RAPID BANANA

Commercializing rapid-multiplication technologies, and new models that drive private sector investment into banana seed systems

RAPID BANANA INNOVATION FUND CALL FOR PROPOSALS APPLICATION GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

RAPID Banana is a 4-year initiative implemented by MEDA in collaboration with Context Global Development, USA that intends to spearhead work on commercializing banana seed system in Uganda and Tanzania. The project aims to commercialize rapid-multiplication technologies, and new business models that drive private sector investment into banana seed systems making improved varieties of banana available to small holder farmers at affordable price and at the right time. The project intends to work with different stakeholders, led by private sector seed producers in the banana seed system in piloting different innovative approaches both in multiplication technologies, operations optimization and business models which will improve the accessibility, availability and affordability to drive the adoption of improved and clean planting material to small holder farmers.

Background:
Banana is one of the most important staple crops in the Great Lakes region of East Africa, particularly in Uganda and Tanzania. It has been traditionally known as being key to food security and is a safe bet for many smallholder families for their home consumption, even with changing climate and rainfall variability. Banana consumption in Uganda and Tanzania is among the highest in the world where it provides 10% of the calorie intake of more than 70 million people.

Improved varieties and agronomic practices have been researched and developed that, in theory, should increase the productivity of farmers' cultivation of these crops, these advancements are not found in the majority of farmers' fields where yields remain extremely low. A significant contributing factor is the nature of seed distribution. Farmers have traditionally relied on an informal system of acquiring seed from neighbors or simply retaining and reusing seed from their own fields. As a result, diseases accumulate and "seed" degenerates over time. Therefore, a formal seed system is needed to bridge the gap from the research and release of new disease resistant, improved varieties and the farmers. Virus indexed invitro plantlets propagated by tissue culture (TC) is the most effective way to introduce quality controlled planting material. Banana nurseries receive TC generated plantlets for propagation, hardening and distributing to farmers.

However inefficient rapid-multiplication technologies by tissue culture and nursery operators in combination with nascent business operations and distribution models have resulted in low productivity and high unit costs. The relatively high price of TC plantlets, generally about $1-2 USD per plantlet, combined with inefficient distribution models and poor macro-propagation practices at the nursery level has resulted in farmers not purchasing planting materials. In addition, nurseries that rely on traditional sucker propagation have very low multiplication rates. The resulting economics of this seed system has made it unattractive for sustained private sector investment in commercializing banana seed production.

Purpose: The RAPID Banana project focuses primarily on the key bottleneck in the banana seed value chain of high-cost EGS caused by low multiplication rates and distribution inefficiencies. Dramatic changes in distribution and the corresponding business models along the TC and banana nursery value chain are possible. Towards that end, this project works with the private sector TC companies and nursery operators to adopt and scale new rapid-multiplication techniques and new business models that will drive investment into EAHB seed systems

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Approach: The program will be implemented in phases that allow for: thorough landscaping of existing companies and technologies, piloting and testing promising concepts that have the potential to for wider impact, and then selecting several of the most successful business models for further out-scaling. By incorporating learnings built through this phased approach, the program aims to have a more robust and dynamic method for ensuring systematic change in commercial banana seed system. These phases are implemented through an Innovation fund design which has several key components:

1. Validation Matching Grants – these will be used to pilot and demonstrate use of economically viable, gender-inclusive, and equitable business models to apply mass banana multiplication technologies and techniques. This is 1:1 matching grant. These will be distributed at the end of 2019 and early 2020 to successful applicants of this first round of grants.
2. Scaling Matching Grants: to organizations that demonstrate their ability to address EGS challenges in validation grant stage will be further supported through scaling matching grants. These will be distributed at the end of 2020 and early 2021 to a subset of grantees who have successfully piloted in the Validate stage (Phase 1 above).
3. The Program will also support grantee organizations through technical assistance and business advisory support during participant engagement. Technical Assistance (TA) will be provided through targeted trainings with subject matter experts and partnerships with leading research institutions. Business Advisory (BA) support will train organizations on proper business and financial planning, as well as strategic design for implementation of new models and technologies. Appropriate levels of TA and BA engagement will be identified through organizational assessment and grantee execution evaluation.

2. Call for Proposals – Validation Stage

The RAPID Banana Innovation Fund Call for Proposals (the Call) seeks applications from eligible organizations, companies and institutes to pilot concepts / ideas that will improve the effective multiplication rates and production capacity of early generation banana seed. This can be done through use of new functional technologies, new business models or optimized operations that improve the distribution of improved banana varieties to smallholder farmers.

RAPID Banana aims to learn from the experiences of grant recipients.
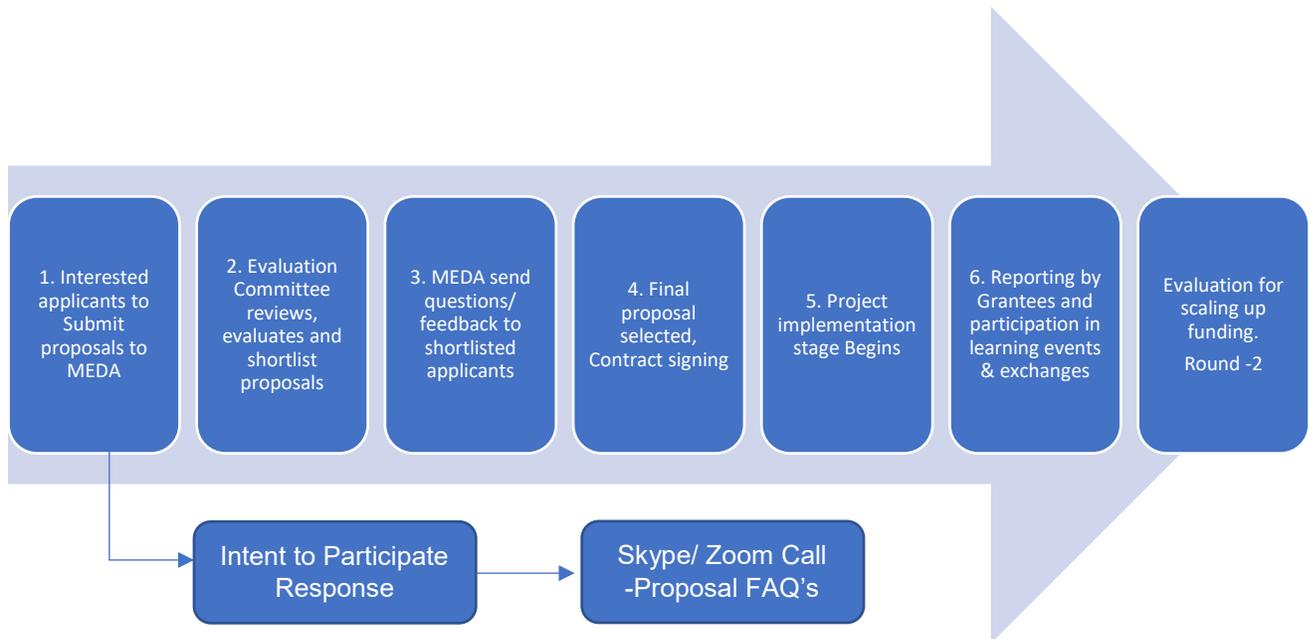
3. How the Application Process Works

1. Call for proposals is released on 19th August 2019
2. Interested applicants first complete and submit online **Intent to Participate by 27th Aug 2019**.
3. In continuation to intent to submit, interested applicants to submit their online application form, attaching their project proposal, project budget, and supporting documents to the application before the submission deadline of **Proposal by 27th Sep 2019**. NOTE: late proposals will not be accepted.
4. The Evaluation Committee reviews and evaluates proposals that meet the eligibility criteria. Out of those proposals, the committee shortlist the most promising proposals.
5. The shortlisted applicants receive questions and feedbacks on aspect of the proposal that need to be clarified or improved. After receiving responses from each shortlisted applicant, the Evaluation committee makes final funding decisions

![MEDA logo]

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6. The final proposals are selected, and successful applicants are notified. This stage also includes contract signing, refining milestones and outcome along with specific MEDA team members and implementation of projects.
7. During the project implementation, grantees submit monthly/ quarterly reports as agreed and specified in the contract and participate in learning events and exchanges with other grantees and project stakeholders
8. After 6 to 9 months post launch of the implementation stage, MEDA and Context Global Development will be engaging with grantees for scaling up funding proposals especially the ideas/ concepts that prove their initial testing hypothesis and ability to scale and replicate framework.

4. Grant Details

Funding is available in the pilot form aka validation grant of amount up to USD $12,000. Grant has 1:1 matching contribution requirement by the applicant. For example, an applicant requesting USD $10,000 from the project must contribute USD $10,000 of their own contributions as a match. Eligible match contributions can include direct costs funded by cash and a reasonable percentage of shared costs incurred that are directly allocable to grant activities. Eligible match contributions will be further clarified at the time of award. In-kind contributions like personal working directly on the project can be counted as match. MEDA reserves the right to fund less than the requested amount.

Explanation of Budget Categories

Category Name	Category Description	Funding Responsibility
Labor / Personnel	Applicant's team members specifically hired or working for the proposed project. If specific personnel are a shared	Applicant

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	resource, then his/ her part cost to be apportioned to the project cost.	
Field Activities	Activities directly related to the proposed project like training nursery of operators. Detailed explanation on the expected cost for this activity with logic.	*Applicant
Consumables	This refers to items like new growth media being tested/ pilot, disposable lab goods or containers, specifically being piloted under the proposed project.	RAPID
Capital Expenses	Expenses like LED lights, infrastructure upgrades in Lab/ Screen houses or humidity Changes. These expenses must be directly linked to piloted project.	RAPID
Other Direct Costs	Any other direct costs which will be specifically being incurred for the implementation of project. For ex: Regular operation costs of the business-like utility bills, rent cannot be considered here.	*Applicant

The goal of the matching grant is to share expenses between the applicant and RAPID. While RAPID prioritizes direct costs such as Capital Expenditures and Consumables (other categories to be considered on an ad hoc basis), the applicant should see the commitment of Labor and Field Activity support as part of their contribution and matching commitment."

**Categories marked with * (Asterik) can be considered for receiving matching fund subject to discussion during budgeting and contracting stage.*

Up to 12 awards (pilot grants) will be granted to promising ideas/ concepts.

Pilot Grant

Description	To test and validate ideas/concepts that can increase the multiplication of improved banana varieties, improve distribution models or business operations optimization with aim of improving accessibility, availability at right time and affordability of improved banana varieties to small holder farmers
Outcomes	Capture learnings on new business models and functional technologies that can be replicated and scaled within the business and to other regions through Scale-up Grant in next round of the project.
Grant Amount	Up to USD $12,000 maximum
Match Requirement	Minimum 1:1 (up to USD $ 12,000 required) MEDA reserves the right to request higher level of match depending on circumstances of the pilot
Implementation Period	Maximum12 months (ideally less)

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5. Target Applicant

The Call targets private enterprises (including cooperatives, nursery operators and producer associations), research institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGO). Applicants should be based and registered in Uganda or Tanzania, and the proposed initiatives must be implemented in the target countries as well as sub-regions with large banana productions.

Below is a table of conceptual questions and answers that may apply to the different kinds of applicants that are targeted in this Call. These are provided as illustrative examples to assist applicants to understand the Call description, particularly with multiplication technologies and new business and distribution models. These examples should not be interpreted as preferred questions-please use your own creativity and end customer centricity benefit understanding to respond.

Entity	Example Questions	Possible Responses
Private Company like Tissue Culture Company	- How to increase the multiplication rates of improved varieties or reduce the mortality due to contamination or handling losses, etc? - How to improve the distribution models of delivering tissue culture plantlets to downstream players such as nursery operators? - How to optimize the operational efficiency to reduce the cost of production per unit for TC?	- Testing an additional step through new technology like PIBS before plantlets are sent for hardening - Test new distribution model like hub and spoke integrating at last mile - Test new materials to improve lab operations or training etc.
Nursery Operators	- How to improve the post-TC multiplication through macro-propagation techniques? - How to demonstrate the advantages of tissue culture plantlets to small holder farmers? - How to work with women farmers to promote adoption of tissue culture plantlets? - How to aggregate planned TC purchases from farmers within local area of operation in a timely and efficient manner?	- Optimization of operations in macro- propagation unit. - Establishing demonstration plots with tissue culture plantlets - Enrolling early adopter women farmers as TC brand ambassadors and mobilizing them in building awareness
NGO's	- How to promote adoption of good agricultural practices and clean planting materials by small holder farmers?	- Working with farmer associations promoting farming as business and establishing benefits on traditional way of planting Vs. clean planting farmers

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Research Institutions	- How to build the awareness of improved banana varieties for increased adoption of the same by farmer? - How to reduce the time associated with release of new improved varieties to tissue culture labs for multiplication? - How to reduce the losses of TC labs in handling and multiplication of different varietals (e.g. optimal protocols by variety)?	- Test / Pilot field demonstration plots in collaboration with tissue culture labs - Testing handover protocol documents - Testing and designing different varietal protocols for TC labs

6. Eligibility Criteria

- Minimum Organizational Requirements:
    - Legally registered entities and proof of legal registration for a commercial entity/ NGO/ research institute
    - Minimum 2 years of experience in nursery operation, tissue culture lab or banana seed system distribution

- Applicants shall indicate country and sub region within the country for the proposed initiative:
    - Tanzania (Kagera, Kilimanjaro, Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Mbeya)
    - Uganda (Central, Southern, Kampala, North-West)

- Applicants can only apply for one grant and clearly identify / demonstrate a matching contribution (see section 4) from internal and / or third-party sources. (Although, multiple ideas may be submitted within the one application.

7. Evaluation Criteria

Following the submission deadline, each proposal will be reviewed against the evaluation criteria. An Evaluation Committee, comprised of MEDA staff, technical team from Context Development and other experts will review the proposals and determine a list of shortlisted proposals for further consideration. Shortlisted applicants will be contacted for any additional information or clarification requested from the Evaluation Committee. Following the feedback round with shortlisted applicants, the Committee will select the final grant recipients. Successful applicants will be notified by email / call in early November 2019, followed by contract negotiation and signing and submission of requisite documentation of the applicant organization. Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified by email in early November 2019.

The most competitive proposals will be those that demonstrate strong potential for learning, replication and scalability and execution capability. Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:
- **Promising Idea / Model** -- potential for improving the production efficiency, accessibility and distribution of improved varieties of banana seed
- **Targeted Impact** – demonstrate understanding of the target customer or business needs and potential to impact target customer or business through proposed project
- **Management and Organization Capacity –** in handling and deployment of new technologies and field-based business models

- **Replicability / Scalability** – potential for the scaling by the Applicant or qualify for next round of Scaling Grant by MEDA
- **Implementation and Budget** – feasible plan with clear roles and responsibilities and a corresponding approximate budget
- **Learning Outcome** – proposal clearly articulates the potential to contribute to the applicant's organization and related to the key objective of the project
- **Measurable Outcome** – applicant and his team involved in the project implementation has analytical capacity to capture, analyze, and share meaningful insights and learnings from project

8. Proposal Preparation

Interested applicants are invited to visit the **MEDA/ RAPID website page** to access the online application, documents (Application Proposal form and Budget Template). Any follow-up questions on the proposal or other, if not clear can be asked during the Zoom/ Skype Call organized to clarify any doubts on application or can be emailed at **rapid@meda.org**. Applicants are recommended to fill the **Intent to Participate** form by 27th Aug 2019 and wait for further communication email on details of "Skype/ Zoom Call" for Application Inquiry Call

Proposals can be submitted by a single entity only.

The online application form (proposal summary) shall be submitted in English.

Proposal Submission Checklist:

o   Download the Proposal Documents (Application Proposal Form and Budget Template)
o   Complete the Online Application Form
o   Upload the Application Proposal Form and Supporting Documents (Copy of Legal Registration, Completed Budget Template) to the Online Application Form.

9. Proposal Submission

The completed application form must be submitted online, along with the uploaded application proposal form, proposal budget and supporting documents no later than **Friday, 27th Sep 2019, at 11: 59pm East African Time**. Proposals received by the deadline and deemed by MEDA to be compliant with the requirements set out in this Call will be assessed in accordance with the evaluation criteria. Proposals received after the deadline **WILL NOT** be considered. Any enquiries can be directed to **rapid@meda.org**.

10. Implementation, Reporting and Deliverables

Once the final proposals are selected, contracts will be developed in accordance with MEDA Policies and Procedures. Contracts will include the detailed budget, implementation plan, and reporting requirements (key performance indicators and financial reporting). After the grant contracts are signed, the anticipated implementation period will commence mid-to end of January 2020.

Financial reporting will be submitted to monthly/ quarterly basis or as stated specifically in the contract. Grants will be provided monthly/ quarterly / semi-annually based on receipt of adequate supporting documents and an invoice as explained in the contracts. In addition, the following will apply to each funded project:

- Performance measurement is a critical component of the grant program to track progress, results and lessons of each funded project. In the case of successful application, MEDA will work with grant recipients to develop a reporting system specific to the initiative that will include a list of indicators and targets on which applicants will be expected to report during and at the end of the implementation period. In addition to custom reporting, there will be standard indicators against which all projects are expected to report.
- MEDA will focus on understanding the data that grant recipients already have or can feasibly collect with some improvements due to introduction of proposed initiatives to ensure reporting is manageable and not overly cumbersome. The details of the reporting will be outlined in the contract.
- In addition to performance measurement carried out by grant recipients, the MEDA and Context Development team engage with grant recipients (including site visits) to ensure activities are on track and as well as collection of data for baseline study prior or at the start of project.

The final deliverable for each grant is following:

- A short learning paper (max 1-2 pages) to be produced at the end of the pilot. This learning paper will be based on the hypothesis testing template which is included in the proposal template.

11. Cross Cuttings Testing and Learning Agenda

A key component of participating in this initiative is learning and identify pool of ideas on new technologies, business and distribution models based on the lessons and results of the pilot tests. As pilots test commence, there will opportunities to engage with other grant recipients and project stakeholders to exchange learnings and disseminate lessons and results. Once the grants are awarded, regional learning events will be held with grantees to discuss and develop cross-cutting learning agenda. There will be some available funds apart from the grants to support grant recipients to participate in learning events.

12. Permission to Share Information

By way of applying under this call, the applicant consents to the disclosure of the documents submitted by the applicant to the reviewers within MEDA, Context Global Development (CGD) and externally who are involved in the assessment and evaluation processes of proposals. If selected for funding, the applicant further consents to the disclosure of the name of the applicant, the name of the team leader and the title of the proposed project in any announcement of selected projects. Unsuccessful proposals will be destroyed within 180 days after the close of the application period