Final report on the Concept Note Selection Process

I. Introduction

SRF mission is to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, by providing funds for immediate relief to affected populations, strengthening local capacities, supporting skilled aid organisations, and paving the way for lasting solutions. It is designed to support and reinforce principled humanitarian response and is guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

The SRF aims to provide predictable, flexible, and long term fundings for international and national humanitarian NGOs, to implement integrated multisector and cross-border response. The SRF intends to finance three regional consortia able to scale up their operations and offering substantial and relevant technical and geographical complementarities.

A call for consortia projects concept notes (CN) was launched on the 20th of September 2022. The guidelines and all the related documents were available on the SRF website. The information was widely spread through our newsletter for which contacts have been collected through NGO forums and other specialised platforms. The call was open for four weeks, with a deadline set at October 16th for potential candidates to design their concept notes.

At the end of the allocated time, a total of eleven (11) concept notes was submitted. The evaluation committee, composed of relevant experts, reviewed the submitted concept notes and submitted the results to the SRF board for approval. The following process was used to select applicants.

II. The Evaluation committee

The evaluation committee is a group of technical experts from DRC and FCDO set to analyse SRF concept notes and proposals. They review and select best technical narratives to the board for final decision. Result shared with the board are anonymised.

The evaluation committee members have been approved by the SRF board.

III. The SRF board

The SRF is managed by a board of INGO, NNGO, Donor and Observer which is the decision entity of the SRF. During the CN selection process, the SRF board is responsible to approve the evaluation methodology carried out by the evaluation committee and to select the number of CN eligible for the full proposal preparation based on the committee's recommendations taking in consideration efficiency and equity factors. It is important to mention that the results submitted to the vote of the SRF board are anonymous, the only information provided was the ranking of the CNs (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) as well as the score of each one.

IV.   Methodology

IV.1. Concept Note eligibility check

The eligibility check has been performed exclusively by two members of the evaluation committee: the Fund Director and the MEAL Coordinator (Chairing the evaluation committee).

The purpose of this first step was to check if the application documents were fulfilling the eligibility criteria to apply to the SRF. This verification was done using the "Eligibility Self-check" document which was cross-checked with the documents shared by the candidates.

Following this process, two (02) consortia were rejected for the following reasons:

- One consortium was only covering 1 country
- One consortium did not submit any supporting documents nor the eligibility self-check

The nine (09) others concept notes were uploaded in a SharePoint folder only accessible by evaluation committee members for review.

The eligibility report can be accessible on SRF SharePoint by the grievance committee in case of complaint on the transparency and fairness of the selection process.

IV.2. Concept note technical review

For four days, the concept notes were reviewed and rated by the evaluation committee using the SRF score card for concept note approved by SRF board. The SRF score card for concept note was part of the annexes of the concept note package uploaded on the SRF website. The committee members area of expertise involved Protection, Health, Nutrition, Food Security & Livelihood, Protection Mainstreaming, Accountability, Finance, Access and Safety and Cartography to ensure an overall technical review of Concept notes.

Outside the sectoral approach, other committee members oversaw the coherence of the concept note, and the alignment with the SRF strategic framework.

Each concept note had one dedicated scorecard in which each member of the committee assigned grades according to the sector, task and section assigned to him/her.

The concept notes were not only evaluated through a scoring grad (quantitative), but reviewers were also able to share comments (qualitative) to clarify the score given or flag some gaps in the reviewed concept notes.

At the end of this process, a half day meeting between evaluation committees' members was organized to decide, based on scores and comments, which candidates presented a robust enough concept note to pass to the full proposal stage.

Experts provided their score individually in the score card according to the sector, task and section assigned to him/her. The individual score was then centralised by the chair of the evaluation committee who only shared the consolidated results in this final meeting.

V.   Result Presentation

IV.1. Evaluation Committee analysis

Following the individual technical review of concept notes and the consolidation meeting, the committee identified 06 concept notes eligible to pass to the full proposal stage. The conclusion of the evaluation committee was consensual, no dissident views were recorded. Furthermore, according to the SRF strategic planning and the level of effort required by the applicants, the evaluation committee suggested to:

- **Pass the first 04 concept notes to full proposal stage to:**
    - Limit the burden on candidates that will develop full proposal.
    - Reduce the burden on DRC's technical experts who, given the schedule, could be mobilized on other organizational priorities.
    - Keep a certain level of competition in the full proposal stage.
- **02 in Standby:** These are also well-designed concept notes, but with some gaps in the design of the intervention, feasibility, and the cost effectiveness. In view of this and the points mentioned above, the committee suggests keeping them on standby for future top ups in case of new donors arriving in the SRF. *(Subject to approval of the SRF board and adjustments to be done by applicants based on recommendations from evaluation committee)*
- **Rejected:** These are concept notes which are not technically strong enough and/or not in perfect alignment with the SRF strategy. For these reasons, the committee did not recommend them for full proposal submission.

To prevent conflict of interests to arise in this process**, the FMU invited the SRF board to vote the validation of the results on an anonymous basis.** No information was shared at any stage with SRF board members which could have facilitated the identification of applicants.

Following this classification, here is the details of the results.

Table 1: Concept Note classification.

Pass	Standby	Rejected
4	2	3

	5	6	8	2	3	7	4	1	9
Methodology and project design	22.2	23.1	12	21.4	26.8	22.2	26.6	25.8	10.6
Sector expertise and experience	10.7	10.5	9.75	13	8.5	5.5	10.25	12.5	7.9
Local experience and presence	11	11	11	15	11	11	7	11	8
Coordination and advocacy	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Cost effectiveness	9	8	5	9.7	7.0	6.0	8.0	8.7	6
Stakeholders' engagement	6	6	0	8	10	8	10	10	3
Total	73.9	73.6	52.7	82.0	78.3	67.7	76.8	82.9	50.5

IV.2. Final decision from the SRF board

Based on a few limitations identified by the evaluation committee such as

- Concept note length limiting applicants to provide more details on the intervention, and
- Lack of detail on the budget (no budget ceiling and no detailed budget provided for some applications)

And for equity's sake, the SRF board recommended that the first **6 concept notes should be eligible for full proposal development**.

Following the vote of this recommendation, the applicants selected for full proposal development are (in alphabetic order):

- Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Mercy Corps
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Plan International
- Save the Children

The result (name of applicants) was not shared with the SRF board at the end of the vote but one week later at the same time with all the applicant organisations.

Note: *In case of claim, consortia individual evaluation reports for concept note are available for the Grievance Committee to assess the transparency and fairness of the concept note review process.*

VI.   General comment on approved concept notes:

Through its analysis of the different applications, the evaluation committee has identified several trends that are summarized as follow:

- 👍 Strength
  - 👍 Good understanding of the SRF strategic framework by most of the consortia
  - 👍 Focus on SRF target areas
  - 👍 Good knowledge and presence in the Sahel and in the targeted areas
  - 👍 Good multi-country and transborder approach
  - 👍 Good complementarity between consortium members and sectors
  - 👍 Good people centered approach

- 👎 Gaps
  - 👎 Need to further develop the integrated sectoral approach
  - 👎 Access strategy not enough developed
  - 👎 Conflict analysis could have been pushed forward
  - 👎 Improvement in cost effectiveness
  - 👎 Improvement of the proportion of the budget allocated between the partners, especially to national partners
  - 👎 Consortium governance system could reflect further the equitable and strategic partnership with national and local NGOs.

VII.   Lessons learned:

- ✓ **Adapt the length of Concept Notes**: The length of the CN template didn't allow organisations to expand more on technical aspect of the intervention thus it did not facilitate a thorough technical sectorial review.
- ✓ **Limit the total budget eligible**: The differences between the different applications in relation to the total budget were greater than expected. Considering the evaluation committee and FMU

anticipate 3 consortia will be selected, it is recommended that each consortia budget do not exceed 8,3 million GBP for budget development at proposal stage. It may then be adjusted based on recommendations from the evaluation committee related to geographic and technical complementarity.

VIII.   Next steps

- ✓ FMU should document and learn from this process to adjust where relevant for future call for concept notes/proposals.
- ✓ Individual organisation feedback on submitted concept note (pass or not and why) will be shared by Friday 28th October by the FMU with all applicants. No individual technical feedback at this stage.
- ✓ The timeline for development of the full proposal will officially start with the reception of the proposal package by all applicants.
- ✓ FMU will be available for individual feedback session upon request of unselected applicants.