessors, whether they be internal to the European Commission (based in EU delegations or at headquarters) or external (external experts).

To this end, all assessors should independently from each other carry out the assessment of the proposals assigned to them in a consistent manner by applying the same methodology, interpretation and understanding of the objectives and criteria described in the guidelines for applicants. This does not necessarily mean that the scores of two different assessors are expected to be identical, but rather that each assessor applies the same standards and provides a well substantiated opinion supporting his/her individual scores. This may be achieved by applying the following standards and good practices.

Before starting the examination of the proposals all assessors must familiarise themselves with the following documents:

- The present guidelines for assessors,

- Terms of Reference for assessors

- The guidelines for applicants responding to this call for proposals, available at:

  https://www.cosv.org/re-launching-the-social-agriculture-development-fund-sadf/?fbclid=IwAR0-00RwOlzkvJ_7a86kuWez5iJpXMwBt4vH5kV9Z89xpx7BH-b54OvOQMo , including annexes.

- Chapter 6 of the practical guide:
  https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/6.+Grants

2   OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Assessors must familiarise themselves with the documents related to the call for proposals. The information below refers to certain key points but does not substitute a thorough reading of e.g. the guidelines for applicants, their annexes and the FAQs published for the call.

2.1   Specific background

The Social Agriculture Development Fund - SADF call for proposals is developed under the EU funded TOKA JONË project EuropeAid/171607/DD/ACT/AL under the Civil Society Facility & Media Programme for Western Balkans and Turkey 2020 (CSF), a programme which was introduced in 2008 to strengthen civil society in the IPA Countries.

Toka Jone project through SADF sub-granting scheme is fully in line with main priorities of EU support to civil society, in particular: 1) to achieve an environment that is conducive to civil society activities; and 2) to build the capacity of CSOs to be effective and accountable independent actors. To foster the diversification of revenue sources and strengthen the financial capacities of CSOs, as well as encourage good practices in terms of good governance and the promotion of a culture of legality -

from a multidimensional perspective - the EU has consistently supported the reuse of abandoned assets for social purposes.

Confiscation of criminal assets, therefore, is a key aspect to prevent criminal organisations from remaining in their illegal activities. To that end, Toka Jone aims at contributing to some of most pressing Albanian national priorities on social re-use of confiscated assets as an effective solution for the growth of non-profit organisations and social enterprises combined with the strengthening of Albanian enforcement agencies and local government units.

Toka Jone foresees the provision of a significant component of financial support to third parties gathered in the specific financial instrument: the Social Agriculture Development Fund (SADF). The global aim of this grant mechanism is to support social agriculture initiatives managing confiscated assets from organized crime, as a means to promote socio-economic development, self-employment, upskilling and reskilling opportunities of vulnerable groups, sense of legality and rule of law.

SADF is conceived as a flexible instrument able to address the needs and aspirations of economic actors willing to launch or consolidate social agriculture experiences in the Tirana and Durres regional areas. In this context, will be selected and supported, through a sub-granting scheme, at least three social agriculture initiatives that will benefit from financial and technical assistance to consolidate the economic activities. The involvement in social agriculture entrepreneurship activities and programs will provide new and innovative economic opportunities for youth, particularly those from poor households and rural areas, as well as rural women. Consequently, the SADF sub-granting scheme aims to promote pivotal actions to raise awareness towards most vulnerable groups of the population to adequate social innovation, use of agricultural land through community –based social farming services (including therapy and rehabilitation, social connection and inclusion, and social services, through the re-use of confiscated assets at a community level). Particular attention will be devoted to the creation of new sustainable and pioneering partnerships, which focus on the green and social economy.

The establishment of social enterprises in the confiscated assets is expected to generate several benefits for the community such as: i) generate a direct impact on improving the life of victims of organized crime and groups at risk of exclusion; ii) to improve the economic opportunities of the rural communities; iii) increase the active participation of citizens in socio-cultural activities; iv) strengthen their trust in institutions and rule of law.

2.2	Specific objectives of the call for proposals

Overall Objective: To promote sustainable re-use of confiscated assets to benefit vulnerable groups at risk of exclusion.

Specific Goal: To develop innovative social agriculture initiatives re-using confiscated assets as a means to promote socio-economic development, employment opportunities of vulnerable groups, sense of legality and rule of law.

2.3	Specific priorities

The priorities of this call for proposals are:

- Establishment of Social Agriculture Initiatives (SAI) on the agriculture confiscated assets

- SAI that engage meaningfully vulnerable youth, women and relatives of organised crimes victims, people with disabilities

- Promotion of rule of law and good governance

The proposed actions must address at least one of the crosscutting issues:

- Agriculture and Rural Development

- Environmental Protection and Climate Change

- Gender Mainstreaming

- Rule of Law and Good Governance

- Human Rights Protection

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3   EVALUATION

Applications submitted for the call for proposals will be evaluated to identify the best proposal which merit EU funding.

The proceedings of the evaluation exercise are confidential and all parties involved are bound to adhere to the principles of confidentiality, impartiality and no conflict of interest. The assessors must sign a declaration to this fact.

Only the chairperson of the evaluation committee may authorise contacts with an applicant during and after the evaluation process. This includes communications related to clarifications, the announcement of the results of each phase as well as dealing with requests for information and questions raised by any applicant about the results.

Lead applicant whose applications have not been selected will be informed about the scores obtained in the evaluation including a breakdown by section and sub-section of the evaluation grid. They may also be given the comments and justifications provided by the assessors and/or the evaluation committee.

3.1   The evaluation process

Recommendations on the proposals are to be provided to the contracting authority by an appointed evaluation committee, comprising a non-voting chairperson, a non-voting secretary and an odd number of voting members (minimum of three). The role of the assessors is to carry out all or part of the detailed examination so as to assist the evaluation committee in its deliberations.

Assessors are used for this call for proposal:

- For the evaluation of proposals.

Assessors work under the supervision of the chairperson of the evaluation committee.

Opening session - all proposals received should be opened in an opening session (after expiry of the submission deadline) at which the registration details are checked and the proposals are numbered.

The secretary to the evaluation committee supervises the opening session and requests the assistance of other staff of the contracting authority if need be.

The register of proposals received should contain the following information:

- the registration number of the proposal;

- the date of submission;

- the lead applicant's name and address.

For each application, there is an **administrative check** to be carried out.

The secretary draws up the first report containing the result of the administrative checks.

Applications submitted and which duly passed the administrative checks are **evaluated for the relevance** and design of the action, financial and operational capacity, implementation approach, sustainability of the action budget and cost effectiveness of the action, using an evaluation grid (see Annex E5_b). The final score is the arithmetical average of the scores given by the assessors.

The secretary draws up the second report containing the results of the administrative check and the evaluation of the full applications, ranked by score. The evaluation committee will make a recommendation for provisionally selected proposals as well as a reserve list of applications, should additional funds become available within a defined time period.

For the provisionally selected applications and those on the reserve list, an **eligibility check** will be undertaken on the basis of submitted supporting documents to confirm earlier statements in checklists and declarations.

The secretary draws up the third report containing the results of the eligibility checks and the evaluation committee makes a final recommendation to the contracting authority.

The chairperson of the evaluation committee determines to what extent the evaluation process must be restarted.

The committee reserves the right to perform re-evaluations in duly substantiated cases. However, in the case of substantial discrepancies between the two assessments, the committee must re-evaluate the application concerned. (6.5.7.1 PRAG)

3.2	Content of the evaluation

- For the **administrative checks**, EC should verify each proposal against the checklist and the declaration by the lead applicant (see Annex E3b). The criteria published in the checklist with the call may under no circumstances be modified. Each proposal need to be checked by EC . Each evaluation grid must be initialled, signed and dated by EC member that has carried out the evaluation.

- For the **evaluation of full applications**, assessors should write an assessment using the published evaluation grids (see annexe E5b) without modification. At least two assessors must assess each application, working independently of each other. The assessors must not discuss the evaluation of specific proposals between themselves.

  Assessors are fully responsible to complete their evaluation grids in compliance with the quality evaluation standards described in these guidelines and the criteria listed in the evaluation grid available. Each application must be assessed on its own merits and not by comparing different applications. Each criterion of the evaluation grid should be evaluated only once by the assessor and should not influence assessment of other criteria. The assessor must give concise, pertinent and well justified comments for each sub-section of the evaluation grid, in a wording that may be given directly to the lead applicant, if requested. **Strong and weak points** must be reflected. In particular, comments should not include only a summary of the proposal, but should provide a **short critical analysis** in line with the respective questions of the evaluation grid. Each evaluation grid must be initialled, signed and dated by the assessor having carried out the evaluation.

- For the **eligibility checks**, the EC should verify each proposal against the checklist, the declaration by the lead applicant (see annex E3b) and submitted supporting documents. The criteria published in the checklist with the call may under no circumstances be modified. Each proposal need only be checked by one EC member. Each evaluation grid must be initialled, signed and dated by the EC member that has carried out the evaluation.

If the assessor has any doubts about the compliance of an applicant, the issue should be raised to the chairperson of the evaluation committee for further advice and/or necessary clarification requests to the lead applicant.

The evaluation grids should be completed in english.

4   SCORING

The applications will be ranked in accordance with the final score they are attributed by the evaluation committee. It will receive an overall score out of 100.

4.1   General

Comments and scores must be coherent and consistent with the corresponding score. Therefore, a high score combined with critical or negative comments or a low score accompanied by positive comments would be incomprehensible and rather confusing for the evaluation committee to appreciate and the conclusion may be that it is not possible to rely on the assessment. Remember also that the comments provided may be communicated to the lead applicant upon request.

Scores between 1 and 5 (not 0) must be given. Half points are not accepted. The calculation of the sub- and total scores must be verified carefully.

The evaluation grid is divided into sections and subsections.

The first section contains the selection criteria which evaluate the financial, professional and technical capacity of the applicants to implement the action proposed. Applicants must have the necessary professional competencies and qualifications to complete the proposed action. The lead applicant must also have stable and sufficient sources of funding to keep operating throughout the action period and to participate, where appropriate, in its funding. The assessments are made considering the action proposed, the applicable payment schedule of the contract and on the basis of the relevant supporting documents defined in the guidelines for applicants. These may include an external audit report of the lead applicant, the profit and loss account and the balance sheet for the last financial year for which the accounts have been closed. If the answer is negative to one or more of the criteria, the evaluation of the other subsections must still be carried out by the assessor.

The other subsections will be given a score between 1 and 5 (never 0) in accordance with the following guidelines: Each subsection will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows:

1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

If the assessor has any doubts about the scoring of applicants, the issue should be raised to the chairperson of the evaluation committee for further advice and/or necessary clarification requests to the lead applicant.

4.2   Specific issues to be examined during the assessment

The evaluation committee may decide to approve the ranking drawn up by the secretary on the basis of the assessors' report. If the evaluation committee does not accept the scores awarded by the assessors to an application (where for instance there is a significant difference or clear discrepancies between the scores awarded by the assessors), it must give reasons for this decision in the evaluation report. The committee then has to fill in a new evaluation grid (either collectively or by one of the voting members of the committee) for the proposal concerned. Such a re-evaluation may not be entrusted to external assessors. A new list will be produced on the basis of the scores from the new evaluation, which replace those given by the assessors. The new evaluation may also cover only one

or more parts of the evaluation (for example, where the evaluation committee decides to re-evaluate only the relevance of the actions).

All such decisions must be recorded and fully substantiated in the evaluation report. The evaluation grids completed by the members of the evaluation committee must be kept with those completed by the assessors.