CALL FOR PROPOSALS

IMPACT EVALUATION OF AWS SYSTEM – PHASE TWO

VERSION 1.0
16 JULY 2024

1. PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT LEAD: Lisa Bunclark, PhD, AWS Knowledge & Learning Coordinator
Email: lisabunclark@a4ws.org (based in Lima, Peru)

AWS PROJECT TITLE: Independent Impact Evaluation of AWS System (Phase Two)

PROJECT TIMELINE: 1 January 2025 - 1 October 2025

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 23 August 2024

2. BACKGROUND

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is both a global membership network of businesses, civil society and public sector organisations, and the custodian of the International Water Stewardship Standard (known as the AWS Standard).

The AWS Standard helps major water users across farms, factories, facilities and other water using sites to take credible, verifiable actions to protect water resources for shared use now and in the future. It is structured as a plan-do-check-act framework that helps businesses understand their water use and its impacts and to develop and implement water strategies that can then be audited and certified by an independent third-party.

As part of the AWS Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System, we are initiating a long-term impact evaluation programme to investigate the attributable impacts of the AWS Standard System. As part of this programme, AWS is seeking to commission the first in-depth, independent impact evaluation. This two-phase evaluation will be the first in a series of impact evaluation projects implemented in the coming years. The Impact Evaluation Concept Note outlines the scope, aim, principal research questions and proposed methodology for the independent impact evaluation of the implementation of the AWS Standard System on which this Call for Proposals is based.

This Call for Proposals relates to site level fieldwork and reporting under Phase Two of the independent impact evaluation, as presented in the Concept Note. The design of Phase Two of the independent impact evaluation has been informed by the outputs and associated recommendations of Phase One (as presented in the Impact Evaluation Phase One Findings Report) in the context of the long-term AWS impact evaluation programme.

Alliance for Water Stewardship (SCIO)
2 Quality Street, North Berwick, Scotland, EH39 4HW
Website: www.a4ws.org Email: info@a4ws.org
AWS is registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCO45894)

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AWS is an ISEAL Code Compliant Member. Our system has been independently evaluated against ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice[1] – a globally recognised framework for effective, credible sustainability systems. The commissioning of an independent impact evaluation will help to ensure that AWS continues to meet the requirements of ISEAL's new Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems.

3. AIM

The overall aim of the project is to conduct a systematic, objective and in-depth, ex-post assessment of the medium or long-term effects; positive or negative, intended or unintended, of the implementation of the AWS Standard System. The primary questions that Phase Two seeks to answer are as follows:

1. To what extent does AWS Certification produce the desired positive intended social, cultural, economic and/or environmental water stewardship outcomes and impacts?
2. What unintended social, economic and/or environmental effects (positive or negative) have resulted from the implementation of the AWS Standard?
3. To what extent it is possible for sites to attribute observed social, cultural, economic and/or environmental effects to AWS Certification?
4. What factors likely influence observed social, cultural, economic and/or environmental effects (factors within the control of the standard system and other external factors)?

These overarching research questions will guide Phase Two of the impact evaluation but may be complemented with additional questions, as proposed by the consultant(s), in line with those suggested in the Impact Evaluation Phase One Findings Report and the AWS Research Agenda.

4. SCOPE

Phase Two of the impact evaluation will be carried out on selected AWS Certified Sites at the global level. Whilst the AWS Certification process requires sites to meet criteria that align with all five AWS Outcomes, as a result of the resources available for this first independent impact evaluation, the focus will be on exploring impacts in relation to one AWS Outcome in particular: Good Water Governance. The focus on an evaluation of impacts related to the Good Water Governance Outcome is informed by several factors:

- The current high level of evaluability of this AWS Outcome compared to others, as determined by the evaluability assessment conducted as part of Phase One (see Impact Evaluation Phase One Findings Report for more details)
- The relation of Good Water Governance to all aspects of how water is managed and its role in providing the foundation for achieving the multiple goals of water stewardship, with linkages to the other four AWS Outcomes (Sustainable Water Balance, Good Water Quality Status, Important Water-Related Areas (IWRAs) and Safe Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH))
- The connection of good water governance to other on-going work and priorities within the AWS System, including the GOVAQUA research project on innovative water governance approaches, ensuring that scaled adoption of the AWS Standard creates positive impact for diverse local stakeholders, and increasing public-private collaboration to accelerate action on water stewardship

Whilst the evaluation will focus on an examination of the effects of the AWS Standard on the Good Water Governance Outcome, it is expected that links to impacts on the other four AWS Outcomes will also be explored, as well as resilience to climate change.

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[1] Isealalliance.org

A pool of some 125 Certified Sites that have been AWS Certified for three or more years (as of July 2024) was identified as part of Phase One from which the consultant(s) can draw sites to include in the sample of sites for Phase Two (see Phase One Findings Report Annex 2). The sample selected for evaluation will include sufficient diversity to enable coverage of as wide a range as possible of AWS Certified Sites to be evaluated across corporate sectors (across agricultural supply chains, food and beverage manufacturing, ICT and microelectronics, apparel and textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and personal care, and others), geographic regions, AWS Certification Levels (Core, Gold and Platinum), and AWS Certification Types (Single, Group and Multi-site). We expect the study to be appropriately focused to limit variables that may affect results.

It is envisaged that the scope of Phase Two will include AWS Certified Sites located across up to six countries, with a preference to include Peru, China, Ireland, India, Japan and Mexico.

The final sampling strategy for Phase Two will be developed in collaboration with the consultant(s). As well as the criteria mentioned above, the final sample selected will also take into account: project budget, the language spoken at potential sites, the availability of data (as determined in Phase One), and the area of expertise and location of the consultant(s).

5. APPROACH

It is expected that a Theory-Based Approach similar to that proposed in the Impact Evaluation Concept Note will be employed by the consultant(s), guided by the AWS Theory of Change (ToC). The AWS ToC demonstrates the intended causal impact pathways of how AWS Standard Implementers (those that achieve AWS Certification) are expected to contribute to the five intended AWS Outcomes (Good Water Governance, Sustainable Water Balance, Good Water Quality Status, Important Water-Related Areas (IWRA) and Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)) and hence good water stewardship at catchment level.

The contribution of AWS Certification to impacts identified will be assessed by examining the factual (the extent to which actual results match what was expected) and ruling out alternatives. The consultant(s) will focus on building a strong, empirical case that relates the AWS Standard to identified impacts. A mixed methods approach is proposed, with quantitative and qualitative analysis done separately, and results triangulated to compile final findings and recommendations. The approach to the evaluation taken should align with the ISEAL Credibility Principles and abide by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation at each stage of the evaluation.

The specific tasks conducted as part of the fieldwork and reporting under Phase Two of the impact evaluation include:

1. Refine Impact Evaluation Phase Two methodology (quantitative and qualitative aspects)
2. Develop a set of indicators that will be used as the framework to guide data collection and take into consideration the various dimensions of good water governance (effectiveness, efficiency, and trust and engagement)
3. Develop data collection and analysis plan, including data collection instruments and protocols
4. Review and evaluation of site-level data and the activities implemented that directly relate to AWS Certification at the selected AWS Certified Sites to be included in Phase Two
5. Triangulate information from different AWS Certified Sites and synthesising all observations, conclusions, lessons learned and key recommendations
6. Draft the Impact Evaluation Phase Two Final Report including: purpose, information on the evaluation team, scope, data collection and analysis, findings, conclusions, limitations, contextual factors and recommendations. This should include examples of contributions to impact in each of the study sites (identified during on-site interviews) and overall recommendations

7. Validate Preliminary Impact Evaluation Phase Two Final Report with AWS, AWS Certified Sites and key stakeholders
8. Revisit data collection, analysis and interpretation as necessary based on feedback obtained in validation stage
9. Revise the Impact Evaluation Phase Two Final Report, incorporating changes to sections of the report mentioned in (6) based on feedback during validation stage (up to two rounds of comments from AWS and associated report revisions)

SPECIAL NOTES

i. The commissioned consultant(s) is invited to propose alternative approaches that respond to the evaluation aim and research questions. Any proposed changes should be explained and justified in the submitted proposal
ii. The consultant(s) must be willing and available to travel for field work
iii. This is largely a desk-based exercise with some travel anticipated

6. SPECIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

CONSULTANT COMPETENCIES

AWS requires the services of a highly specialised, experienced and independent consultant(s) to conduct the research as per the aim above. Applicants must be able to demonstrate evidence of the following technical and professional knowledge and skills:

- A Doctoral or Master's Degree in relevant academic discipline and/or demonstrate 10 years or more experience in relevant fields (e.g. water stewardship, water governance, international development, conservation, hydrology, climatology, environmental science, agriculture or similar)
- Direct experience with the AWS Standard System (preferably completed AWS Standard System Training to Specialist Level) highly desirable
- Experience in data analysis methodologies relevant to this project (knowledge and understanding of sustainability, water resources management, standard systems, etc.)
- Experience working with data relating to certification schemes and a high level of attention to detail in the management of data, particularly in relation to data integrity, quality and accuracy
- Experience in writing research reports and data visualisation
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office, SharePoint, Teams and Salesforce
- Excellent organisation skills with a high level of attention to detail
- High level of proficiency in English and report writing
- Individuals are encouraged to submit proposals. If the applicant proposes working in collaboration with another researcher, the Lead Researchers must have ten years or more experience in relevant fields and the Co-Investigator at least five years

Applicants shall disclose to AWS all real, perceived or potential conflict of interest that they may have with AWS or all entities in the impact evaluation.

DELIVERABLES & ACTIVITES

1. Attend monthly project coordination calls with AWS project team (1-2 hours)
2. Provide mid-project progress report by 15 May 2025 (5-7 pages)
3. Provide Final Report outline by 30 June 2025 for approval to proceed
4. Provide Final Report First Draft by 15 August 2025 for approval to proceed
5. Submit Final Report by 30 September 2025 (c. 25 pages)
6. Provide anonymised and cleaned raw data set (in Excel and/or Word format)
7. Participate in presenting final report in AWS webinar

To answer this Call for Proposals the interested parties are invited to submit:

- A short proposal outlining the approach to be used for the evaluation process and timeline (max five pages plus CVs)
- CV of applicant(s) and research team, detailing qualifications, training and relevant experience, and languages spoken and written, with two references
- Two examples of similar work completed within the last five years

7. GENERAL CONDITIONS

1. All documents submitted in response to this Call for Proposals shall be in English
2. All enquiries in connection with this Call for Proposals shall be submitted to Dr Lisa Bunclark, AWS Knowledge & Learning Coordinator (lisabunclark@a4ws.org)
3. Proposals are to be submitted via email to Dr Lisa Bunclark, AWS Knowledge & Learning Coordinator (lisabunclark@a4ws.org) and Christine Carey, AWS Chief System Integrity Officer (christine@a4ws.org)
4. Available project budget is 20,000 GBP
5. AWS will comply with all relevant Privacy and GDPR regulations regarding candidate data and data retention
6. Only successful candidate(s) will be contacted. Unfortunately, we cannot provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates

PROPOSALS TO BE SUBMITTED TO: Lisa Bunclark, PhD, AWS Knowledge & Learning Coordinator (lisabunclark@a4ws.org) and Christine Carey, AWS Chief System Integrity Officer (christine@a4ws.org)

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 23 August 2024