

Questions and answers to the Request for Proposal No. RFP-2026-1130-002 for Benin

1. Sampling: Why does the number of students sampled in each school not equal to 20?

CI - The “20 students per school” figure is an average planning assumption to reach the total student sample (3,360) while remaining feasible in the field. In practice, the actual number per school may vary slightly due to: 1) Grade 2/3 enrollment levels at the time of data collection, 2) absenteeism on the assessment day, 3) replacement rules for unavailable learners, and 4) the requirement to maintain sex balance (e.g., 10 girls/10 boys) across Grades 2 and 3. The Independent Evaluator will document the final realized sample and apply standard weighting/adjustment if needed in the dataset and report.

2. What is the expectation of the comparison school, since these schools might have currently access to a school feeding program? It is only to compare EGRA results based on the literacy treatment? Note that while the TOR mentioned a small sample of comparison school the sample proposed the same as project school.

CI - Comparison of schools are included for descriptive benchmarking and contextualization, not for causal attribution. Because some non-project schools may still receive meals through PNASI, the comparison group is intended to help interpret baseline levels (e.g., literacy, attendance, school conditions) in similar operational contexts, rather than isolate “school feeding effects.” The ToR language should be clarified to avoid implying a quasi-experimental design. If the current proposed sample mirrors the project schools, we recommend revising the ToR to state that comparison schools may be included in a smaller benchmarking subset (if USDA prefers), or retained at the planned level only for descriptive comparisons (means/levels), explicitly noting that the baseline will not estimate impacts or causal effects.

3. Why including grade 3, when the MGD SO1 only includes grade 2?

CI – Grade 3 is included for three practical reasons:

- a. Program learning: assessing Grades 2 and 3 provides a clearer picture of early-grade reading progression and helps interpret learning trajectories over time.
- b. Field feasibility: in some schools, Grade 2 enrollment or attendance may be limited, including Grade 3 supports stable sampling without compromising sex balance.
- c. Instructional relevance: teacher training and literacy supports often span early grades, including Grade 3 improves the diagnostic value of baseline findings for instructional planning.

That said, the IE will ensure that reporting for the MGD SO1 standard indicator is consistent with USDA definitions, if the USDA indicator is strictly Grade 2, the baseline report can present Grade 2 results as the primary reporting line and Grade 3 as supplementary diagnostic findings.

4. Have the comparison school been identified?

CI - Not yet as a finalized list. Comparison schools will be identified during sampling using the most recent MEMP sampling frame, in coordination with relevant government counterparts (e.g., MEMP, ANAN, and commune/department education authorities) to ensure schools are:

- Geographically and operationally comparable,
- Not receiving the full integrated Diàna nu kéubi package, and
- Feasible and safe to access during fieldwork.

The IE will document selection criteria and replacement rules in the Sampling Design Memo.

5. For the evaluation question “What percentage of students currently experience learning difficulties?” is Counterpart expecting a numeric answer or should the question be reframed to lead to a more qualitative and nuance answer?

CI - Counterpart expects a quantifiable estimate, but the question should be operationalized clearly. We recommend reframing as:

- Quantitative: What proportion of Grade 2 (and Grade 3, if applicable) students demonstrate foundational reading skills below agreed benchmark thresholds (based on EGRA subtask cut scores)?
- Qualitative complement: What learner-, classroom-, and household-level factors contribute to learning challenges, as perceived by teachers, parents, and school leadership?

This preserves a numeric baseline while ensuring nuanced interpretation.

6. Is the EGRA instrument provided? Which subtasks are included?

CI - The IE is expected to develop/adapt and validate the EGRA instrument in alignment with national assessment approaches and local language/instructional realities, in consultation with relevant government technical bodies (e.g., INFRE/MEMP). If Counterpart/partners have an existing EGRA tool package from prior work, it can be shared as a reference; however, the IE remains responsible for final instrument design, piloting, and documentation (including subtasks, scoring protocols, and enumerator manuals). Subtasks typically include components such as letter knowledge, familiar word reading, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension; the final list will be confirmed during tool finalization and piloting.

7. Confirm that the ET is not expected to measure the “Percentage of government and school actors (ANAN, DDEMP, school directors, APE/CGCSI) who demonstrate improved capacity in school feeding management, monitoring, or governance (based on capacity assessment scores).” ?

CI – Confirmed, the baseline evaluation is expected to measure indicators in the approved Performance Indicator Table and baseline ToR scope. The specific indicator quoted (“Percentage of government and school actors... based on capacity assessment scores”) is not included in the provided PIT as a required standard indicator, and it is not a baseline requirement unless it has been formally included in the project’s approved MEL system as a custom indicator. The IE may still assess institutional capacity qualitatively (and, if requested, through structured readiness questions) as part of the DAC criteria (relevance/coherence/sustainability), but not as a formal percentage indicator unless Counterpart and USDA explicitly request it.

8. Will Counterpart provides tablets fir data collection?

CI - The expectation is that the IE will propose an electronic data collection approach and identify required resources. Counterpart’s preference is electronic data collection to improve quality and timeliness. Whether Counterpart can supply tablets depends on in-country availability and the final procurement/implementation arrangements. As a baseline assumption, the IE should plan to provide (or budget) sufficient tablets through its fieldwork plan, while Counterpart can potentially support in-kind where feasible.

9. Is an IRB required? If so can counterpart obtain it with the documents that we will provide?

CI - An IRB/ethics review requirement depends on: a) Benin national requirements, b) the evaluator’s institutional policies, and c) the presence of research activities involving children (EGRA) and sensitive data. The baseline will include child participation, so ethical review/approval is typically expected through an appropriate local ethics mechanism and/or the IE’s institutional IRB procedures. Counterpart can facilitate ethics approval processes in-country by providing project documentation, letters of support, and coordination with government counterparts, but the IE is responsible for preparing the ethics package (protocol, consent/assent scripts, instruments, data protection plan) and ensuring compliance.

10. Will counterpart provide some of the tablet needed for data collection?

CI - Same as #8: Counterpart can explore partial in-kind support depending on availability, but the IE should not assume tablets will be provided unless confirmed during contracting. For planning and budgeting purposes, the IE should include tablets (or device rental) as a line item, with the option to reduce costs if Counterpart later confirms available devices.

11. **Instructions to Bidders** - The Technical Proposal has a maximum of 15 pages. Does this include CVs for the lead evaluator and associate evaluator?

CI - The 15-page limit applies to the main Technical Proposal narrative only (methodology, evaluation structure, workplan, and management approach). CVs for the Lead Evaluator and Associate Evaluator should be included as annexes and do not count toward the 15-page limit.

12. **Technical Specifications** - Could the role of Lead Evaluator be split across two people to meet the qualifications described on p.21, under “6. Qualifications”?

CI - No. The Lead Evaluator role may not be split across two individuals. One designated Lead Evaluator must meet the required qualifications and be accountable for overall technical leadership, quality assurance, and deliverables.

13. **Technical Specifications** - Could Counterpart International please share the Evaluation Plan referenced in the RFP?

CI - Yes. Counterpart will share the approved Evaluation Plan referenced in the RFP with the selected firm upon contract award and during the inception phase. Bidders should base proposals on the ToR and PMP-level information provided.

14. **Language of implementation and deliverables:** Should data collection and fieldwork be conducted primarily in French and relevant local languages?

CI - Yes. Fieldwork should be conducted primarily in French and relevant local languages, as appropriate for respondents and context. Enumerators must be fluent in the languages used for data collection.

15. Are deliverables expected in English only, or in both English and French?

CI - Final deliverables are required in both English and French, unless otherwise specified in writing by Counterpart.

16. **EGRA language adaptation:** The TOR notes that EGRA tools should be adapted and translated as needed. Could you please confirm whether EGRA is expected to be administered in French only, or in French with adaptation to relevant national languages (e.g. for instructions or selected subtasks), in line with national practice?

CI - EGRA is expected to be administered in French, with adaptation and translation of instructions and selected subtasks into relevant national/local languages, as appropriate and in line with national practice. All adaptations must be piloted and documented.

17. **EGRA scope:** Is the EGRA expected to follow the proposed sample sizes strictly, or is limited refinement permissible during the inception phase if actual Grade 2–3 enrollment or attendance levels differ from assumptions in the TOR?

CI - Yes. Limited refinement is permissible during the inception phase to account for actual Grade 2–3 enrollment or attendance, provided that:

- The total sample size remains consistent with ToR assumptions, and
- Any refinements are documented and approved by Counterpart.

18. **Sampling and comparison schools:** Can the proposed sampling framework be refined during inception if required by field constraints?

CI - Yes. The sampling framework may be refined during inception to address field constraints (e.g., security, access, enrollment variability), subject to Counterpart approval and without altering the overall evaluation design.

19. Could you also confirm that comparison schools are intended for descriptive benchmarking and contextual interpretation only?

CI - Confirmed. Comparison schools are included for descriptive benchmarking and contextual interpretation only and will not be used for causal attribution or impact estimation.

20. **Data collection modalities:** The TOR notes that data will be collected electronically wherever feasible. Could you please confirm whether Counterpart is able to provide tablets or other data collection devices for the baseline, or whether the evaluation team should plan to supply and cost these directly?

CI - The evaluation team should plan to supply and budget for data collection devices. Counterpart may explore in-kind support if feasible, **but availability is not guaranteed and should not be assumed in proposals.**

21. **Timeline and validation:** Could you please confirm whether a validation workshop forms part of the expected baseline evaluation deliverables and should therefore be included in the proposed scope, timeline, and budget?

CI - Yes. A baseline validation and dissemination workshop is expected and should be included in the proposed scope, timeline, and budget.

22. **Use of AI-supported tools:** Is Counterpart open to the responsible use of AI-supported tools for qualitative analysis, under full human oversight and appropriate data-protection safeguards?

CI - Yes. Counterpart is open to responsible use of AI-supported tools (e.g., for qualitative coding or pattern detection), provided there is:

- Full human oversight.
- No automated decision-making.
- Compliance with data protection and confidentiality requirements.

23. Page 3, A. Technical Proposal. Is Counterpart open to receiving PDF versions of Technical Proposals, instead of Microsoft Word?

CI - Yes. PDF submissions are acceptable in lieu of Microsoft Word, unless otherwise specified.

24. Page 3, A. Technical Proposal. The TOR states that the Technical Proposal, subject to the 15-page limit, “must include CVs for... the Lead Evaluator and Associate Evaluator”
- Can Counterpart please confirm that the 15 page-limit only refers to the required Proposed methodology and Evaluation Structure and Gantt Chart, and that CVs for Key Personnel can be provided as annexes outside of the 15-page limit?

CI - Confirmed. The 15-page limit applies only to the Technical Proposal narrative.

- CVs for the Lead and Associate Evaluators may be submitted as annexes, outside the page limit.
- CVs for additional team members may also be included as annexes.

25. Page 4, A. References. Given the dismantling of USAID in 2025, can bidders submit former USAID staff members as references (using their now personal contact information) for cancelled USAID projects within the last five years?

CI - Yes. Bidders may submit former USAID staff as references for relevant projects within the last five years, using current personal or professional contact details.

26. Page 20, 4. Assignment Duration and Timeline. The TOR timeline gives four (4) business days between contract award and delivery of finalized data instruments and a workplan outline which, according to table 6, also includes a full design report. Is Counterpart flexible with this schedule, as it may not be feasible?

CI - Yes. Counterpart acknowledges that four business days may be tight. Bidders may propose a slightly extended but justified timeline in their technical proposal.

27. Page 20, 4. Assignment Duration and Timeline. Given the timeline listed in Table 6, could Counterpart please clarify the following details so bidders can assess the appropriate level of effort per task?
- The table requests “Finalized data collection tools and evaluation schedule” within four (4) businesses days of contract signing. Please clarify “finalized.” Does this include translation? Review by Counterpart and/or other stakeholders?
 - Are there existing data collection guidelines and definitions for each of the indicators in the performance table?
 - Are there documents, and draft instruments that have already been drafted?
 - Is the EGRA tool already calibrated and available off shelf for application in Benin?
 - Are reading assessments only required in French?

CI -

- “Finalized” means drafted, piloted, and technically ready, not fully translated and approved.
- Translation, Counterpart review, and stakeholder validation occur after this milestone.
- Indicator definitions exist in the Performance Indicator Table/PMP.
- Some draft instruments may exist and will be shared post-award.
- EGRA is not off-the-shelf; adaptation and calibration are required.

- Reading assessments are primarily in French, with permitted local language adaptations.

28. Page 20, 5. Staff Structure. To ensure maximal cost effectiveness, would Counterpart consider an approach where the Team Lead is in country for part of the data collection and the Associate Team Lead is in country for the full duration of data collection?

CI - Yes. Counterpart is open to cost-efficient staffing models, including partial in-country presence of the Team Lead, provided technical oversight and quality assurance are maintained.

29. Page 21, 6. Qualifications. Can Counterpart confirm that the qualifications listed on page 21 requirements for the team as a whole (aside of the degree requirements and minimum years of experience)? For example, must the Team Lead have experience working in Benin or would extensive experience working in Francophone West Africa be sufficient for the Team Lead?

CI - Confirmed. Except for degree and minimum experience requirements, qualifications apply to the team as a whole. Extensive experience in Francophone West Africa is acceptable in lieu of Benin-specific experience.

30. Can you confirm whether schools without any school feeding are expected to be included in baseline data collection for descriptive or contextual purposes, or whether they are referenced solely as part of the stratification frame and not sampled at all?

CI - Schools without school feeding may be referenced in the sampling frame, but are not required to be sampled, unless specifically included for descriptive benchmarking and approved during inception.

31. Can you clarify whether the EGRA instrument for the baseline needs to strictly replicate the existing national assessment tool in French, or whether evaluators may adapt validated EGRA modules (with appropriate piloting) for descriptive baseline use? Additionally, could you confirm in which language(s) EGRA should be administered - exclusively in French, or allowing bilingual/local language administration where appropriate?

CI - The EGRA does not need to strictly replicate the national assessment tool. Evaluators may adapt validated EGRA modules, with piloting and documentation. Administration may be French-only or bilingual, as appropriate.

32. The ToR specifies an ICC of 0.50 and 80% power to justify a fixed sample of 3,360 students and indicates this design will be maintained across baseline, midterm, and final for comparability. Can you confirm whether Counterpart considers these ICC and power assumptions final and adopted, or whether they are expected to be jointly validated (without redesign) during the inception phase?

CI - The ICC (0.50) and power assumptions are planning parameters. They are expected to be validated (not redesigned) during inception and documented in the Sampling Design Memo.

33. While the ToR requires final deliverables in both English and French, can you clarify expectations for language use during earlier stages? Do data collection tools and working drafts (e.g., workplan, analysis outputs, draft report) need to be prepared in both French and English, or with English draft versions provided as needed (and all final deliverables submitted in both languages)?

CI - a) Data collection tools and field manuals: French + local languages, b) Working drafts: English preferred (French optional during drafting), c) Final deliverables: English and French required.

34. What monitoring and tracking systems does the project currently use that will be used to help manage the evaluation data? (pg. 10)

CI - The project uses DevResults and Kobo toolbox as its primary performance monitoring system, supported by internal Activity and Output Monitoring tools. These systems will support evaluation data management and reporting alignment.

35. Can the EGRA tool and the Student Survey tool be used to gather data from the same students? In other words, could the Student Survey tool be used for a smaller sample of the EGRA students or is the evaluation team expected to collect this from another sample of students?

CI - Yes. The Student Survey may be administered to a subsample of EGRA students, provided respondent burden is managed and sampling is documented. A separate student sample is not required unless methodologically justified.

36. To confirm, would the two CVs that are asked for count towards the 15 page limit for the Technical Proposal? Is it possible to include the CVs of other team members as well?

CI - Confirmed again: CVs do not count toward the 15-page limit, and CVs for additional team members may be included as annexes.

37. How many schools does Counterpart anticipate will be included for classroom literacy observations?

CI - The number of classroom observations will be defined during inception, typically covering a subsample of treatment schools sufficient to capture variation across communes and grades.

38. For bilingual deliverables, does Counterpart expect full professional translation of all annexes and technical appendices, or only the core narrative sections of the reports?

CI - Full professional translation is required for core narrative sections. Annexes and technical appendices may be summarized or selectively translated unless otherwise requested.

39. Looking ahead to the midterm, does Counterpart anticipate issuing separate RFPs at each evaluation milestone, or is there an intention to engage a firm to partner across the multiple evaluations?

CI- Counterpart may issue separate RFPs for midterm and final evaluations. There is no guaranteed multi-evaluation award, though strong performance may be considered in future procurements.