1. **Background and Purpose**

Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) in the world, with the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reporting a national prevalence of 89.6%. Given such a high rate, the practice appears to be broadly accepted in rural Sierra Leonean societies. Acceptance may be linked to perceived positive outcomes that people associate with the practice, such as strengthening of camaraderie among women, honoring of tradition, initiation into adulthood, membership in sacred or power societies, and promotion of sexual chastity or cleanliness. USAID seeks to better understand the practice of FGM/C in the different regions and districts of Sierra Leone, with a specific focus on understanding the perspectives of active practitioners and all other community stakeholders. To initiate this understanding, USAID seeks a Sierra Leonean consultant or consulting firm to perform a review of existing research, literature, data, analyses, and interventions/programs related to FGM/C in Sierra Leone. Insights and analyses gleaned from this desk research will serve to inform future USAID programming and/or support to locally led programs aimed at reducing the prevalence of the practice.

1. **Objective**

Undertake a comprehensive analysis of all relevant and existing literature, studies, interventions, and data on the practice of FGM/C in Sierra Leone and synthesize findings in a single report that answers key questions identified below.

1. **Activities**

In coordination with USAID, the consulting personnel or firm is expected to develop a work plan and methodology to complete all necessary desk research, analyses, and documentation, within the required timeframe and within budget. These include:

* 1. Complete a desk review of available literature and research, including quantitative analysis, if/where appropriate.
     + Conduct information gathering as needed, and as approved by USAID, to complement written studies (other donors, implementing partners etc.). No field work or primary research is anticipated under this consultancy.
  2. Develop recommendations, using the data and analysis from the desk research, for a nationwide listening program that would solicit insights and perspectives from a broad range of stakeholders on the advantages, disadvantages and key drivers of FGM/C in Sierra Leone.  Recommendations might include potential approaches, geographic areas, key actors to involve/invite, and potential considerations of discussing these sensitive topics with communities.
  3. Produce a detailed report of findings and analysis, including a research summary and recommendations.

1. **Deliverables**

The consulting personnel or firm is expected to produce the following as deliverables:

* 1. Weekly check-in meetings with USAID
  2. Draft report(s) as needed for USAID review and comments
  3. Final report (not to exceed 25 pages, not including annexes). The report shall include:
     + Executive Summary - summarizes the report purpose and key findings
     + In-depth analysis that responds to the following illustrative research questions
       1. **Context:** What is the current practice (and general history) of FGM/C issues in the Sierra Leone context?
          1. How widely practiced is FGM/C in Sierra Leone? What is the relationship to bondo (and/or other female power societies) and marriage before the age of 18? How does this vary by region, ethnicity, and religion, and how has it changed over time?
          2. What positive perceptions/benefits are attributed to female power societies and initiation rites?
          3. Are there other ways in which FGM/C happens without female power society involvement (e.g., medicalization? Other means?)? To what extent?
       2. **Key Stakeholders: Who are the key stakeholders with interest and influence over the practice?**
          1. What are the primary drivers behind soweis’ practice of FGM/C?
          2. What role do men play in advocating for, supporting, or preventing the continuation of the practice?
          3. What is the role of religious institutions in FGM/C?
          4. What groups or efforts are already seeking to mitigate the practice of FGM/C in Sierra Leone?
       3. **Topics to Inform Future Listening and Programs:**
          1. What models/experiments in Sierra Leone exist for maintaining the traditions of the secret society without the cutting? How widespread are these? What is their reception by the population, government, and civil society groups?
          2. How might USAID engage with existing efforts for women and girls having greater agency over their bodies to help reduce the occurrence of FGM/C? What reaction do these efforts inspire among soweis, power societies, or other actors invested in FGM/C?
          3. What are key stakeholder groups that USAID should bring into listening sessions? What are the ways that USAID could inadvertently “do harm” in tackling this issue? How can USAID ensure we are empowering - not harming - those who join in future conversations around this topic?
     + Recommendations - including the elements described above in the Activities section (3b).
     + References / Resource List / Bibliography
     + Conclusions - assessors’ interpretations and judgments
     + Submission -

1. **Performance period**

The timeline for this activity will be a maximum of 30 business days.

**Note:**

* USAID to review and provide comments within 5 business days after the draft report has been submitted.
* The final report to be submitted within 10 business days after the USAID has submitted comments.

1. **Qualification and Experience**

The consulting personnel or firm must include at least one Lead Researcher with experience managing research projects of similar scope and size in Sierra Leone. As appropriate, additional research team members may bring complementary technical, analytical, and may comprise local and international experts as necessary.

The Lead Researcher should have:

* A minimum of 2 years of independent social science research experience .
* Graduate degree from a recognised university.
* Excellent editing and writing skills; proven ability to produce high-quality concise written reports in a timely manner.
* Excellent understanding of Sierra Leonean social cultural and political structures across regions. Cultural sensitivity is critical.

1. **Administration:**

The consulting personnel or firm will report to the USAID Agriculture Project Management Specialist, with whom s/he will plan, review, and adjust the program as needed. Deliverables will not be considered final until they have received approval from this USAID point of contact.