

Call for Expression of Interest (EOI): Join the AU-EU IRC Functional Working Groups on FNSSA

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Issued by: IRC Secretariat | International Research Consortium (IRC) on FNSSA

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Background

The International Research Consortium (IRC) on Food, Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA) is a bi-continental, AU–EU co-owned platform under the HLPD on STI. It operationalizes the FNSSA 2027–2036 Roadmap through six interdependent Functional Working Groups (FWGs) that act as a “network of networks,” co-led by African and European institutions and anchored by regional implementing partners. The FWGs are the IRC’s operational engine to translate priorities into measurable outcomes, investment alignment, and policy uptake.

The IRC Functional Working Groups (see annex 1 for concise ToRs)

1. Research – knowledge generation and scientific advancement
 2. Education – human capital development and skills transfer
 3. Advisory Services – knowledge translation and community engagement
 4. Policy Think Tank – evidence-informed policy support and foresight
 5. Agrofood Enterprises (Industry) – innovation uptake, commercialization, SME growth
 6. Funding – resource mobilization and financial sustainability
- Cross-cutting enablers (engaged across all FWGs): Communication; Gender & Youth; Funders’ Engagement.

Objective of the Call

This EoI invites eligible networks to join one or more FWGs to co-design and deliver collaborative AU–EU R&I actions, shape joint agendas (JWPs), and represent stakeholder perspectives in Africa–Europe FNSSA dialogue and implementation.

Who Can Apply

Eligible entities are “networks of actors” across the AU–EU R&I space that are signatories to the AU–EU IRC on FNSSA or part of the CEA-FIRST/IRC community, including:

- Thematic networks, clusters of projects, clusters of interest at national, regional, continental, bi-continental and global levels
- Public/private research organizations, universities, research infrastructures, innovation hubs
- Government agencies and regional institutions (incl. RECs)
- Civil society organizations, NGOs, farmer and producer associations
- Private sector actors and agri-business networks (incl. SME alliances)
- Youth and women-led organizations and enterprises
- Donor/development partners and think tanks

Applicants must show clear interest and/or active involvement in FNSSA-related work and alignment with IRC objectives and principles (co-ownership, transparency, inclusivity, decentralization, adaptive learning).

Thematic Focus (illustrative clustering for FWG work planning)

- Sustainable intensification & agroecology; climate adaptation/mitigation; biodiversity & ecosystems
- Food systems for nutrition & health; markets and trade
- Digitalization, innovation & emerging technologies
- Policy, governance & donor coordination
- Cross-cutting: youth, gender, inclusion, capacity development
- Regional/geographic clusters (e.g. EU, West Africa, North Africa, Horn of Africa,)

Roles and Expectations of FWG Members

Members are expected to:

- Co-develop and deliver the annual Joint Work Programme (JWP) for their FWG
- Participate in regular coordination meetings (\geq quarterly) and inter-FWG learning
- Contribute to collaborative research, policy, enterprise and capacity-building activities
- Share institutional knowledge, tools, data, platforms and networks
- Report progress through the IRC MEL system (quarterly snapshots; annual synthesis)
- Support stakeholder outreach (regional anchoring, dialogues, communities of practice)

Governance notes: FWGs operate under AU–EU co-leadership (with possible rotation every two years). Regional Anchor Institutions support decentralized delivery and alignment with regional / national frameworks (this will work with designated national focal points in AU-EU member states).

What Members Gain

- Influence AU–EU FNSSA agendas and pipelines (science, policy, investment)
- Access to IRC digital infrastructure (e.g., knowledge platforms) and structured collaboration spaces
- Opportunities for joint proposals, pilots, scaling pathways and policy dialogues
- Eligibility for performance-based incentives via the IRC Performance Fund (\approx 10–15%)
- Visibility across AU–EU communities and international fora (events, briefs, showcases)
- Co-authorship of knowledge products (policy/foresight briefs, learning notes, evidence syntheses)

IRC Membership & Sustainability

- Membership fees tiered by institutional capacity: €200–€1,000 per year (with potential waivers for under-represented or low-income institutions).
- Fees and co-funding feed into the IRC’s hybrid financing model and the Performance Fund.
- Compliance with IRC financial accountability and MEL standards applies to all members.

Submission Package

Please submit one PDF (max 10 pages + annexes) containing:

1. EoI (to include)
 - Area(s) of interest and expected role(s) in the FWG
 - Relevant expertise, assets (e.g., datasets, platforms), and partnerships
 - Proposed contributions to JWP delivery, anchoring, MEL and communications actions to FWG (refer to [ToR](#))
2. Institutional profile (or CVs for focal points)

Submission email: ifrempong@faraafrica.org; antti.autio@uef.fi and CC:
mowusu@faraafrica.org

Subject line: EoI – IRC FWGs – <Your Network/Institution Name>

Selection Process

- **Review:** IRC Secretariat with endorsement by the AU-EU HLPD Working Group on FNSSA
- **Criteria:** thematic relevance/expertise; AU–EU balance; regional anchoring; inclusivity (commitment to equity targets for gender and youth); collaboration track record; MEL readiness; contribution potential to JWP and scaling pathways

Compliance & MEL

Selected members commit to:

- Use of IRC MEL dashboards and quarterly reporting templates
- Participation in annual reflection reviews and inter-FWG learning circles
- Adherence to financial and ethical compliance; risk reporting via the IRC risk dashboard

Enquiries

For clarifications on scope, eligibility, or the EoI,
contact the IRC Secretariat at the emails below

[ifrempong@faraafrica.org; antti.autio@uef.fi and CC: mowusu@faraafrica.org]

Annex 1: Terms of Reference (ToR) for each IRC Functional Working Group (FWG)

These FWG ToRs are consistent with the *IRC Working Groups Strategy & Implementation Plan (Revised Oct 2025)*.

These ToRs for each FWG sheet follow the following structure:

- Mandate / Focus Area
- Example Activities
- Coordination Cadence (how often and with whom it meets)
- Expected Deliverables (Annual/Periodic)
- Cross-cutting Links & Enablers

FWG 1: Research – Knowledge Generation and Scientific Advancement

Mandate:

Coordinate and align AU–EU research agendas to generate new scientific knowledge and innovations supporting FNSSA priorities. Strengthen synergies among projects, research infrastructures, and thematic clusters.

Example of Activities:

- Map existing AU–EU FNSSA research programs and identify convergence areas.
- Co-design and deliver **Joint Work Programmes (JWPs)** with other FWGs.
- Develop thematic research clusters (e.g., agroecology, climate resilience, food systems).
- Support open data, joint publications, and technology foresight.
- Interface with the **Policy FWG** to translate research outputs into policy options.

Coordination Cadence:

- **Quarterly virtual meetings**; one **annual scientific retreat** (hybrid).
- **Co-leads:** 1 African & 1 European research institution.
- Collaboration via IRC digital workspace and thematic CoPs.

Expected Deliverables:

- Annual AU–EU FNSSA Research Landscape Report.
- 3–5 collaborative research cluster concept notes / proposals per year.
- Database of research assets and experts.

Cross-cutting Links: Education FWG (skills), Policy FWG (evidence uptake), Funding FWG (joint calls).

FWG 2: Education – Human Capital Development and Skills Transfer

Mandate:

Foster human-capital development through joint training, curriculum alignment, and mobility schemes that strengthen FNSSA competencies.

Example of Activities:

- Develop an **AU–EU FNSSA Academy** concept linking universities, TVETs, and centers of excellence.
- Map FNSSA training gaps and capacity-building opportunities.
- Support researcher mobility, internships, and mentorship programs.
- Collaborate with enterprises on innovation and entrepreneurship training.
- Mainstream gender and youth in all skills initiatives.

Coordination Cadence:

- Bi-monthly coordination calls with regional anchor universities.
- Annual AU–EU Capacity-Building Forum (rotating host region).

Expected Deliverables:

- Annual FNSSA Capacity & Skills Inventory.
- Repository of FNSSA curricula and training materials.
- AU–EU Fellowship/Mobility Framework document.

Cross-cutting Links: Research FWG (graduate research), Agrofood FWG (entrepreneurship), Advisory FWG (extension curricula).

FWG 3: Advisory Services – Knowledge Translation and Community Engagement

Mandate:

Strengthen mechanisms for demand-driven knowledge brokerage, extension, and community innovation engagement across Africa and Europe.

Example Activities:

- Establish a **FNSSA Knowledge Brokerage Platform** for farmer-researcher exchange.
- Facilitate multi-actor innovation platforms (MAIPs) at regional level.
- Develop tools for translating research outputs into extension packages.
- Promote participatory action research and demonstration hubs.
- Coordinate with policy actors to ensure bottom-up feedback.

Coordination Cadence:

- **Quarterly online meetings** with **bi-annual regional stakeholder dialogues**.
- Supported by regional anchors (RECs, farmer organizations).

Expected Deliverables:

- Two regional innovation platform reports per year.
- Knowledge translation toolkit / repository.
- Annual Stakeholder Engagement Report.

Cross-cutting Links: Agrofood (uptake), Policy (evidence feedback), Education (training of extensionists).

FWG 4: Policy Think Tank – Evidence-Informed Policy Support and Foresight

Mandate:

Provide a structured mechanism for policy foresight, evidence synthesis, and strategic dialogue between AU–EU stakeholders on FNSSA priorities.

Example of Activities:

- Produce policy briefs and foresight papers on emerging FNSSA issues.
- Support AU–EU **HLPD Working Group on FNSSA** with evidence inputs.
- Coordinate annual **FNSSA Policy Dialogue Series**.
- Develop an **AU–EU FNSSA Observatory** dashboard in partnership with MEL team.
- Promote policy coherence and donor alignment.

Coordination Cadence:

- **Quarterly policy labs; annual foresight conference.**
- Close coordination with IRC Council and AU–EU HLPD Secretariat.

Expected Deliverables:

- 3–5 policy/foresight briefs per year.
- Annual FNSSA Policy Landscape Review.
- Regional policy dialogue reports and recommendations.

Cross-cutting Links: All FWGs (for evidence inputs); Funding FWG (for alignment).

FWG 5: Agrofood Enterprises – Innovation Uptake, Commercialization & SME Development

Mandate:

Bridge R&I outputs with market actors to accelerate innovation adoption, entrepreneurship, and inclusive value-chain development.

Example of Activities:

- Identify scalable innovations and support business incubation.
- Facilitate AU–EU agri-SME networking events and matchmaking.
- Design innovation-to-market pipelines with research and advisory FWGs.
- Promote digital agriculture and climate-smart technologies.
- Engage investors and development finance institutions.

Coordination Cadence:

- **Quarterly coordination meetings; annual AU–EU Agro-Innovation Fair.**
- Co-lead by African agribusiness hub & European innovation cluster.

Expected Deliverables:

- Innovation Pipeline Database and Success Stories Catalogue.
- 2–3 joint AU–EU enterprise partnerships launched annually.
- Annual Innovation Uptake & SME Impact Report.

Cross-cutting Links: Funding FWG (finance access), Advisory FWG (user feedback), Education FWG (entrepreneurship training).

FWG 6: Funding – Resource Mobilization and Financial Sustainability

Mandate:

Coordinate joint resource-mobilization, financing instruments, and sustainability mechanisms to ensure long-term operation of the IRC and its FWGs.

Example Activities:

- Develop an **IRC Hybrid Financing Model** (membership fees, grants, performance fund).
- Map AU–EU and international funding opportunities.
- Facilitate joint AU–EU funding calls and co-funding agreements.
- Track investment flows and produce FNSSA financial dashboards.
- Support business-case development for anchor institutions and networks.

Coordination Cadence:

- **Quarterly coordination meetings** with finance focal points from each FWG.
- **Annual Donor and Investors Roundtable.**

Expected Deliverables:

- IRC Annual Financing Plan & Funders Directory.
- 1–2 joint AU–EU co-funding calls per year.
- Annual IRC Financial Sustainability Report.

Cross-cutting Links: All FWGs (funding alignment), Policy FWG (donor coordination).

General Notes for All FWGs

- **Governance:** Each FWG is co-led by one African and one European institution, supported by 1–2 regional Anchor Institutions.
- **Meetings:** At least **four virtual meetings per year** plus one in-person or hybrid annual coordination session.
- **Reporting:** FWGs submit quarterly progress notes and an annual synthesis to the IRC Secretariat (MEL dashboard).
- **Membership Tenure:** Two years, renewable based on performance.
- **Cross-Cutting Enablers:** Communication, Gender & Youth, and Funders' Engagement are integrated across all FWGs.