CONCEPT NOTE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SERVICES OF EXTERNAL CONTANT(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON CHALLENGING HEIGNTS’ “BLUEGREEN” PROJECT.

Introduction

Challenging Heights is an NGO founded 18 years ago to protect the rights of children, youth and women as well as for community development. Over the years, the organization has supported hundreds of children, women and youth in 12 out of the 16 regions of Ghana. The organization has also mounted several local and national interventions and supported international-level advocacies on several issues. It has also registered significant changes in systems and policies and has impacted the lives of the communities it serves. Challenging Heights has, over the years, focused on providing underserved individuals, communities and livelihoods with support, including educational support, recovery and psychosocial support.

The BlueGreen Project, which has been experimented with since 2018, is an extension of addressing poverty, vulnerability, and community development by addressing the issues of deforestation, sea pollution and environmental destruction in selected Districts in Ghana.

The BlueGreen project looks at the protection, prevention and restoration of both water (Blue) and land environment (Green) by meaningfully probing and analyzing the key issues, strategizing and engaging all stakeholders to implement interventions that will mitigate the impact of challenges in these sectors.

Protection of Aquatic Ecosystem (The Blue Project)

Fishing communities in the Coastal towns of the Central Region of Ghana are characterized by poor sanitation caused by illegal fishing, dumping of refuse, especially e-waste, into the sea and open defecation, among others. These pose a considerable threat to the fishing industry, fishing communities and the blue economy. This results in a reduction in catch, diseases and poverty to mention a few.

Since fishing is one of the main occupations of the indigenes of coastal districts such as Elmina, Gomoa Districts, Awutu as well as Effutu Municipalities, a threat to the fishing sector is a threat to the livelihoods of the people whose lives depend on the sector. This directly heightens the poverty level in the area and impacts the issue of child labour, human trafficking, malnutrition, and school dropouts in those areas.
Over the years, Challenging Heights has initiated several interventions to tackle the issue of poor sanitation, the protection of the aqua ecosystem and the promotion of best fishing practices.

Through our Festival for Development (F4D) initiative, we have collaborated with traditional authorities to create the Woarabeba Fishing Festival, which is purposed to mobilize the fishing communities in Effutu to tackle the issues affecting the aquatic ecosystem in the area.

To consolidate our gains, Challenging Heights would like to gather data to thoroughly know and understand the causes, validate the key issues, and evaluate the extent of the problem in the affected communities to design strategic interventions to tackle the problem.

**Forest Conservation (Green Project)**

After experimenting with several festivals in the Central region, Challenging Heights recognizes the importance of and how to use festivals as a tool for development; hence our interest in festivals celebrated within our operational areas. The people of Winneba have celebrated the Aboakyer Festival annually for over a century. The festival provides them with spiritual and historical connections with their ancestors. In the last few decades, the festival has also become a source of income for the Effutu municipality by opening the town for business and boosting local businesses.

The festival is celebrated with the hunt of a live deer once each year in a designated forest. Due to this, the forest in which that one deer is hunted is strictly preserved and conserved to preserve the animals and its ecosystem, as it is believed that the ancestors constructed the ecosystem of that forest and that the preservation of the sanctity of the Aboakyer Hunting Forest is tied to the spirit of the festival. In other words, the identity of the people of Winneba is linked to the forest, and the preservation of the Aboakyer Festival is tied to the conservation of the Aboakyer Hunting Forest. The success of the Aboakyer festival is seen in the successful catch of a live deer. The absence of a catch of a live deer connotes bad premonitions and renders the festival redundant. Against this premise, the Aboakyer festival can be said to be the major reason why the Hunting Forest has been preserved to date.

In recent times, the Aboakyer Hunting Forest, which is part of the Winneba Ramsar site, has come under severe attacks from human activities such as unauthorized hunting, wanton bush burning, encroachment, illegal felling of trees, cattle ranching/grazing and boundary disputes. The stretch of the lagoon, which lies between the forests, is being polluted, thereby destroying life underwater and affecting the forest's sanctity and ecosystem. There have been instances in the recent past where no catch was made during the Aboakyer festival. If immediate interventions are not taken to restore and conserve the Hunting Forest, the Aboakyer festival stands a high
chance of being extinct, thereby depriving the Effutu people of their identity, spirituality, sense of being, livelihood, as well as some economic benefits.

Since 2016, Challenging Heights and its media arm, NYCE FM, have been fully involved in the promotion of the festival in our quest to:

1. Boost the economic benefits of the festival by promoting local businesses to tackle the issue of poverty in the Effutu Municipality.
2. Deepen the sense of attachment of the Effutu people to the festival and, in a way, renew their commitment towards the conservation of Hunting Forest.
3. Promote tourism and attract investment to the festival to boost the local economy.

To augment our efforts in conserving the Aboakyer Hunting Forest, Challenging Heights would like to know the extent of the problem and its implication for the people of Effutu to enable us to design preventive, curative, and mitigating strategies needed to address the issue.

**Environmental Destruction Caused by Mining**

Mining, especially illegal mining, is a national concern affecting the environment and livelihoods. Forests are being destroyed. Water bodies are being polluted. Farmlands are being destroyed. Mining communities are losing their livelihoods, resulting in socio-economic issues such as poverty, diseases, child labour, forced/child prostitution, and irregular migration. With specific districts in mind, Challenging Heights would like to probe into the issues to know the extent of the problem and understand the associated implications of mining activities on communities. Through this inquiry, we hope to be well-informed and better placed to design strategic interventions to mitigate the challenges posed by legal mining activities.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE CONSULTANT(S)**

Challenging Heights is seeking to recruit consultants experienced in conducting research and producing research reports for publication and fundraising to submit applications to perform the assignment highlighted in the concept note. Specifically, Consultants should submit separate applications for the following:

**Lot 1:** Research on the aquatic ecosystem management and protection, forest conservation and its linkages to the sustainability of the Aboakyer Festival of the people of Winneba and its environs.
Lot 2: Research on mining-related activities targeting the most affected and vulnerable people/communities --- focusing on identifying the impact of mining on children, women, and communities in general.

Scope of Work

For each of the lots, the consultant(s) is expected to:

1. Research to ascertain the extent of the challenges described in the concept note;
2. Review literature to identify areas with peculiar challenges relevant to each Lot of the project.
3. Organise consultative forums to harvest and share knowledge on the BlueGreen project concept
4. produce a research report;
5. propose strategies based on the research, design interventions to tackle the challenges and;
6. Establish the relevance of the BlueGreen concept to child labour and trafficking and other child protection concerns
7. Guide in writing a proposal to seek funds for the BlueGreen Project.

Methodology

The consultant is expected to use a combination of consultative and participatory processes in conducting the research. This should include but not be limited to the use of participatory rural appraisal methods such as key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The consultant is expected to use innovative knowledge-harvesting approaches in conducting the research. A SWOT analysis of the BlueGreen project concept is strongly recommended. The consultant will develop the key data collection tools for engaging stakeholders, identify the key data collection points of the research, and share them with Challenging Heights, whose comments and suggestions will be incorporated into the finalized tools.
Expected Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected for each Lot of the project.

1. An inception report includes a preliminary literature review, draft engagement tools for the key stakeholders, a draft list of proposed stakeholders and a sampling matrix of communities and or districts.
2. Produce draft and final research reports.
3. Conduct validation of the research report with relevant stakeholders
4. Share the outcome of the research with relevant stakeholders
5. Develop a strategic plan to address the outcomes/recommendations of the study.

Timelines

The research for both lots will be conducted concurrently, between July and October 2023.

Qualification of the Consultant

The consultants/consulting team should demonstrate extensive experience and vast exposure to research relevant to the BlueGreen project as described in the concept note. In addition, the consultant/consulting team should have the following:

1. At least a master’s degree in social sciences, environmental studies, eco-tourism or any other relevant discipline
2. A minimum of five years of research experience in a relevant field
3. Experience in conducting research in coastal and mining communities
4. Knowledge of the culture, tradition and festivals of the people of Winneba and its environs will be deemed an advantage

How to Apply

Interested persons (s) or institutions can apply for this consultancy role by submitting separate technical proposals for the specified Lots, detailing how he/she/they intend to conduct the research on the problems described in the concept note by indicating the research approach, design, collecting data strategies and data analysis method. The applications should also include the following:
1. A work plan showing the timeline/schedule for the research and the level of effort required
2. The budget/financial proposal for the research
3. CVs of consultant(s)
4. An appendix indicating previous research.

Submission of Application

- All applications should be sent to: enock@challengingheights.org and copy nycemediaonline@gmail.com
- Indicate the Lot being applied for in the email subject line
- Deadline for submission of technical and financial proposals is 20th July 2023.

Only Shortlisted candidates will be contacted