On February 12, 2020, Counterpart International is pleased to provide the following answers/responses to questions that were submitted for the Request for Proposals published on February 3, 2020. Please note that the Baseline Terms of Reference is subject to change based on USDA approval.

1. Please confirm the anticipated budget ceiling for this award.

**Response:** The anticipated budget ceiling for the baseline is 200,000 USD, inclusive of all costs related to evaluator fees, local enumerators, international and local travels (air ticket, lodging, M&IE), etc. and logistics. This will be a firm fixed price contract.

2. Please indicate the specific time proposals are due on February 21.

**Response:** Counterpart has amended its deadline and the proposals are due at 5:00 pm (EST) on February 28, 2020.

3. Is there a page limit for the technical proposal?

**Responses:** The technical proposal should not exceed 20 pages excluding relevant attachments.

4. There are only 11 days between when offerors can expect responses to questions and the deadline for proposal submission. Would Counterpart consider delaying the deadline for submission?

**Response:** Please refer to question 2 above on extension of submission deadline.

5. The RFP indicates that Counterpart expects the contract to be signed by Feb 28. Given that proposals are due on February 21, this leaves five working days for firm selection and contract negotiation with selected firm. Please confirm that Counterpart does indeed intend to abide by this aggressive timeline.

**Response:** Counterpart has updated the timeline accordingly.

6. Assuming the contract is awarded by February 28, the expectation that fieldwork will begin on March 15 with enumerator training occurring the week of March 9, leaves a period of one week for the development of a rigorous evaluation design; review and approval by Counterpart of the evaluation design; meetings with the Ministry of Education, local stakeholders to validate/discuss the evaluation design; development, review and approval of survey and other data collection instrument design, and securing of ethics clearances. The attempt to compress all these activities into a one-week period is worrisome and has implications for the quality and legitimacy of the baseline data collection. Would Counterpart consider delaying data collection to allow for a more realistic timeline?

**Response:** Counterpart may consider adjusting the timeline and will discuss this with the selected evaluator. As noted in the terms of reference, baseline data collection must be completed before the start Ramadan, April 22nd.

7. The current timeline has a one-month period (Mar 15 – April 15) for instrument testing, data collection, and data analysis, with a debriefing on preliminary findings scheduled for April 20. This timeline is not feasible, given the different types of data being collected – quantitative and qualitative, EGRA, student/teacher/parent/director surveys – and then analyzed. For example, even if it is possible to conduct
the pilot, adjust the instrument and collect all the data in three weeks, that leaves 2.5 weeks for coding of qualitative data, data cleaning and analysis, and preparation for debrief. Most evaluations allow eight weeks for data cleaning and analysis, particularly when different instruments and mixed methods are involved. Would Counterpart consider delaying by six weeks the due dates for deliverables following data collection?

**Response:** The critical step is the data collection which needs to be completed before the start of Ramadhan on April 22. Counterpart will negotiate with the selected evaluator a more realistic data analysis and final reporting timeline.

8. Page 8 says “The program will be implemented in phases with different cohorts of beneficiaries and treatments for each phase.” Would Counterpart consider randomizing the phases when different areas get services, in order to study certain program components experimentally?

**Response:** The program will not be implemented in phases. Only the literacy pilot project, with a subset of schools will be implemented in phases in terms of the rollout of textbooks. Randomizing of phases is not appropriate.

9. The program includes multiple activities, which we understand will not be deployed at the same time. We wish to highlight that if there isn’t some level of uniformity in deployment, it will not be clear what “treatment” we are evaluating. Can Counterpart provide a deployment plan of activities, indicating when and where each activity will be deployed?

**Response:** Counterpart will share with the selected evaluator the key project documents such as the workplan that provides a detailed activity timeline for the life of the project.

10. Page 7 states “The consultant will meet with Ministry of Education and local stakeholders to develop the evaluation design based on program design and implementation.” And “the consultant will continuously present the evaluation objectives, materials, and results for Counterpart and local stakeholders to maintain commitment to the evaluation.” Please provide guidance of what these tasks would entail. For example, will offerors need to organize one or more workshops with government officials? Please also elaborate on how Counterparts envisions these continuous presentations and stakeholder meetings, given the compressed timeline presented in the RFP.

**Response:** Counterpart will take a lead in organizing meetings at the national level (Minister of Education, School Feeding Director and Director of Education, etc.) and at the regional levels with the relevant officials. Counterpart will discuss with the selected evaluator the type and nature of the debriefs which could be written or face to face.

11. Is the consultant responsible for formulating a theory of change (ToC) for each strategic objective and producing graphic representations of the ToCs?

**Response:** Counterpart would like to clarify that there will be no need to develop a Theory of Change and graphic representative for each strategic objective. The evaluator will be required instead to provide recommendations on the validity of the Theory of Change (ToC), and any gaps should be documented. The ToC document will be shared with the selected evaluator.

12. Please confirm Counterpart will provide a specific definition of what it means for a school to “graduate” from the program.
Response: According to USDA (Refer to farm security and rural investment act of 2002), graduation refers to the ability to (A) sustain the benefits to the education, enrollment, and attendance of children in schools in the targeted communities when the provision of commodities and assistance to a recipient country under a program under this section terminates; and (B) estimate the period of time required until the recipient country or eligible organization is able to provide sufficient assistance without additional assistance.

13. Could Counterpart please provide some information on the criteria used to select schools for the program?
Response: Counterpart and the Ministry of Education team have agreed to the school selection criteria below.

i. School with completed cycles/grades will be prioritized but the Ministry highlighted that it is difficult to find 209 school which meet this requirement especially in rural areas. Only 25% of the national schools have completed cycles/grades.
ii. The schools will be at around 1-2 kilometers of the official school where the commodity will be stored.
iii. Engagement and active participation of the community toward the project.
iv. Schools shall be accessible anytime for commodity transportation.
v. Schools will have infrastructure such as storerooms, latrines and water sources.
vi. Schools with enrolment from 40 to more than 400 students.

14. Are there any comparison (untreated) schools available in Brakna and Gorgol, or will the consultant need to select control schools from neighboring regions? If the former, how many schools eligible for the control group are in the two regions; if the latter, can Counterpart suggest the regions from which control schools should be selected?
Response: Schools shall be available in each region (Brakna and Gorgol) for the control groups.

15. Is the consultant supposed to collect data from a subset of the 209 program schools, or from all of them?
Response: The consultant will collect data from a statistically representative sample of schools.

16. Please confirm offerors can partner with local data collection firms for this activity.
Response: Yes, it is critical to partner with local consultants for the data collection.

17. Page 15 says “all sampling will comply with the 95 percent confidence level, 5 percent margin of error standard. Sample designs for teachers and directors will also meet this 95 percent, 5 percent standard.” This specification refers to a requirement in terms of representativeness of the data. Please confirm this is what should be followed for the sample design. We ask because, given that this is an impact evaluation, we had assumed the sample design should guarantee a minimal detectable effect (e.g. sample should allow estimation of a difference between treatment and comparison students of X words read per minute at endline with a power of 80% and alpha of 5%), rather than a representativeness benchmark, which does not involve a comparison between two groups, but the estimation of a parameter of interest, like the number of words per minute students in the treatment group can read. If indeed the sample design should follow a representative benchmark, please provide a guideline to decide the sample size of the comparison group.
Response: The sample design does not need to follow a representative benchmark. Counterpart welcomes viable recommendations from the evaluator which shall be discussed during award negotiation.
18. However the sample size is estimated, requiring the same level of precision for teachers and head teachers as for students may well be unfeasible because there will probably not be enough teachers and, especially, head teachers in treatment schools to achieve the same level of precision. Would Counterpart reevaluate this requirement in light of sample size realities?

**Response:** Counterpart may reevaluate this requirement in discussions with the selected evaluator.

19. Please confirm the only instruments that should be fielded are: (i) EGRA, (ii) Snapshot of School Management and Effectiveness (SSME) survey, and (iii) Language mapping assessment.

**Response:** Counterpart confirms that the two instruments to be used are EGRA and the Snapshot of School Management and Effectiveness (SSME) survey which may be updated to reflect the field needs.

20. Please confirm there are versions of the EGRA, the SSME survey, and the language mapping assessment that have already been piloted and adapted for the Mauritania context, and translated to the appropriate languages, so the evaluator will not need to conduct any adaptation of these instruments.

**Response:** The evaluator will be responsible for developing the tools and submit to Counterpart for approval.

21. Please confirm Counterpart will provide drafts for the SSME survey, and the language mapping assessment.

**Response:** The selected evaluator will develop the EGRA and SSME and submit to Counterpart for approval.

22. Does Counterpart expect the evaluator to conduct classroom observations?

**Response:** Yes

23. Which grade or grades is covered in this study?

**Response:** The literacy activities will focus on grades 1-3 and school feeding and other activities for all the grades (1 to 6).

24. We understand that the study includes surveys with teachers, head teachers, director and parents. Please elaborate on the purpose of data collection from each of these groups.

**Response:** The program seeks to identify any barriers that can hinder the success of the program or windows of opportunity that can be used to advance the goals. Additionally, will identify any behaviors, attitudes, perceptions among the education stakeholders e.g. teachers, directors, parents in order to develop appropriate behavioral communication materials and messages.

25. Please indicate the local languages in which each instrument should be fielded?

**Response:** Arabic and French

26. Is it anticipated that parental consent will be required for school-based data collection with children?

**Response:** Counterpart will liaise with the Ministry of Education to seek an authorization letter to grant the research team access to the schools. Children or cognitively impaired adults should not be interviewed in
the survey or otherwise involved in the research without the consent of a parent or guardian. Counterpart will provide a consent form to the research team.

27. Please advise on costs, technical requirements and timelines related obtaining local IRB approvals, research permits, and government authorizations in Mauritania. Does Counterpart have its own IRB from which the evaluator must obtain approval?

Response: Counterpart does not have an IRB approval but will process the necessary government authorization to access the schools. The research firm will be required to process any research permits as per the local laws.

28. Does Counterpart require that the evaluator submit quantitative and qualitative data containing personal identifiers?

Response: Counterpart will remove personal identifiers in its own reporting.

29. Please confirm where the stakeholder meetings to share findings should be held.

Response: The stakeholder meetings will be held in Nouakchott.

30. Are the interventions being introduced new to the treatment communities, or are some of them already being implemented (prior to the start of the evaluation)?

Response: Other implementers such as WFP have previously worked with some of the project schools but are currently not implementing there anymore.

31. Does Counterpart have tablets that can be used for data collection? If so, can Counterpart detail the specifications of the tablets available and the cost to the evaluator of using these tablets, if any?

Response: Counterpart will procure tablets (Androids 2.1 with sufficient memory) for data collection.

32. Upon award, will Counterpart provide the evaluator with school rosters for student random selection?

Response: Yes, Counterpart will provide the evaluator with the school rosters.

33. For the field testing of the survey instruments, can the evaluator count on Counterpart’s support for contact and coordination with schools?

Response: Yes.

34. Would Counterpart assist the evaluator in coordinating with the Ministry of Education to schedule school visits?

Response: Yes, Counterpart will seek an authorization letter from the Ministry of Education.

35. The deliverables listed in Section 11 “Deliverables” do not match those presented in the table in Section 9 of the RFP. Please clarify what deliverables the consultant will be responsible for and the estimated deadline for each deliverable.

Response: Counterpart has updated its deliverable table, please refer to the Amended RFA mod#1.
36. We would like to verify the language of instruction in the grade of interest (usually in MGD evaluations this is G2 to report on their standard indicator). The EGRA instrument should be in the language of reading instruction in the grade of interest.

**Response:** Counterpart will target 51 out of 209 schools for the pilot literacy activity and the effort will concentrate on grades 1 to 3. Arabic language for grade 1 while Arabic and French for grades 2 and 3.

37. As mentioned, there is an option for Counterpart to accept the limitation in of using an existing EGRA instrument in the language of instruction (French and/or Arabic) administered in another country without a full adaptation process to adapt to the Mauritanian context to save on time, given the necessity to complete data collection before the start of Ramadan.

**Response:** Counterpart would prefer to adapt EGRA to the local context however we are open to discuss options with the selected evaluators post-award.

38. We wanted to confirm whether an experimental design is required by USDA.

**Response:** To better understand the impact of the program, Counterpart would recommend an experimental design.

39. If an experimental design is indeed required, how would Counterpart envision the Evaluator’s role in identifying control schools? Would Counterpart provide data on the selection criteria for potential control schools and the Evaluator would be responsible for randomly selecting schools from this list?

**Response:** Counterpart will provide a selection criterion and the list of schools that meet those criteria. The evaluator will randomly select a sample for both the literacy pilot and control.

40. While the sample size has not yet been approved/finalized with USDA, is there is an existing “draft” sample that USDA will likely approve, or more specific requirements for what levels the sample should be generalizable to, it would be helpful to share this to gauge whether we might reduce the estimated length of data collection.

**Response:** There is no “draft” sample at this moment.

41. Does Counterpart have any recommendations of local research firms?

**Response:** Counterpart is unable to recommend any research firms in Mauritania.

42. Is there flexibility regarding the team structure? Are bidders able to include more team members than listed in different positions?

**Response:** Yes, the bidders can propose additional team members keeping in mind the budgetary ceiling of 200,000 USD.

43. Can Counterpart provide bidders with the average per diem rate (to include accommodation, meals and incidentals) they should use in their financial proposal. Alternatively, should bidders use the per diem rate as stated by the US State Department?

**Response:** The per diem rate shall be at the discretion of the bidder in collaboration with the local research partner.
44. Can Counterpart provide the number of students the program will reach within the 209 schools?

Response: The total number of students will not exceed 127,100. Counterpart will share the list of the schools and students once the evaluator is selected.

45. Should sampling be performed at the level of the school or student?

Response: At both levels.

46. How many control schools are expected to be visited for data collection?

Response: Counterpart expects the consultant to propose the number of schools for its review and validation. The final number shall be agreed upon post-award.

47. Where is Counterpart’s country office located in Mauritania? Are their regional offices in Aleg, Kaédi, or any other major towns in the region?

Response: Counterpart office is located at Tevragh – Zeina-Ilot K, close to the Embassy of Morocco. Counterpart plans to open an office in Boghe.

48. Can Counterpart confirm that only one field visit is expected to Mauritania for training of field staff and data collection?

Response: Yes, we anticipate that one field visit shall be enough.

49. Since the program will focus on various cohorts, can Counterpart confirm that this baseline focuses only on the first cohort?

Response: Counterpart is seeking for a baseline from each cohort from each region.

50. Does this program focus on specific grades within each school? If so, which ones?

Response: The program will focus on grades 1 to 3.

51. Should bidders budget for any travel to Washington, DC for meetings or presentations with Counterpart and/or USDA?

Response: Yes, for one trip to Counterpart HQ (Arlington, VA) if possible.