

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) programme: a review

1. About the Research Commissioning Centre The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Research Commissioning Centre (RCC) has been established to effectively commission and manage research to enhance the impact of FCDO's research that addresses global challenges. Led by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), the University of Birmingham, and an unmatched consortium of UK and global research partners, the RCC aims to commission different types of high-quality research in FCDO's key priority areas. All FCDO-funded research and development (R&D) investments commissioned by the RCC will be implemented using rigorous and robust research methodologies and quality standards. These R&D standards include meeting the Frascati definition requirements and FCDO's Ethical Guidance for Research Evaluation and Monitoring Activities.¹

2. Background

The Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) aims to address knowledge gaps and generate evidence to inform more effective and sustainable policies for agricultural and pastoral livelihoods. It focuses on strengthening the resilience of those who depend on these sectors, particularly in areas vulnerable to frequent and prolonged crises. SPARC generates evidence to inform policymakers, donors, governments, and aid organisations, promoting more cost-effective, efficient, and sustainable policies and practices. SPARC also supports innovation and technology use in the FCDO and partner programmes.

SPARC's work is centred around the six themes described below:

- **Aid and resilience:** to enhance the resilience of pastoralists, agropastoralists, and farmers, by addressing food security and poverty related issues. The programme also identifies barriers to anticipatory action and effective resilience-building in hard-to-reach areas.
- **Livelihoods and markets:** to explore and identify the best approaches to strengthen livestock market systems and improve resilience to challenges such as livestock disease and drought.

¹See OECD. 2002. *Frascati Manual*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264199040-en>; European Commission, Eurostat. 2014. "Manual on Measuring Research and Development in ESA 2010." Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2785/52718>; and the [FCDO Ethical Guidance for Research, Evaluation and Monitoring Activities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444444/FCDO_Ethical_Guidance_for_Research_Evaluation_and_Monitoring_Activities_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

- **Land and conflict:** to address land management and tenure security while mitigating conflicts over natural resources.
- **Innovative solutions:** to identify and promote technological and social innovations that improve livelihoods. Mapping these innovations also helps attract funders who might otherwise overlook them.
- **Climate change and adaptation:** to assess climate-related risks and improve adaptation and mitigation efforts, such as those for transboundary droughts caused by climate change.
- **Gender equality and social inclusion:** to investigate ways to incorporate gender, sexuality, class, ability, education and language into policies and investments, and avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.

SPARC's research-into-action approach fosters innovation and the use of technology to support resilient livelihoods, agriculture and pastoralism. Furthermore, SPARC places gender and social inclusion at the centre of its agropastoralism research, aiming to transform how evidence informs policymaking and practice particularly for women, girls and youth.

3. Description of research to be commissioned

Research title: The Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) programme: a review

The Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) programme, commissioned by FCDO, is a six-year initiative focused on enhancing the resilience of pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, and farmers in regions affected by ongoing and complex crises. Between 2020 and 2026, SPARC's work is concentrated in the drylands of Africa and the Middle East.

To inform the remaining implementation and the design of a second-generation programme to replace SPARC, we will commission a review of SPARC to date, focusing on understanding programme impact and how the consortium has worked to deliver on its objectives and leveraged comparative advantages to drive high-impact outcomes and action.

4. Research need and questions

As SPARC is entering its final phase, we are commissioning an external review to inform FCDO's design of a second-generation programme to replace SPARC. The objective of the review is to understand where SPARC has been successful in achieving its intended impact, what the contributing factors to that success were and how this could be built on in the future. The review will also look at the effectiveness of the multi-partner consortium established for the purpose of managing the programme.

To address these objectives the review will answer the following questions:

➤ **Research quality, outcomes and impact:** the review will consider how SPARC evidence products and activities have influenced practice and policy at local, national and international levels. This will also consider the mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of these products and how they were tailored to address challenges, particularly relating to fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS). Please find below a list of potential research questions to be addressed.

1. Which SPARC activities have been most successful?
2. Where has SPARC been most operational and most effective in meeting its goals? (geography, relationships and research focus)
3. How has SPARC tracked impact and measured uptake of research outputs?
4. To what extent has the MEL system been effective in promoting, facilitating learning and supporting the achievement of outcomes across the programme (per theme and per geographical presence)?
 - a. To what extent has SPARC research been successful in achieving evidence use and policy impact?
 - b. What has been SPARC's publication strategy and to what extent has this promoted research-into-action outcomes for the programme?
5. How has the programme managed quality and ensured it met the highest standards?

➤ **Partnerships and collaborations:** the review will consider the mechanisms that succeeded in fostering collaborative engagement in evidence generation and dissemination within SPARC's scope of work and across its consortium.

1. Has SPARC built robust and equitable partnerships across the SPARC geographies? If so, how has it done this and to what effect and has this built capacity of local researchers?
2. Reflecting on the SPARC programme, what systems need to be in place to manage quality outputs across a mixed-research consortium, and how do these systems work to: a) generate and deliver on a programme wide agenda, b) promote quality research outputs, c) leverage the comparative advantages of consortium partners for the benefit of the programme.
3. Do SPARC's governance structures enable the effective management of consortium partners?

Overall: Lessons learnt across SPARC that can support in the development of a follow-on programme.

1. What lessons were learnt from programme implementation that could inform a future programme with a similar scope?
2. What lessons were learnt from working on SPARC's six themes, including any relevant cross-cutting areas such as gender and climate change?
3. How did the programme consider sustainability, particularly with respect to local systems, engagement and ownership?

The review will not be expected to assess day-to-day activities, as this is covered by existing monitoring and evaluation processes at SPARC.

5. Approach

Considering the timeline, budget and data availability for this review, the approach taken will be a combination of desk review and consultation with key stakeholders, including but not limited to:

1. **Stakeholder consultation:** interviews with SPARC programme leads across the six themes.
2. **SPARC document review:** evaluating programme reports, online materials and other documents related to the programme.
3. **Contribution tracing:** drawing on the SPARC MEL data to trace research uptake and impact.
4. **Assessment and validation:** evaluating the programme Theory of Change to understand the alignment between SPARC's objectives and its captured impacts.

Key design considerations

- The reviewer should adopt the lens of “relevance for future projects” and thereby reflect the evaluative intention and indicative reasons for successes and shortcomings in a constructive way.
- The reviewer should be able to highlight the appropriateness of the projects conducted under SPARC vis-a-vis the goals set.
- The outputs should identify and reflect on the cross-cutting themes (such as gender and climate change) and domains (such as MEL and innovation) that the SPARC programme deals with. The external reviewer could suggest stakeholder engagement activities such as with those entities that have contributed to the local impact of SPARC. The FCDO will review these suggestions and assess them for relevance and feasibility.

Challenges and mitigations

- **Operational challenges:** the FCDO will support the external reviewer by providing them access to the necessary information critical for this review's success.
- **Time constraints:** the reviewer may restrict the breadth or depth of the analysis to meet the timelines but acknowledge any foreseen limitations that could result from this.
- **Methodological limitations:** this is an ex-post, light touch programme review and as such it will not be feasible to attribute impact of SPARC and isolate it from external factors that occur in multi-actor settings. Additionally, apart from consultations with programme leads and other key stakeholders all data will be secondary data produced by SPARC.

6. Deliverables and timeline

The project duration will be three months from the issue of the contract and will conclude by 31 May 2025, depending on satisfactory completion.

Table 1: Deliverables and disbursements schedule

Milestone	Target date (since project kick off meeting)
Delivery of an inception report .	Within three weeks.
Delivery of interim findings presentation .	Within eight weeks.
Delivery of draft external review report .	Within ten weeks.
Satisfactory delivery of final external review report .	Within 12 weeks.

7. Preferred expertise and skills of the team

We welcome bids from any organisation(s) or individuals able to deliver against the FCDO's scope of work and encourage applications from groups of individuals or partners bringing their skills together to meet the needs of the portfolio review. We are looking for:

- Ability to operate flexibly and adapt approaches so as to maximise learning from the review and understanding of SPARC outcomes and impact.

- A deep and demonstrable understanding of process evaluation, performance review, participatory research and process reviews.
- Familiarity with the themes and contexts of the SPARC programme.
- Demonstrable experience in collaboration, developing and maintaining strong working relationships and rapport with organisations. This review will require such rapport with SPARC's team throughout the duration of this project. The deliverables should answer to SPARC's needs and should be approved by the team as "ready" to inform future programmes.

8. Estimated budget

The estimated budget limit of the project is up to £75,000.

- Payments will be made upon delivery of outputs and the RCC's confirmation of receipts and utilisation of the resources.
- Modifications to the budget and technical documents after contract signature need to be approved and recorded. Engagement arrangements with the FCDO and a reporting schedule will be agreed with the RCC upon the commencement of the commissioned research and throughout the inception phase. This may include touchpoints on key areas such as delivery progress, financial management and risk.

9. Eligibility

Individuals or organisations capable of conducting high-quality research will likely qualify, either independently or in collaboration with a partner. Individuals with previous experience in conducting process reviews for similar programmes or with experience in SPARC's geographic regions are preferred. Individuals or organisations with previous exposure to the programme will not be considered to ensure a degree of independence and objectivity in the process review.

10. Page limits and criteria for selection

The proposals will be appraised based on the criteria summarised in the table below. The FCDO claim the rights to use the results and the deliverables of the research project. The selected team must ensure the confidentiality of information and anonymity of research participants. The CVs should not exceed two pages.

Table 2: Criteria for selection

#	Criterion	Description	Maximum score
1	Understanding of Call for Proposals	<p>The extent to which the application reflects the Call for Proposals.</p> <p>The application should address important aspects of the project's objectives, directly tackle the issue to be solved, and embrace a critical approach to solving the question.</p>	15
2	Methodological approach and academic rigour	<p>The overall quality of the methodological approach.</p> <p>This includes but is not limited to the logical and theoretical coherence of the proposal, the design, the proposed methods and technical instruments, innovative components of the research, and stakeholders' engagement (please see Section 7. Preferred expertise and skills of the team for details).</p>	15
3	Proposed team	<p>The overall quality of the proposed team against the required expertise. This includes expertise and experience in the relevant fields of the project (please see Section 7. Preferred expertise and skills of the team for details); proven experience in development projects, advising governments and affiliated agencies, and working with the private sector; expertise in using the required research methods; and team experience in the geographical area, especially low-income settings.</p>	15
4	Equity and inclusion	<p>To what extent does the proposal consider cross-cutting issues, including aspects such as stakeholders' involvement and participation, gender issues, safeguarding of minorities and vulnerable groups, and protection of participants and/or respondents from risks or any harmful activity?</p>	15

5	Financial feasibility and value for money	To what extent do the proposed methodology and the expected outcomes justify the budget request? This includes the potential societal impact, clarity and organisation of activities and planning feasibility, and the alignment of ambition of resources.	15
6	Research Uptake Plan	The overall quality of the research uptake plan. This includes the clarity of the influence goals and their consistency in relation to the uptake objectives; whether the proposal specifies strategies that will encourage the active use of the research findings; and the feasibility of the research plan along all stages of the research: design, implementation, and dissemination strategies.	15
7	Overall evaluation of the project	Does the project, as a whole, provide a good approach to solving the critical elements of the research questions?	10

Proposals will be assessed to ensure optimal value for money while balancing costs and quality. Proposals with clear pathways to meaningful impact will be considered favourably.

11. Deadline

Completed proposals should be submitted to rcc@3ieimpact.org by **23:59 GMT on 24 February 2025**, but we will be **assessing on a rolling basis**. Proposals received after the due time and date will not be considered.

Queries can be submitted during a live webinar session on 18 February 2025 or submitted to rcc@3ieimpact.org by 20 February 2025, after which Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be posted with responses to the questions.

12. Competition process and indicative timeline

Stage	Target dates
Call for proposal launched	11 February 2025
FAQs webinar	18 February 2025
Deadline for queries	20 February 2025
FAQs posted	22 February 2025
Proposal submission deadline	24 February 2025
Proposals moderation	Starting 25 February 2025
Selection committee meetings	28 February 2025
Outcome decided and bidders notified	3 March 2025
Due diligence completed	7 March 2025
Signing of the accountable grant	10 March 2025 (dependent on successful completion of due diligence)

13. Q&A and contact

This project is managed by the FCDO Research Commissioning Centre. If you have any questions about this opportunity, please submit these to the rcc@3ieimpact.org mailbox including “Enquiry – SPARC review” in the subject line. In the interest of fairness and transparency, all questions and answers will be published on the FCDO Research Commissioning Centre page at the [website link](#) alongside other information on how to apply.