



**Government of Sierra Leone
Ministry of Trade and Industry**

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (EOI) For
CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SIERRA LEONE'S AfCFTA STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR
WOMEN AND YOUTH

PROCUREMENT NUMBER: MTI/OSPS/EOI/SLASFWY/NCB/001/2026

Date of first publication: 16th September, 2026.

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Sierra Leone ratified the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and has advanced its implementation readiness through the National AfCFTA Implementation Strategy, the National Trade Strategy 2024–2030, and participation in the Guided Trade Initiative. As the country deepens its integration into continental and regional value chains, ensuring that women and youth are not left behind has become a central pillar of Sierra Leone's trade policy agenda.

Women and youth constitute the majority of Sierra Leone's population and workforce, and dominate informal cross-border trade, agro-processing, artisanal production, and micro-enterprise activity along key corridors with Guinea and Liberia within the Mano River Union. However, they continue to face disproportionate barriers to formal trade participation, including limited access to trade finance, low awareness of rules of origin and AfCFTA procedures, weak market linkages, gaps in digital and entrepreneurial skills, and exposure to harassment and administrative bottlenecks at border posts.

At the continental level, the African Union Assembly adopted the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade in February 2024 as a binding subsidiary instrument of the AfCFTA Agreement, obliging State Parties to adopt affirmative measures, remove trade-related barriers, and mainstream the interests of women and youth

traders into national implementation frameworks. Sierra Leone, as a State Party committed to inclusive trade-led growth, requires a dedicated national strategy to operationalise this Protocol domestically and to align it with existing gender and enterprise-development legislation, notably the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 and the Local Content Agency Act 2016, alongside the national MSME policy and institutional framework administered under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. This also aligns with Strategic Objective 2 of the ECOWAS Trade and Gender Action Plan (2024 – 2030) to promote gender sensitive trade policy development and implementation as well as Objective 5 of the ECOWAS AfCFTA Implementation Plan to make the AfCFTA an opportunity for women's economic empowerment and youth.

It is against this background that the Ministry of Trade and Industry with technical and financial support from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), seeks to engage a qualified consultant or consulting firm to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based and implementable AfCFTA Strategy Framework for Women and Youth for Sierra Leone.

2. RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION

A dedicated strategy framework is required for the following reasons:

- Sierra Leone currently lacks a single, coordinated national framework that translates the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade into actionable, sequenced, and resourced national interventions.
- Existing legal instruments relevant to women's economic empowerment and enterprise development operate in separate institutional silos; a strategy framework will harmonise their application to trade policy and AfCFTA implementation.
- Development partners and regional bodies, including the AfCFTA Secretariat, AfDB, UNECA, UNCTAD, ITC and UN Women, increasingly condition technical and financial support for inclusive trade programming on the existence of a credible national strategy and results framework.

- A costed, time-bound strategy will strengthen Sierra Leone's ability to mobilise resources, track results, and report on its Protocol implementation obligations to the AfCFTA Secretariat and African Union.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSIGNMENT

3.1 Overall Objective

To develop a comprehensive, evidence-based AfCFTA Strategy Framework for Women and Youth that enables Sierra Leone to operationalise the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade in a manner that is legally coherent with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022, the Local Content and MSME legal and policy framework, and the ECOWAS Trade and Gender Action Plan to position women- and youth-led enterprises to benefit from continental and regional market access.

3.2 Specific Objectives

1. Assess the current status of constraints, and opportunities facing women and youth traders and MSMEs in Sierra Leone in relation to AfCFTA implementation, including a review of border, finance, skills, market access, and regulatory barriers.
2. Assess and define opportunities for women- and youth-led traders to leverage regional and continental market integration, including access to ECOWAS and AfCFTA markets, regional value chains, market linkages, and utilisation of regional and continental trade instruments.
3. Map and analyse the alignment, gaps, and synergies between the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022, the Local Content Agency Act 2016, and the national MSME policy and institutional framework.
4. Define strategic pillars, outcomes, and priority interventions for women- and youth-inclusive AfCFTA implementation, covering trade facilitation, access to

finance, capacity building, value addition, digital trade, and protection from gender-based violence and harassment in trade.

5. Develop an institutional coordination and governance mechanism for implementation, clarifying roles of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Sierra Leone Local Content Agency, Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, and relevant development partners.
6. Produce a costed results framework and implementation roadmap (2026–2030) with indicators aligned to the National Trade Strategy 2024–2030 and AfCFTA Protocol reporting obligations.
7. Design a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system, including baseline indicators for women- and youth-led trade participation.
8. Facilitate validation of the draft strategy through structured consultations with government, private sector, women and youth trader associations, civil society, and development partners.

4. LEGAL AND POLICY ALIGNMENT

The Strategy Framework shall be developed in demonstrable alignment with the ECOWAS and AfCFTA Implementation Strategy, and the consultant shall produce an explicit alignment matrix as part of the deliverables:

4.1 AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade (2024)

As a binding subsidiary instrument of the AfCFTA Agreement, the Protocol commits State Parties to affirmative action, elimination of discriminatory barriers, enhanced access to finance and capacity building, formalisation of informal trade, and protection from harassment for women and youth traders. The strategy must translate these commitments into nationally owned, sequenced actions.

4.2 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 (GEWE Act)

The GEWE Act establishes minimum representation quotas in public and private institutions, mandates equal pay and access to finance and training, and requires

Gender Units across Ministries, Departments and Agencies. The strategy shall ensure that trade-specific interventions reinforce, rather than duplicate, these statutory obligations, and shall engage the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs as a co-owner of implementation.

4.3 Local Content Agency Act 2016 and the National MSME Policy Framework

The Local Content Agency Act 2016 establishes the Sierra Leone Local Content Agency and the Local Content Development Fund to promote Sierra Leonean ownership, participation, and value capture across productive sectors. The strategy shall identify concrete entry points through which women- and youth-owned MSMEs can access local content certification, set-asides, and the Local Content Development Fund, and shall align with the mandate and programming of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Where the consultant identifies gaps, ambiguities, or inconsistencies between these instruments as they apply to trade, the strategy shall include specific, actionable recommendations for legal or policy harmonisation, for consideration by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Office of the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice.

5. SCOPE OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

The assignment shall be delivered through the following phased methodology:

Phase 1: Inception (Week 1)

- Desk review of the AfCFTA Agreement and Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, relevant ECOWAS trade and gender instruments, the National Trade Strategy 2024–2030, GEWE Act, Local Content Agency Act, MSME policy documents, and relevant World Bank, AfDB, IMF, WTO, UNCTAD and UN Women reports.
- Development and submission of an Inception Report, including a refined methodology, stakeholder map, consultation plan, and detailed work plan.

Phase 2: Diagnostic and Situational Analysis (Weeks 2–3)

- Stakeholder consultations with women and youth trader associations, MSME cooperatives, border agencies, financial institutions, and relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies.
- Assessment of opportunities and barriers for women and youth to participate in regional and continental markets, including cross-border trade, regional value chains, and market linkages.
- Identification of priority regional value chains and market opportunities in which women- and youth-led enterprises could participate, including opportunities for value addition and market linkages.
- Field engagement at priority border posts and trade corridors, including with the Mano River Union member states, to assess practical trading conditions for women and youth.
- Preparation of a Situational Analysis and Gap Assessment Report.

Phase 3: Strategy Formulation (Weeks 4–5)

- Drafting of strategic pillars, outcomes, targets, and priority interventions.
- Development of the institutional coordination mechanism and costed implementation roadmap.
- Design of the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework and baseline indicators.
- Submission of a Draft Strategy Framework for internal Ministry review.

Phase 4: Validation and Finalization (Weeks 5–6)

- Facilitation of a multi-stakeholder validation workshop.
- Incorporation of feedback and submission of the Final AfCFTA Strategy Framework for Women and Youth, together with an Executive Summary Brief for ministerial and Cabinet-level use.

6. KEY DELIVERABLES

No.	Deliverable	Timeline
1	Inception Report with methodology, work plan and stakeholder map	End of Week 1
2	Situational Analysis and Legal/Policy Gap Assessment Report	End of Week 2
3	Draft AfCFTA Strategy Framework for Women and Youth	End of Week 3
4	Validation Workshop Report	Week 5
5	Final Strategy Framework, Costed Implementation Roadmap, MEL Framework and Executive Summary Brief	End of Week 6

7. CONSULTANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERTISE

The Ministry seeks a Lead Consultant (individual or firm) with the following minimum qualifications:

- Advanced degree (Master's or higher) in International Trade, Economics, Development Studies, Law, Gender Studies, or a closely related field.
- Minimum of ten (10) years of professional experience in international trade policy, with demonstrated familiarity with the AfCFTA Agreement and its Protocols.
- Proven track record of developing national trade, gender, or MSME strategies for a government, regional economic community, or the African Union system.

- Strong working knowledge of Sierra Leone's or a comparable West African trade and regulatory environment, including local content and MSME frameworks.
- Demonstrated expertise in gender-responsive trade policy and youth economic inclusion.
- Excellent facilitation, stakeholder engagement, and report-writing skills in English.
- Prior experience working with the AfCFTA Secretariat, AfDB, ECOWAS, UNECA, UNCTAD, ITC, UN Women, or the Mano River Union Secretariat is an added advantage.

8. REPORTING AND SUPERVISION ARRANGEMENTS

The Consultant will report to the Ministry of Trade and Industry designated focal point, in collaboration with the assigned UNDP and ECOWAS focal point and the Technical oversight will be provided by the Chief Director and Professional Head of the Ministry of Trade and Industry jointly with the ECOWAS Commission Directorate of Trade and UNDP. A Technical Reference Group comprising representatives of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Sierra Leone Local Content Agency, and Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce and Industry shall review all deliverable prior to their approval by the technical oversight team.

9. DURATION AND PAYMENT SCHEDULE

The assignment shall be completed within six (6) weeks of contract signature. Payment shall be made in tranches linked to the achievement and formal acceptance of deliverables, as follows:

- 20% upon submission and approval of the Inception Report.
- 25% upon submission and approval of the Situational Analysis and Gap Assessment Report.
- 25% upon submission and approval of the Draft Strategy Framework.

- 30% upon submission and approval of the Final Strategy Framework, Roadmap, MEL Framework and Executive Summary Brief.

10. EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

Criterion	Weight
Relevant qualifications and technical expertise in AfCFTA and trade policy	25%
Demonstrated experience in gender-responsive and youth-inclusive trade strategy development	25%
Quality, clarity and feasibility of proposed methodology and work plan	20%
Familiarity with Sierra Leone's legal, institutional and MSME environment	15%
Financial proposal and value for money	15%

11. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Interested consultants and firms should submit the following to the Ministry of Trade and Industry by the deadline specified in the accompanying request for expressions of interest:

- Technical proposal, including understanding of the assignment, proposed methodology, and work plan.
- Curriculum vitae(e) of the Lead Consultant and any proposed team members.
- At least two references and samples of previous, comparable assignments.
- Financial proposal, inclusive of all professional fees and reimbursable expenses.
 - A Copy of Valid Business licence
 - A copy of NRA Tax Clearance certificate
 - A Copy of Valid NASSIT Clearance

Interested Service provider may obtain detail information from the Acting Director Foreign Trade and Regional Integration, Ministry of Trade and Industry 6th floor Youyi Building Freetown e-mail....marktambanyuma2015@gmail.com starting 16th September, 2026 between 10:00 am to 4:00 pm Mondays to Fridays.

The seal EOI must be delivered to the address below on or before 29th September, 2026

Note:

Late EOIs will be rejected and returned unopened.

The Procurement Department
Ministry of Trade and Industry
6th floor Youyi Building Freetown
Sierra Leone.
Mob.079-031-405
Email: Umarrdeen4956@gmail.com