Proposal Title
“Stimulating SME performance and recovery in the aftermath of the Ebola crisis: Evidence from a business training intervention in Liberia”

PIERI EVALUATION PROPOSAL

Presented to

Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP)

By

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Fahn Meaka
(Female: To be recruited)

BRAC, Liberia

COUNTRY
Liberia

June, 2017
Before you begin

Please consult the following webpages/documents regarding PEP’s expectations in terms of:

- Specific policy issues to be addressed by projects supported under this call
- **Scientific content of eligible research project proposals**
- Initiatives to be undertaken by PEP supported research teams in terms of policy outreach

Please note that:

- Plagiarism is strictly forbidden – see note on “references and plagiarism” at the end of this document/template. PEP will be using software to detect cases of plagiarism.
- PEP encourages applicant research teams to submit proposals in English, but content (in text boxes below) may also be written in French or Spanish (and will be accepted given proper justification of language barrier).

There are three main areas/dimensions to all PEP-supported projects: research, capacity building and policy engagement/impact. The PEP proposal template is structured around these three dimensions. Each section must be completed with due care and attention, as they are reviewed individually and concurrently to assess the overall quality of a proposal.

Please do not exceed the number of words limits. Failure to do so indicates unwillingness to abide with PEP rules and will penalize the overall project.

**SECTION I – RESEARCH**

1. **Introduction**

1.1. **Abstract (max. 250 words)**

The abstract should state the main research question, the context and its relevance in terms of policy issues/needs in relation to PAGE thematic focus, complete with a brief description of the data that will be used.

The Liberian Micro Small and Medium Enterprises sector experienced a significant decline in performance during the Ebola outbreak. Business closures or downsizing were very frequent over this period. Similarly, BRAC Liberia Microfinance registered a significant increase in missed repayment rates, particularly among borrowers of its Small Enterprise Program (SEP). By July 2016, 12% of SEP clients had missed at least one repayment, up from 7% in January 2014.

Understanding the impact of interventions targeting MSMEs performance is thus important from a policy perspective. Improving management skills, and in particular customer care skills - that is, the ability to communicate effectively with customers, to be polite, helpful and welcoming, thus adopting a "customer first" mentality - seems a particularly promising avenue: the Ebola outbreak was characterized by a dramatic reduction and aversion towards social interactions at all level of society (World Bank, 2015). Also, CRS (2016) report indicates 41% of Liberians do not feel empathy towards others. However, interacting with customers is an important part of the daily operations of typical MSME owners in the retail or service sectors.

The study is intended to assess the feasibility of alternative approaches to business management skills training for MSME owners in the post epidemic and disaster period. The baselines will inform us about which management skills and personality traits are associated with business performance. Also, we will assess firm owners' attitudes towards different types of skills trainings. Our aim is then...
to evaluate the impacts of this pilot business training intervention on firm recovery and firm growth.

1.2. Evaluated Intervention and Context (max. 500 words)

Briefly describe the context in which the program takes place. E.g., for a job training program, describe current supply and demand for jobs, how these compare to other places and other periods; major market frictions and issues facing employers/job seekers; alternative and previous programs. Then describe extensively the program that you intend to evaluate. What are the objectives of the program? What are the program benefits? What are the program eligibility rules? Who is in charge of implementing the program or delivering the benefits? Who is in charge of funding? How are benefits delivered? Indicate whether the intervention/programme has already started, whether in pilot or at scale and give a brief and a timeline for the roll-out of the interventions.

The Liberian Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector experienced a significant decline in performance during the Ebola outbreak. Business closures or downsizing were very frequent over this period. Similarly, BRAC Liberia Microfinance registered a significant increase in missed repayment rates, particularly among borrowers of its Small Enterprise Program (SEP). By July 2016, 12% of SEP clients had missed at least one repayment, up from 7% in January 2014.

According to the Government of Liberia (2014), the MSMES sector faces four critical challenges: i) Lack of adequate legal and regulatory reforms within the business sector, ii) Limited access to markets, iii) Lack of access to finances, and iv) Inadequate business skills and knowledge. In order to enhance the sector's performance, the MSME Division together with its partners already trained 50 firm owners in areas related to customer service, business planning, access to finance, procurement, marketing and accounting services during 2014 (GOL, 2014).

Investing in business training is one of the interventions undertaken to improve business outcomes among MSMEs in many developing countries. Most of the trainings directed towards improving existing businesses commonly entail business management skills content (Calderon et al, 2013, McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012). Also there is a focus on soft skills like personal initiative, practical intelligence, cognitive biases, goals and visions, passion, affect and customer care (Frese & Gielnik, 2014; McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012).

Methodology

The study is therefore intended to assess the feasibility of alternative approaches to business management skills training for MSME owners in the post epidemic and disaster period. The study will involve; i) Collection of baseline and a follow up survey and ii) Pilot implementation of the business training intervention. The baselines will inform us about which management skills and personality traits are associated with business performance. Also, we will assess firm owners' attitudes towards different types of skills trainings. Eventually, the findings from the baseline surveys will be used to guide the design of the pilot intervention.

The study will include BRAC SEP clients, as well as customers to the respective firms. The SEP programme has had a total number of 1,206 borrowers, since its inception in 2008 and 902 current borrowers (currently financing their loans). Approximately 65% of the clients are females and mainly engage in: Carpentry, Catering, Hairdressing, Motor-mechanics, Textile, Grocery and Pharmaceuticals. Clients’ employee 2 – 9 employees, and reportedly have been in existence for the
past seven years, on average.

The programme operates in 5 counties namely: Bong, Margibi, Montserrado, Grand Bassa and Lofa. The study shall include respondents in all the counties, so as to cater for regional variations. The programme’s main concentration is in semi/urban areas within the respective counties where there are sizeable numbers of potential borrowers.

For the survey, customers will be identified by conducting random spot-checks at the firms and waiting for customers to arrive.

Based on findings from the baseline and qualitative interviews, a skills training course will be developed and piloted among randomly selected firm owners. Alongside, a psychologist will be engaged to allow customization of training content and measurement of the soft skills to the Liberian context.

1.3. Research gap (max. 400 words)

Clearly lay out the research questions that you aim to address with the RCT methodology. Explain whether the program has been evaluated before and if your research question has been addressed before in similar contexts or using different techniques (cite key references, i.e., references offering literature reviews on similar research questions as well as references to previous evaluations of the same program or of similar programs in other contexts). Explain how your evaluation will contribute to closing any remaining knowledge gap and what you wish to achieve by investigating your research question.

This proposal seeks to answer two main specific research questions about the Liberian MSMEs sector:

- What are the specific management skills and personality traits – customer oriented skills associated with positive business outcomes, customer satisfaction and loyalty? In particular, what are the returns to having a customer-oriented approach, relative to other managerial skills?
- Can customer feedback be used as a proxy to evaluate the impact of skills training programs – that is, can customer surveys be used as an important way to evaluate the efficacy of the business training program and estimate the returns to skills attained?

Our data from a pilot study with 27 firm owners from Montserrado county, during December 2016 in Liberia, indicated that firm owners are aware that both practical and soft skills are important drivers of business productivity and profitability (See Fig 1: Appendix). At the same time, they acknowledged the need to improve upon their customer relations skills even more than on their practical skills (See Figure 2: Appendix). Findings from a qualitative study in a developed setting (Australia) indicate that SMEs owners’ recognize the need for skills development (Walker et al, 2011). In addition, results from the same pilot with 27 customers revealed that customers give priority to firm owner’s interpersonal skills to decide upon the product/service provider (See Figure 3: Appendix). During the same pilot customers reported communication skills as the main skills they would like service providers to improve upon (See Figure 4: Appendix).

Research indicates that the provision of management skills positively impacts business performance (Frese & Gielnik, 2014; Calderon et al, 2013; McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012; Yahya, et al, 2012).
Training on both management and soft skills promotes business success and influences different components of performance (Frese & Gielnik, 2014).

Evaluation of most soft skills trainings focus on motivational skills centred on self and business improvement (Frese and Gielnik, 2014; Solomon et al, 2013). Limited attention has instead been given to skills training associated with interpersonal relations and integrity with customers, despite existing research showing a positive correlation between good customer relations and customer contentment (Jahanshahi et al, 2011).

Also, less attention has been given to customer feedback as a way of evaluating the impact of business training interventions. Yet, customers provide important feedback on customer service and business performance (Lebing, 1997).

Therefore, a customer-centered business training intervention seems to be a promising avenue to foster business recovery in the post-Ebola and conflict period.

1.4. Theory of Change (max. 400 words)

Impact evaluations take root in a program’s theory of change (see manual link here). Outline how the evaluated intervention will achieve the intended results. Describe the causal logic (the chain of events) of how and why the program or policy will reach its intended outcomes. What are the main barriers that could lead the program fails to achieve its objectives?

The theory of change for the skills for firms’ performance is illustrated in Figure 1. The training will recognize that business outcomes related to firms’ poor performance partially result from poor business skills and knowledge—that is to say poor business management specifically: i) financial management ii) records keeping iii) business organisation and iv) marketing skills. In addition, poor performance might stem from negligence regarding non-cognitive skills, namely: i) communication, ii) time management and use, low trust, minimal flexibility with customers and inadequate work place hygiene).

In order to enhance the firm owner’ abilities, firm owners shall receive a 2 days training, which will covers a) business management skills, and b) inter-personal skills as illustrated in the Figure below. Training in business management modules will include: financial literacy, records keeping, sales and marketing. Modules on inter-personal skills shall contain: customer care basics, good practices, and relevance of: communications, trust, flexibility, time management and work place hygiene/cleanliness.

Thus the training aims at improving firms’ performance through enhancing business practices and behaviour, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Ultimately, the intervention aims to sustainably improve SMEs business outcomes and loan performance.

We shall improve on existing business training materials offered by BRAC to Microfinance staff and adolescents on business management. Training materials will be customized to fit the target population. Training modules shall be developed by the research team, together with help from BRAC Microfinance and Adolescents programs trainers. Also, an organisational psychologist will be contracted in order to develop modules on interpersonal skills. The strategy would be cost effective.
compared to hiring a business training firm. Training will be delivered by BRAC Credit officers (CO) given their good relations with the clients. In other words clients will comfortable to participate in the training delivered by the COs. CO’s will use both English and pigeon English to be able to accommodate clients with low literacy levels. In order to be able to deliver the training, CO will be provided with a Training of Trainers for two days by the research team with the help of a psychologist.

The study will include both male and female clients.

Selected SEP clients through lottery shall be invited to the respective branch locations to receive the training. Training participants shall be provided with food and refreshments during the training worth (USD 5 per person each day) and USD 16 (USD 8 per day) to serve as compensation for transport and opportunity costs. Respondents in the control arm shall receive a phone call from the research team every after two months to serve as recognition for their hard work and maintain relations with the research team to minimize on non-response rate.

![Figure 1: Skills for firms’ performance training results Framework.](image)

### Need
- Lack of adequate business skills and knowledge;
  a) Business management (Financial management, records keeping, business organisation and marketing)
  b) Non-cognitive (poor communication, time management, trustworthiness, flexibility with customers and workplace hygiene/cleanliness)

### Inputs
- Financial resources
- Human capital
- Time

### Activities
- Development of skills training materials.
- Skills Training on
  a) Business management;
  Financial Literacy: i) basic accounting, ii) budgeting and expenditure management ii) savings promotion, iii) marketing, and iv) financial negotiation.
  Records maintenance
  b) Interpersonal skills (Customer care)
  (Communication, trustworthiness, flexibility with customers, time management and workplace cleanliness/hygiene)

### Output
- Improvement in business practices (Records keeping and maintenance of business expenses, sales, inventory; sales and marketing strategies)
- Improvement in customer behaviour; politeness, flexibility with customers, time conscious, clean work environment
- Customer satisfaction
- Customer loyalty

### Outcome
- Improvement in business performance
- Improvement in loan performance

### 1.5. RCT Methodology (max. 400 words)

Describe the randomization process that you intend to implement to assign units to the treatment and control groups. Very often, randomization will only occur in a limited geographical location because of implementation or political constraints. How large is the geographical location that you will use to conduct the RCT? How many villages/districts? What is the size of these primary units? How large is the population (number of villages/districts, number of individuals/households)? Justify
based on available (census or administrative) data. Often enough, randomization happens at an aggregate level (we then talk of cluster randomization). Clearly state:
- unit of analysis (household, individual)
- randomization level (village, district),
- if you plan to stratify and with respect to which factors,
- any other particularities or innovations of your randomization process.

The study will be conducted, from the 5 counties where the SEP program operates: Bong, Margibi, Montserrado, Grand Bassa and Lofa. This will allow us to capture regional variations.

SEP clients will be randomly assigned to participate in the survey through a lottery. Then, clients shall be randomly selected (at individual level) to receive business skills management and customer relations training. The remaining selected clients shall be assigned to the control group.

Individual firm owners’ will hence act as the unit of randomization and analysis. Since the majority of BRAC SEP clients are women entrepreneurs, the research sample is expected to comprise a higher (65%) share of women.

The random sample shall therefore be stratified by location, at first. Thereafter, we shall further stratify the sampling by gender and business sector. This will allow proportional representation since the study will include BRAC SEP clients from all the 7 sectors: Carpentry, Catering, Hairdressing, Motor-mechanics, Textile, Grocery and Pharmaceuticals.

Also customers to the respective firm owners will be surveyed. As earlier noted in Section 1.2, customers will be identified by conducting random spot-checks at the firms and waiting for customers to arrive. Customers shall be interviewed according to the order of inflow (perform systematic random sampling) and after transacting business with the firm owner. However, the selection will be proportionate to gender. That will allow capturing for gender dimensions. In addition, the exact number of customers to be systematically selected will depend on the sector. We plan to utilize the firm baseline survey to us about the average number of customer in the respective sectors.

2. Data requirements

*This is a critical part of the proposal.* The key objective is to show your ability to collect sufficient data to detect an impact.

2.1. Outcome variables (max. 200 words)

Briefly describe your primary outcome variable and two secondary outcomes that you plan to measure. Mention for which outcome power calculations will be conducted.

For each outcome:
- describe the corresponding variable and its unit of measure,
- state its nature (continuous, binary, multinomial, ordered, etc.)
- describe the data source for each outcome (self-reported survey or census data, observational measure by enumerators, institutional records such as bank records or tax records, administrative data, etc.)
We intend to conduct surveys to collect baseline and follow up data, among firm owners. Firm owners will be required to provide information concerning business and loan performance, on a monthly basis (12 months) during the project time line.

Main measurement of business performance will comprise of continuous variables namely; self-reported sales, profits, firm size and number of customers served (Ref to Table 1). Sales are considered as the main outcome indicator given ease to recall the amounts by firm owners. We intend to use business monthly sales as the key outcome indicator for which power calculations will be conducted. Loan performance will be the secondary outcome to be measured using continuous indicators namely; loan repayment rate, retention and loan size indicators.

Table 1: Outcome variables, nature and source of data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Unit of measure</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Source of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Performance</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Liberian Dollars</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Surveys and Monthly records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Profits</td>
<td>Liberian Dollars</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Surveys and Monthly records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Firm size</td>
<td>Number of employees</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Surveys and Monthly records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Customers served</td>
<td>Average number of customers served</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Surveys and Monthly records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan Performance</td>
<td>Loan Repayment rate</td>
<td>Portfolio at risk (PAR)</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Surveys and Monthly records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Continuous loan borrowing</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Surveys and Monthly records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loan size</td>
<td>Amount of loan borrowed (LRD)</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Surveys and Monthly records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Sample size (max. 400 words)

Provide an approximate value and discuss the following factors that will determine the sample size required for your evaluation:
- expected baseline levels for the outcome variables,
- expected effect size of the program or intervention for each outcome,
- if relevant, expected take-up rates,
- if relevant, expected attrition in the treatment and control group
- number of units used for the evaluation (sample size)
- if different from the unit of analysis, number of randomized units
- if relevant, expected correlation of units within a randomized cluster with respect to the outcome variables.

A randomly selected sample of 390 SEP clients from BRAC’s existing 902 current borrowers, would allow us to detect at least a MDE equivalent to 0.20 (increase in revenue) of standard deviation 0.27. The parameter would be within a reasonable effect change within a year (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012). We shall consider MDE at 80%, which is a common level of power while calculating sample size in social sciences (3ie manual, 2016).

Ideally, 130 clients would be randomly selected (at individual level) to receive the business skills
management. Another 130 clients will receive both business management and customer relations training. The remaining 130 clients would be considered as the comparison group (control).

However, given the busy schedules of the firm owners’, we assume to get a 65% up take rate which is average to most of the previous studies (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012). In addition, due to non-response, especially in the control group we estimate to experience about 35% attrition rate.

We shall, therefore overestimate the baseline sample size -that is to say include more 46 persons in the each study group as illustrated in Table 2 below. In total, We shall conduct interviews among 528 clients (176 clients in each group).

The MDE for the study would be obtained by utilizing the formula indicated below.

$$\delta = (t_1 t_2)\sigma_y \sqrt{\frac{1}{\hat{\rho}(1 - \hat{\rho})n}}$$

Where

- $\delta$ = Minimum detectable effect
- $t_1$ = t-value corresponding to the desired significance level of the test (1.96)
- $t_2$ = t-value corresponding to the desired power of the design (0.80)
- $\sigma_y$ = Standard deviation of the SMEs revenue (0.27)
- $\hat{\rho}$ = Proportion of the study that is randomly assigned to receive the skills training (0.25)
- $n$ = Sample size (130)

Also, 700 customers (3 per firm) will be surveyed. In addition, 14 in-depth interviews will be carried out among customers (2 customers per sector).

Baseline surveys will be conducted among firm owners and customers to the respective firms prior to project intervention. Initial follow up surveys shall be conducted after one year to assess the influence of the training on both firm owners’ and customers.

### Table 2: Sample size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Ideal Target sample size (SEP Clients)</th>
<th>Expected sample size</th>
<th>Target Sample Customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treatment 1 (T1): Business management skills only</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Treatment 2 (T2): Business management skills + cognitive skills + non-cognitive</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. Power Calculations (max. 400 words)

Use the information above to compute power calculations for your evaluation. Explain how many units you will use to estimate the impact of the program. In order to conduct proper power calculations please consult Duflo et al. (2007), 3ie manual (2016) and List et al. (2010).

For power calculation, We shall consider three parameters i) Power, ii) Minimum detectable effect size (MDE), and iii) Sample size using the formula indicated and illustrated above. We shall calculate power for both the estimated impact between control and T1 and control verses T2, given two treatment arms and control group.

We plan to consider minimum detectable effect (MDE) at 80%; this is a common level of power while calculating sample size in social sciences (3ie manual, 2016). According to McKenzie and Woodruff, (2012), interventions with both genders with individual randomization indicate MDE ranging from 6.5 to 57 with 0.14 and 0.27 lowest and highest SD. We intend to estimate MDE equivalent to 0.20 (increase in sales), which is a reasonable effect change within a year (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012).

Given 80% power, we require a sample size of 15 clients in each treatment arm to detect at least a MDE equivalent to 0.20 (increase in revenue) of 0.14 standard deviation to measure the difference between T1 and Control, which is indicated business training intervention with only two study arm (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012).

McKenzie and Woodruff (2012) indicate that Bruhn and Zia (2012) found SD 0.27 in a study that included three groups. Referring to SD 0.27 with power at 80%, we can be able to detect MDE equivalent to 0.20 with a sample of 130 clients in each group to measure the impact of the training intervention between T2 and control group.

3ie manual (2016), indicate that studies consider the largest sample size derived from calculating sample size for the different treatment impact in determining sample size for a study with three study groups. Considering rule of thumb we shall require a sample of 390 SEP clients to detect MDE 0.20 of 0.27 SD to measure the difference between each treatment group and the control.

As earlier noted in section 2.2, other parameters of interest would be the up take rate and attrition.

We calculate for uptake rate using the formula below

\[
\frac{1}{(C-S)^2}
\]

Where

C = Compliance to attend the training among clients selected for treatment

S = Compliance among the group (not to invited or self-select to attend the training)
We shall consider 65% up take rate among treatment group, which is an average according to McKenzie and Woodruff (2012). That will increase our sample by only 0.2%. We assume high (90%) compliance among the control group, given business people busy schedules. Also the sample will be overestimated by 35% to cater for attrition.

2.4. **Baseline (max. 50 words)**
Do you plan to collect baseline data yourself? Yes □ No □

If not, explain why. Remember that baseline data correspond to information collected before any experimental unit is treated, i.e. before the start of the intervention for your study sample.

Insert your text here

2.5. **First follow-up (max. 50 words)**
How long after the treatment starts are you planning to collect the first follow-up data? Describe the data collection technique for the treatment and the control group (self-assessment through a survey, observational measure by enumerators, institutional records such as bank records or tax records, etc.)

We plan to collect data for the first follow up surveys one year after conducting the skills training to assess the influence of the training on business and loan performance. Utilizing the monthly information, an assessment will be conducted six months after offering the training to track progress.

2.6. **Second follow-up**
Do you plan to conduct a second follow-up? Yes □ No □
SECTION II – CAPACITY BUILDING

1. List of team members

Fill the required information for all team members starting with team leader. Note that PEP favours gender-balanced teams, composed of one senior (or experienced) researcher supervising a group of junior researchers, including at least 50% female researchers, all contributing substantively to the research project. (Each listed member must post an up-to-date CV in their profile on the PEP website – refer to “How to submit a proposal”).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex (M,F)</th>
<th>Highest education level &amp; country</th>
<th>Field of expertise</th>
<th>Affiliations (working institution)</th>
<th>Nationalities (all nationalities)</th>
<th>Main country of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aisha Nansamba</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Msc Population and Reproductive Health</td>
<td>Labour Economics - Health Economics - Behavioural Economics - Leading BRAC research teams to evaluate Social programs using RCTs and quasi experimental approaches of various programmes of BRAC in Liberia, &amp; Uganda - Evaluating programs using Panel data. - Data analysis using stata (Aisha has analysed over 10 data sets using stata software). - Research Methods (The researcher has applied both qualitative and quantitative methods since 2009)</td>
<td>BRAC, Liberia</td>
<td>Ugandan</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Location</td>
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</table>
| Fahn Meaka        | 31  | M      | Bachelors of Business Administration in Management | - One year's experience training enumerators, field supervision and handling logistics, of over 5 surveys of BRAC programmes  
- Knowledge and practice of Survey programming using Survey CTO software on electronic devices (phones, tablets) 
- Research methods | BRAC, Liberia  | Liberian      | Liberia  |
| Female (To be recruited) | 27-35 | F      | Bachelors of Business Administration in Management or Development studies or Social sciences | - One year's experience engaging in survey data collection or supervision  
- Knowledge about electronic data collection  
- Knowledge about software programming  
- Experience managing teams  
- Good interpersonal relations | | Liberian | Liberia  |
2. Expected capacity building

Describe the research capacities that team members (and potentially their affiliated institutions) are expected to build through their participation in this project.

This is an important aspect in the evaluation of proposals and should be presented with detail. What techniques, literature, theories, tools, etc. will the team and their institutions learn (acquire in practice) or deepen their knowledge of? How will these skills help team members in their career development? What is the current state of knowledge of each team members in regard to the project you are proposing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Benchmark and expected capacity building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aisha Nansamba</td>
<td>Ms Aisha is the Co PI for the evaluation of Skills for youth employment project in Uganda. The project is currently being implemented by BRAC Uganda in partnership with Institute for Fiscal studies (IFS) London. The study intends to; To understand the relative importance of cognitive and non-cognitive skills in determining the labor market outcomes of young workers. Aisha has been leading BRAC research teams to Social programs using Randomised Control trials and quasi experimental approaches (design, randomization, monitoring implementation and impact assessment) of various programmes of BRAC in Liberia, &amp; Uganda. Independent Evaluation and Research Cell (IERC) of BRAC Liberia has been working with highly experienced academics from UCL and Institute of fiscal studies (Prof Imran Rasul, and Vittorio Bassi) to develop the research proposal. In addition, Aisha has experience in evaluating programs using Panel data and performing data analysis using stata (Aisha has analysed over 10 data sets using stata software). Aisha has applied research Methods during the implementation of several research projects (The researcher has applied both qualitative and quantitative methods since 2009 on over 10 surveys). Furthermore, engagement in report writing (The researcher has written so far eight scientific reports). On the other hand, Aisha has inadequate skills in writing extremely high quality papers. In addition, the researcher has had no publication accomplished so far. The researcher envisions enhancing skills about RCT design, econometric analysis, research findings interpretation and report writing for publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahn</td>
<td>One year’s experience training enumerators, field supervision and handling logistics, of over 5 surveys of BRAC programmesJeff has knowledge and practiced survey programming using Survey CTO software on electronic devices (phones, tablets)The researcher also has knowledge and has been engaged in the implementation both qualitative and quantitative methods, especially quasi experimental design. However, Jeff has not had hands on Evaluating Social programs using pure Randomised Control trial approach. The researcher will get the opportunity to learn about every small detail of designing an RCT, implementing and monitoring an RCT, data management and analysis, as well as engagement in report writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Aisha, Fahn and New recruit | The Independent Evaluation and Research Cell (IERC) of BRAC Liberia has been consulting with highly experienced academics from UCL and Institute of fiscal studies (Prof Imran Rasul, and Vittorio Bassi) to develop the research proposal given our past working relations in Uganda. However, the academicians’ role would only be limited to offering minimal technical support.

For the past one year, the team has been engaged in designing and implementing 4 quasi experimental evaluations with these IERC Uganda and Sierra Leone. This experience of engaging the national staff in the implementation and the design of these experiments has helped us to learn about RCT methodology and project specific literature. On the other hand, we have not had hands on Evaluating Social programs using pure Randomised Control trials approach in Liberia, enough exposure to perform thorough data analysis and writing extremely high quality papers, especially by the national staff. We very much envisage learning more about every small detail of designing an RCT, econometric analysis and interpretations of findings. |
Add comments and describe institutional capacity building if applicable.

The study shall entail monthly data capturing from the selected firm owners. We plan to train Programme staff (Credit officers) to engage in data collection. We anticipate that this will enhance the Programme staff ability to capture administrative data.

Indicate which specific tasks each team member would carry out in executing the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Task and contribution to the project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Aisha Nansamba  | - Lead the design of the research study  
|                 | - Lead the design of the survey tools  
|                 | - Engage in training and managing field supervisors and enumerators  
|                 | - Coordinate implementation of research projects (data collection, data cleaning, and data analysis).  
|                 | - Participate in writing research reports  
|                 | - Coordinate with donor, research and program partners in planning, budgeting, implementing, data analysis and reporting of study results.  
|                 | - Budget, plan and manage project funds  
|                 | - Mentor the project staffs’ about research procedures  |
| Jeff Meaka      | - Participate in re/design of the research study  
|                 | - Participate in the design of the survey tools  
|                 | - Engage in surveys programming using surveyCTO  
|                 | - Lead training and managing field supervisors and enumerators  
|                 | - Participate in data management (supervise/monitor data collection, data cleaning, and data analysis).  
|                 | - Lead communications with national research partners  
|                 | - Participate in writing research reports  
|                 | - Manage the project logistics  |
| New recruit     | - Participate in the design of the survey tools  
|                 | - Lead surveys programming using surveyCTO  
|                 | - Engage in training and managing field supervisors and enumerators  
|                 | - Lead survey programming using survey CTO software  
|                 | - Participate in data management (supervise/monitor data collection, data cleaning, and data analysis).  |
3. List of past, current or pending projects in related areas involving team members

Name of funding institution, title of project, list of team members involved. This includes funding from other sources for the current project and for projects related to the current project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of funding institution</th>
<th>Title of project</th>
<th>Team members involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DFID/IZA</td>
<td>Asymmetric Information on the Skills of Workers and Matching in the Labor Market: Evidence from Uganda</td>
<td>Imran Rasul, Vittorio Bassi, Aisha Nansamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>Improving life skills of adolescents using CSE Curriculum for Out-of-School Children and Young People in Liberia (Currently at the pretesting stage).</td>
<td>Aisha Nansamba, Kokulo Lowubahsumo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novo Foundation</td>
<td>Enhancing Livelihoods and life skills of Adolescent Girls: An Assessment of BRAC ELA Pilot Program in Liberia</td>
<td>Aisha Nansamba, Kokulo Lowubahsumo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>Psychosocial support influence on EVD survivors and orphans wellbeing and community attitudes and perceptions</td>
<td>Aisha Nansamba, Kokulo Lowubahsumo, Yarkpazuo, P. Lawuubahsumo, Fahm Meaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Impact Assessment of the Project on Increasing Food Security in Rural Liberia through Livestock</td>
<td>James W Khakshi, Aisha Nansamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Quasi experimental evaluation of BRAC Liberia’s community health promoter (CHP)</td>
<td>Aisha Nansamba, Kokulo Lowubahsumo, Dr. Jenipher Twebaze Musoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEGAL Family Foundation (SFF)</td>
<td>Randomized evaluation of BRAC Uganda’s Adolescent health promoter (AHP) programme</td>
<td>Aisha Nansamba, Dennis Sundo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MasterCard Foundation</td>
<td>Randomized evaluation of BRAC Uganda community health promoter (CHP)</td>
<td>Aisha Nansamba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION III – POLICY ENGAGEMENT
1. Policy context and needs

Describe the specific policy issues or needs that your research aims to address; how your potential outcomes and findings may be used in policy making? Please be as precise as possible, indicating specific current or prospective policies and the specific contributions your research would make.

Also, justify timing of your research in terms of policy and socioeconomic needs and context – e.g. reference to existing, planned or potential policies at the national, regional or local level; specific political context; international examples of similar policy problem or solution, etc.

As earlier noted (Ref to Section 1.2), in order to enhance the sector's performance, the MSME Division together with its partners already trained 50 firm owners in areas related to customer service, business planning, access to finance, procurement, marketing and accounting services during 2014, among other interventions (GOL, 2014). The government of Liberia thus has a strong interest in understanding how to best enhance business performance through business training interventions.

As highlighted in Section 1.2, the Ebola outbreak was characterized by a dramatic reduction and aversion towards social interactions at all level of society. Yet interacting with customers is an important part of the daily operations of typical MSME owners in the retail or service sectors. Therefore, improving management skills, and in particular customer care skills, seems a particularly promising avenue to foster firms’ profitability and productivity in a post-disaster country like Liberia.

Discussions with Mr Alasdair Fraser (former IGC country Economist) confirmed the alignment of our proposed research project with the priorities of other research institutions, such as the IGC, on fostering firms’ entrepreneurship and productivity. Through Mr. Samuel W. Jacobs, the Director capacity Development and Performance Monitoring (SBA), the Assistant Minister for Small Business Administration (Hon. Manu Kamara) has been briefed about our research prospectus. Both the Honourable Minister and the Director acknowledged the need for skills training, to enhance the firm owners’ business knowledge and management skills.

1.1. Consultations to date

List all (past) consultations with potential research users (e.g. policy makers or stakeholders) that have helped define your research question, and/or informed you of the specific policy context described above. Include a list of names, institutions and email addresses (add rows when needed).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samuel W. Jacobs (MR)</td>
<td>Director Capacity Development and Performance Monitoring (Small Business Administration)</td>
<td>Ministry of Commerce and Industry</td>
<td><a href="mailto:whodokweh@gmail.com">whodokweh@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapan Kumar Karmaker</td>
<td>Managing Director, Microfinance Limited, BRAC, International</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:tapan.kk@brac.net">tapan.kk@brac.net</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.2. Identify target audiences

Identify potential users of your research findings, including policy makers, advisors and other key stakeholders. Provide a list of institutions and, whenever possible, specific individuals to be targeted for effective policy influence. Please also indicate whether you have already made contacts within the institutions (add rows when needed).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Contacted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samuel W. Jacobs (MR)</td>
<td>Director Capacity Development and Performance Monitoring (Small Business Administration)</td>
<td>Ministry of Commerce and Industry</td>
<td><a href="mailto:whodokweh@gmail.com">whodokweh@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapan Kumar Karmaker</td>
<td>Managing Director, Microfinance Limited, West Africa</td>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tapan.kk@brac.net">tapan.kk@brac.net</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarso Sayghe</td>
<td>Deputy Director General Training</td>
<td>Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jarsosayghe@lipa.gov.lr">jarsosayghe@lipa.gov.lr</a> / <a href="mailto:jjsaygbe.lipa@gmail.com">jjsaygbe.lipa@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David K. Sureh</td>
<td>Academic Registrar</td>
<td>LIPA</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Dkirleeswen@yahoo.com">Dkirleeswen@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3. Define outreach and engagement strategy

How, from proposal design to the dissemination of your research results, will you consult and communicate with these users to both gather their inputs and keep them informed of your project, in order to increase chances of research uptake? You can refer to PEP’s research communications strategy.
and guidance to have a better idea of what is expected in terms of activities for policy outreach and dissemination.

As earlier noted (Ref Section 1.2), we intend to organise a workshop with the various stakeholders; firm owners, policy makers before running the baseline surveys and the pilot implementation. That will help us to finalize the survey tools, as well as to gather more insights related to organizing the skills training. A dissemination workshop will be organized when we shall have the first follow up findings ready, so as to inform the various stakeholders about the projects initial impact.

We have had meetings with policy makers, and also plan to continue to schedule such meetings, so as to give the project.

The ministry of Commerce and industry has a technical working group. The working group has platform of several stakeholders who meet on a monthly basis to discuss matters related to MSMEs. The project’s updates can therefore be communicated, then.

1.4. **Outline your preliminary dissemination strategy**

Identify potential and relevant communication channels (e.g. direct stakeholder meetings, conferences, media/press, web platforms, etc.) through which you will be able, or attempt, to communicate and disseminate your research and research findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Skills for firms performance: Initial workshop</td>
<td>BRAC, Liberia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly meetings</td>
<td>Technical Working group</td>
<td>Ministry of Commerce and Industry</td>
<td><a href="mailto:whodokweh@gmail.com">whodokweh@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly meetings</td>
<td>Country Management meetings (CMT)</td>
<td>BRAC, International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tapan.kk@brac.net">tapan.kk@brac.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel W. Jacobs (MR)</td>
<td>Director Capacity Development and Performance Monitoring (Small Business Administration)</td>
<td>Ministry of Commerce and Industry</td>
<td><a href="mailto:whodokweh@gmail.com">whodokweh@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapan Kumar Karmaker (MR)</td>
<td>Managing Director, Microfinance Limited, BRAC, West Africa</td>
<td>BRAC, International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tapan.kk@brac.net">tapan.kk@brac.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarso Sayghe (MR)</td>
<td>Deputy Director</td>
<td>Liberia Institute of</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Jarsosayghe@lipa.gov.lr">Jarsosayghe@lipa.gov.lr</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outline your preliminary dissemination strategy. Note that PEP expects grantees to disseminate information about their research work and (expected) outcomes throughout the project cycle, and not only after publication.

The Division of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises engages in skills and knowledge development. The division will therefore be consulted during survey design and during the design of the pilot skills training course content. Results will be disseminated through workshops to stakeholders from MSME Division, financial institutions and firm owners. Work in progress and findings will also be presented to BRAC Microfinance Limited management in Liberia as well as in other countries in Africa and Asia where BRAC Microfinance operates.

Written research will be disseminated in various ways to reach a wide-range of audience. Research outputs will be provided at various levels of technicality, ranging from academic journal articles to policy briefs. These outputs will be available on BRAC websites. As with past projects the research teams have been involved in, these updates can also be posted through research networks, such as University College London (UCL), Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), JPAL and IPA, where they will come to the attention of other academics, be included in "policy briefcases" that summarize the findings from similar groups of intervention, and be presented to policy-makers.

In terms of oral dissemination, research findings can be shared through academic conferences and seminars. The research team members have extensive experience of giving research seminars to audiences throughout the world, including in LICs and to non-academic audiences. We will present at events organized by non-academic users, and will aim to publicize our work through the media. Reaching out to policymakers in developing countries will be helped by our involvement in research networks such as the IFS. Members of the research team have working relations with teams that have experience in organizing special sessions at major economics conferences, such as at the annual meetings of the European Economic Association, Royal Economic Society and American Economic Association, where such special sessions are designed to disseminate research findings to non-specialists in non-academics.

SECTION IV – OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Describe any ethical, social, gender or environmental issues or risks that should be noted in relation to your proposed research project.
We intend to gather responses from the SEP clients. Programme staff might wish to give priority to the most royal clients, or coerce some clients to participate in the training. Either way, the clients who will not be included in the study might develop negative attitudes towards the programme. We intend to let every client have an equal chance to participate by randomly assigning the target study population to participate in the survey through a lottery.

The researchers plan work with LIPA to design and deliver the training to the SMES, as well as with a psychologist to allow customization of training content and measurement of the soft skills to the Liberian context. The two partners would wish to serve as co-Authors to the main research output. We would make the roles clear to the teams to avoid role conflict.

Also, LIPA might wish to utilise the training materials during other trainings during the project timeline. Property rights would be discussed and documented prior to signing of the partnership agreement(s).

1.1. Ethical approval

Does your institution have an Institutional Review Board in order to provide Ethical Approval for conducting the RCT?

Yes [ ] No [✓]

If yes, you will be asked to submit the relevant documentation when needed. If not, the project will be reviewed by PEP’s ethics committee.

1.2. References and plagiarism

Applicants should be very careful to avoid any appearance of plagiarism. Any text of three or more consecutive words that is borrowed from another source should be carefully contained between quotation marks with a reference to the source (including page number) immediately following the quotation. It is essential that we be able to distinguish what you have written yourself from what you have borrowed from elsewhere.

Note also that copying large extracts (such as several paragraphs) from other texts is not a good practice, and is usually unacceptable. For a fuller description of plagiarism, please refer, for example, to the following website:

- [http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism](http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism)

PEP will be using software to detect cases of plagiarism.

**SECTION V – Timeline and Budget**

1. Budget allocation
PEP will provide a closed budget of $100,000 US to the selected teams to undertake an experimental evaluation. Provide a detailed budget allocation\(^1\) of the evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Amount (US Dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research staff</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field staff</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International and local airfare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local ground transportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsistence (hotel and per diems)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills Training for firm owners</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm owners Training (Material development, and facilitation)</td>
<td>8,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>6,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients facilitation (incentive)</td>
<td>13,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm baseline survey</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer baseline survey</td>
<td>12,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm follow up survey</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Follow up survey</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer time compensation</td>
<td>3,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis and dissemination</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>2,377.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Total</td>
<td>121,059.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>133,165.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)The psychologist will only be consulted to give his input during the tools designing, interpretation of result

Use the provided forms to illustrate your plan. The listed items are indicative; add any required explanation and items to the table. Remember to take into account overhead costs, withholding taxes and other expenses indirectly related to the research activity.

1.1. **Other funding sources**

Does your team have other sources of funding for this evaluation?

Yes [ ] No [ √ ]

---

\(^1\) Describe in detail data collection costs.
2. Timeline

All teams should complete their evaluation by late 2018. Use the provided forms to illustrate your timeline. The listed items are indicative; add any required explanation and items to the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AUG</td>
<td>SEPT</td>
<td>OCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders Workshop</td>
<td>IERC BRAC, BRAC MF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools development</td>
<td>IERC, BRAC, Psychologist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm Baseline</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer survey tool development &amp; Review</td>
<td>IERC, BRAC, Psychologist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Baseline</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary data management</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills training materials development</td>
<td>IERC BRAC, MF &amp; ELA Trainers Psychologist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm owners’ skills training</td>
<td>IERC BRAC, BRAC Cos, Trainers, Psychologist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline data management, analysis and reports writing</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly data capture</td>
<td>IERC, BRAC MF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm follow up</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer follow up</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data management and analysis and report writing</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up interim report and review</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final report</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Paper</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results Dissemination</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project updates</td>
<td>IERC BRAC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>