



Innovation Challenge

Information Pack for Applicants

Collaboration of Multinational Private Sector Companies operating in South Africa with Innovation Hubs



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Background

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) South Africa, Lesotho and Eswatini implements the SAVax programme (Vaccines for Africa: Roll-out and Production of Vaccines in South Africa). SAVax is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and co-funded by the European Union (EU). The programme supports the development of local manufacturing capacities in South Africa to improve access to quality, safe, effective, and affordable vaccines, medicines, and health technologies.

SAVax contributes directly to the implementation of the Team Europe Initiative on Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies in Africa (MAV+), while building on long-standing BMZ efforts to strengthen sustainable vaccine production and distribution in South Africa.

Despite South Africa's strong research base and scientific capabilities, the country's innovation ecosystem continues to face a significant disconnect between research institutions and industry. While substantial scientific knowledge and research outputs are generated, these do not always align with industry needs or market demand. Private sector investment in research and development (R&D) remains relatively limited, and the commercialization of intellectual property and research outputs is often slow and fragmented. As a result, innovation is frequently supply-driven rather than demand-led, reducing the uptake of new technologies, limiting industrial competitiveness, and constraining the broader socio-economic impact of research and innovation.

Addressing this gap requires stronger collaboration between academia, industry, entrepreneurs, and innovation support organizations. By fostering demand-driven innovation, strengthening pathways to commercialization, and creating opportunities for innovators to respond directly to industry challenges, South Africa can accelerate the development and adoption of locally relevant health technologies. Such collaboration is critical not only for strengthening the country's innovation ecosystem but also for advancing health security, economic growth, and sustainable industrial development.

To address this structural disconnect and unlock the potential of South Africa's innovation ecosystem, SAVax together with Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) and *Bayer, Boehringer Ingelheim, Merck, Sartorius, Thermo Fisher Scientific, and Siemens*

Healthineers, University of the Free State, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Wits Innovation Centre are launching the Innovation Challenge (IC), which is structured in such a way that will foster co-creation and ensure strong alignment with industry needs. **Together (DSTI, SAVax, Industry Partners, and Innovation Hubs), have jointly defined the challenge focus as Women's health in South Africa and beyond with a focus on two streams, (1) Biotechnologies and (2) Pharmaceuticals.** This collaborative model will ensure demand-driven, commercially relevant outcomes with clear pathways to real-world impact.

Roles and Responsibilities of Key Stakeholders

Each stakeholder plays a distinct role in supporting the design, implementation, evaluation, mentorship, and sustainability of the programme.

Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI)

The Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) serves as a strategic partner to the Innovation Challenge, providing oversight and ensuring alignment with South Africa's priorities in health innovation, industrial development, and inclusive economic growth. DSTI's involvement helps strengthen the relevance and sustainability of the initiative within the national innovation ecosystem. Representatives from DSTI may participate as observers during selected activities, including workshops, pitching sessions, and stakeholder engagement events.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

GIZ will coordinate the overall management and administration of the Innovation Challenge. Responsibilities include organizing workshops and information sessions, managing the application and selection process, coordinating communications with stakeholders, facilitating contracting and grant administration processes, and monitoring implementation progress. GIZ representatives will participate in the initial screening and eligibility assessment of applications.

Innovation Hubs and Academic/Research Partners

The participating innovation hubs and institutional partners will provide technical, entrepreneurial, and ecosystem support to shortlisted innovators and participating startups throughout the Innovation Challenge. Their contributions may include mentorship, technical guidance, innovation support services, business development assistance, incubation and acceleration support, access to specialized facilities and networks, and participation in technical evaluations where appropriate. By leveraging their expertise and resources, these

partners will help strengthen the development, validation, and commercialization potential of promising innovations.

Innovation hubs:

- Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)
- University of the Free State
- University of the Witwatersrand

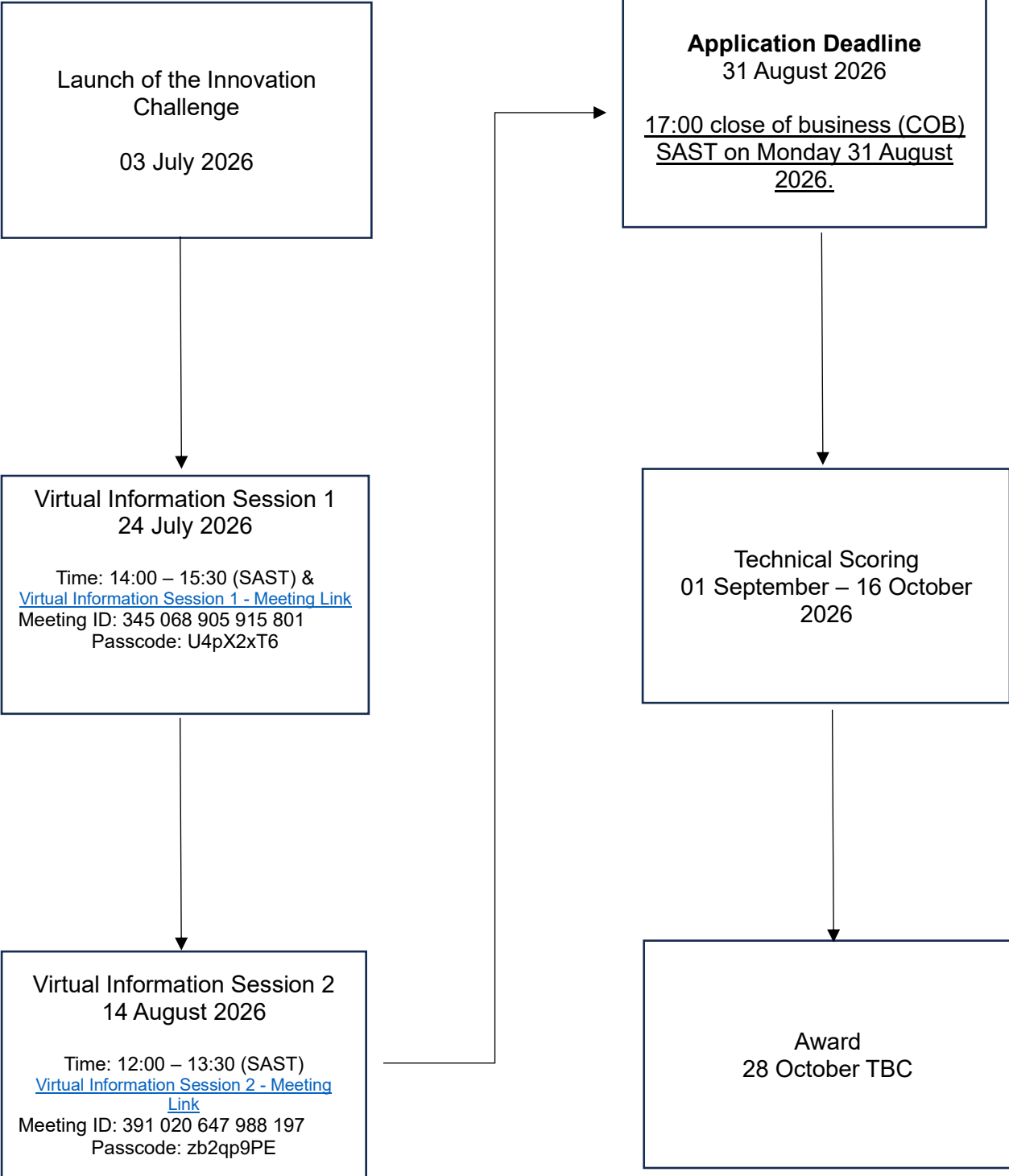
Private Sector Partners

Private sector partners will contribute industry expertise, technical insight, and market-oriented perspectives to the Innovation Challenge. Their participation is intended to ensure that proposed solutions address real-world challenges and are responsive to industry needs and market opportunities. Through their experience across the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical technology, and health innovation sectors, these partners will help strengthen the relevance, feasibility, scalability, and commercialization potential of innovative solutions. Private sector partners may also contribute to challenge definition, technical discussions, mentorship, knowledge sharing, and the evaluation of innovations where appropriate.

Private Sector Partners:

- Boehringer Ingelheim
- Siemens Healthineers
- Bayer
- Merck
- Sartorius
- Thermo Fisher Scientific

Process Milestones



Focus Areas & Scope

The Innovation Challenge **seeks innovative and scalable solutions to improve women's health in South Africa and beyond.** By linking industry-defined challenges with local innovation talent, the initiative aims to identify critical gaps, accelerate commercialization, strengthen entrepreneurship, and create sustainable impact in South Africa and beyond.

The challenge features two streams: **(1) Biotechnologies and (2) Pharmaceuticals.** One winner will be selected from each stream, with each receiving a **grant award of €75,000** to support their innovation.

Challenge statement - Biotechnologies: We are seeking innovative, scalable, and locally relevant solutions that address diagnostic screening to reduce the high disease burden of women in low- and middle-income countries.

Challenge statement - Pharmaceuticals: We are seeking innovative, scalable, and locally relevant pharmaceutical products and delivery solutions that improve access to affordable, effective therapies for women's health conditions in low- and middle-income countries.

Exclusion Criteria

Applications will be deemed ineligible and excluded from review if they are incomplete, submitted after the deadline, fall outside the scope of the Innovation Challenge, fail to meet applicant eligibility requirements, do not demonstrate a clear innovation component, present unacceptable ethical, legal, safety, or regulatory concerns, or lack sufficient information to enable technical assessment. GIZ SAVax reserves the right to exclude any application that does not align with the objectives of the Innovation Challenge.

Technical Scoring and Shortlisting

Technical Eligibility Requirements

After the application deadline all applications will be collated and screened for formal eligibility based on the following criteria.

Applications that are not eligible based on the criteria section below, will be excluded.

- Submit a fully completed application form by the stated deadline **(31.08.2026)**.
- Submit all supporting documents requested in the [Kobo Toolbox](#).
- Be one of the following:
 - A **start-up or small business** registered in South Africa and compliant with all applicable South African laws and regulations; or
 - An **independent research group or a research group** affiliated with an accredited academic or research institution.
- The proposed innovation or solution must align with the thematic focus areas of the Innovation Challenge (Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical).
- Applicants must own, co-own, or have the necessary rights to develop and present the proposed innovation.
- The applicant entity may not be a subsidiary of, or have tax liability in, Germany or any European Union member state.
- Applicants must declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest.
- Applicants must be willing and able to participate in Innovation Challenge activities, including workshops, mentoring sessions, pitch events, and reporting processes where applicable.
- Applicants may not be under liquidation, business rescue, or subject to any legal or regulatory restrictions that would prevent participation.

Technical Scoring

The following criteria will be utilized for the weighted assessment of proposals. Prospective recipients are encouraged to read the descriptions and guiding prompts in detail.

Impact: Relevance to Women's Health and Innovation (40%)

- The extent to which the proposed solution addresses a significant women's health need or challenge.
- Assessment of the extent to which the proposed solution integrates gender equality and inclusive practices, promotes diverse representation, addresses the needs of underrepresented or vulnerable groups, and demonstrates the potential for equitable and inclusive impact (Consideration of Gender Equality and Inclusion).

Commercial Viability: Scalability, Sustainability, Localization Potential & Feasibility (30%)

- The extent to which the solution supports local manufacturing, technology development, skills development, local sourcing, or strengthening of the South African health innovation ecosystem.
- The practicality and likelihood that the proposed solution can be successfully developed, implemented, and sustained within the proposed timeframe and available resources.
- The potential for the solution to expand beyond an initial pilot phase and achieve broader impact across communities, regions, or health systems. The likelihood that the solution can maintain impact over the long term, including operational, financial, environmental, and institutional sustainability considerations.

Accessibility & Affordability (30%)

- The extent to which the solution has the potential to improve access to healthcare services, technologies, or products, particularly for underserved or vulnerable populations or reduce costs

Project Selection

Final project selection will be determined based on a tallying of technical scores. This phase of the selection will be conducted by establishment of consensus amongst a committee of industry experts. If successful, letters will be distributed inviting prospective candidates to go through the commercial and legal suitability assessment (KEP).

Rules for the Innovation Challenge

General Provisions

The Recipient shall observe the principles of proper accounting in the implementation of the Project and ensure project-specific account settlement and documentation. The Recipient shall comply with the guidelines on financial processing.

Please refer in detail to financial requirements and procurement guidelines from GIZ. The budget submitted on the application form should mirror the [Budget Template](#). Both need to be submitted as part of the application. Additional resources, including the [Guidelines for Grant Recipients on the Financial Processing of Grant Agreements](#), can be found on the GIZ website related to [Financing](#).

The awarding of a grant is always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, unrealistic costs and/or ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead to modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant as a result of these corrections. It is therefore in the applicants' interest to provide a **realistic and cost-effective budget**. The total amount of financing cannot exceed EUR 75 000.

Eligible costs: For the implementation, the following costs are **eligible**. These should all be verifiable project-specific costs and not represent general company/initiative operating or other non-project specific costs:

- Staff costs
- External service
- Transport costs/travel expenses
- CO2 Compensation
- Procurement of materials and equipment
- Other costs/consumables
- Funds for direct support to third party beneficiaries (Not applicable for this Call)
- Fair shared costs (according to the Fair Shared Cost Model of the grant recipients)
- Administrative costs
- Forwarding of funds to third party recipients **(Not applicable for this Call)**

In particular, but not exclusively, the following costs are **ineligible**:

- Bonuses, provisions, reserves or non-remuneration related costs
- Duties, taxes and charges, including VAT, that are recoverable/deductible by the applicant
- Return of capital
- Debts and debt service charges
- Provision for losses, debts or potential future liabilities
- Costs of purchase of land or buildings

For the award and procurement of materials and equipment, construction services or other services (Procurements') to be financed as a whole or in part by the Grant, the Applicant shall comply with the provisions on procurement procedures as set out in the Procurement guidelines. Applicants are encouraged to review the [Guidelines for Grant Recipients on the Financial Processing of Grant Agreements](#), which can be found on the GIZ website related to [Financing](#).

Rights of Use

For the purpose of optimising business activities as set out in GIZ's Articles of Association and securing the work results for public-benefit purpose, the Applicant grants GIZ, free of charge, an irrevocable, simple, worldwide and transferable right of use to all work results which are created or procured in connection with implementation of the Project and financed wholly or partially out of the Grant, with particular regard to the reports produced pursuant to the Grant Agreement, studies and documents; GIZ is entitled to exercise this right of use without restrictions on time or content in fulfilment of its public-benefit purpose as stated in its articles of association. At the request of GIZ, the Applicant shall provide GIZ with a copy of the materials available. GIZ is entitled to grant third parties simple sub-rights of use free of charge in fulfilment of its public-benefit purpose as stated in its articles of association.

Visibility

The applicants must take all necessary steps to publicise the fact that the BMZ and European Union have financed the action as part of the GIZ SAVax programme and under the Team Europe Initiative MAV+. As far as possible, actions that are wholly or partially funded by the Grant must incorporate information and communication activities designed to raise the awareness of the results and the impact of this support.

Ethics Clauses and Code of Conduct

a) Absence of conflict of interest

The applicant must not be affected by any conflict of interest and must have no equivalent relation in that respect with other applicants or parties involved in the actions. Any attempt by an applicant to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the selection committee or the contracting authority during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating and comparing applications will lead to the rejection of its application. Any questions on the process, evaluation criteria or status of the application must be submitted to GIZ through savajointaction@giz.de.

b) Respect for human rights as well as environmental legislation and core labour standards

The applicant and its staff must comply with human rights. In particular and in accordance with the applicable act, applicants who have been awarded contracts must comply with the environmental legislation including multilateral environmental agreements, and with the core labour standards as applicable and as defined in the relevant International Labour Organisation conventions (such as the conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour).

c) Anti-corruption and anti-bribery

The applicant shall comply with all applicable laws and regulations and codes relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption. GIZ reserves the right to suspend or cancel project financing if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the execution of a contract. For the purposes of this provision, 'corrupt practices' are the offer of a bribe, gift, gratuity or commission to any person as an inducement or reward for performing or refraining from any act relating to the award of a contract or execution of a contract already concluded with the contracting authority.

d) Non-discrimination and Equal Opportunity

Applicants should ensure that all activities are implemented in a manner that promotes equality and prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristics. Applicants are encouraged to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in project design, implementation, and staffing.

e) Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)

Applicants must maintain a zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment. Appropriate safeguarding measures, reporting mechanisms, and procedures for addressing allegations must be in place throughout the implementation of the project.

f) Data Protection and Confidentiality

Applicants must comply with applicable data protection and privacy legislation. Any personal or sensitive data collected, stored, processed, or shared during the implementation of the project must be handled securely and only for legitimate project purposes.

g) Research Ethics and Regulatory Compliance

Where projects involve human participants, biological samples, health data, clinical research, or other regulated research activities, applicants must obtain all necessary ethical approvals and regulatory clearances before commencing such activities and comply with all applicable national and international regulations.

Project Templates

Below are details related to the project templates associated with the Innovation Challenge.

These include;

- Project proposal and application templates.
- Budget templates.

Project Proposal and Application

Project proposals and applications are to be submitted through the [Kobo Toolbox](#) platform. Please see description below about accessing and navigating the Kobo Toolbox platform.

There is a total of 6 sections to the application form which culminates in the project proposal. Please review the instructions carefully and ensure the appropriate supporting documentation are uploaded along with the completed application form.

1. Instructions
2. Applicant Details
3. Organisational Support
4. Project Details
5. Logical Framework Matrix
6. Commercial Suitability Assessment

Budget Template

The recipient must demonstrate sufficient cash flow capacity to provide its own financial contribution. Templates related to the financing of the project can be accessed from the links

below. The budget submitted on the application form should mirror the [Budget Template](#). Both need to be submitted as part of the application.

Additional resources, including the [Guidelines for Grant Recipients on the Financial Processing of Grant Agreements](#), can be found on the GIZ website related to [Financing](#).

Kobo Toolbox Instructions

1. **Signal Bars:** The signal bars indicate whether the form can be launched offline or not. Web forms are built to be able to collect data while you are offline, however, it is essential to visit the form URL with an internet connection before going offline. Once your form has been loaded and cached, you'll see the offline availability icon (empty "signal bars" and a check mark) in the top-left corner indicating that you can now access the form offline.
2. **Printer Icon:** The printer icon provides you access to print your form or save it as a PDF version. For this, press the printer icon and then select Destination (an appropriate printer connected to your device to print out your survey form or Save as PDF to save your survey form as a PDF).
3. **Save as Draft:** Use this feature to edit or update your records before submitting it to the KoboToolbox server. Once you have checked Save as Draft you will have an option to Save Draft. The draft record gets queued but does not sync with KoboToolbox server. To sync it with the server you will have to open the record from the queued list and uncheck Save as Draft and press Submit.
4. **Submit:** Press the Submit button if you have completed collecting information and wish to send the filled-up form to the KoboToolbox server. After pressing the Submit button, you will not have an option to edit the records on your device.
5. **Queued Records Counter:** The Queued Records Counter shows you the total number of records submitted and waiting to be uploaded to a server. The queued records are uploaded automatically in the background every 5 minutes when the web page is open, and an internet connection is available.

6. **Queue Records Pane:** Clicking the side button shows you the records that are available as drafts (which can still be edited) and finalized submitted records queued to be either uploaded to your server with an internet connection or exported as zip file as outlined in the [support article here](#).

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KoboToolbox

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Innovation Challenge: Women's Health

- ▶ **Instructions**
- ▶ **Applicant Details**
- ▶ **Organisational Support**
- ▶ **Project Details**
- ▶ **Logical Framework Matrix**
- ▶ **Commercial Suitability Assessment**

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Save Draft

Submit

FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)	
Question	Answer
How many grants will be awarded under this call?	GIZ intends to award up to two (2) grants through this Innovation Challenge. Each successful proposal may receive funding of up to EUR 75,000.
Can for-profit legal entities participate?	<p>Yes. For-profit legal entities are eligible to apply. However, grant awards and contracting are subject to an assessment of the applicant's commercial, administrative, legal, and technical capacity to successfully implement the proposed activities and achieve the agreed milestones.</p> <p>For-profit grant recipients may only recover actual costs incurred and only for activities that provide a public benefit.</p>
Where can the application documents be downloaded?	<p>All application documents can be downloaded from the following links:</p> <p>Innovation Challenge Application Form: The mandatory application template that must be completed in full and submitted as part of the proposal Kobo Toolbox.</p> <p>Budget Template: The required template for presenting the proposed project budget and financial information Innovation Challenge: CALL FOR APPLICATIONS GIZ</p>
Where should applications be submitted?	<p>All applications and supporting documentation must be submitted electronically through the Kobo Toolbox portal</p> <p>Applications submitted through any other channel will not be considered.</p>

Where can applicants' direct questions or requests for clarification?	All enquiries regarding the Innovation Challenge should be directed to savaxjointaction@giz.de .
Can the proposed action receive funding from other donors or grant programmes?	<p>Yes. Co-financing is permitted. For-profit partners participating in the Innovation Challenge are encouraged to support proposed solutions through financial contributions, in-kind support, technical expertise, mentorship, access to facilities, or other forms of collaboration, where appropriate.</p> <p>Applicants should clearly disclose any additional sources of funding in their proposal.</p>
Is the procurement of goods, equipment, services, or works an eligible activity?	<p>Yes. Procurement of goods (including equipment), services, and works is eligible where such procurement directly contributes to achieving the objectives, activities, and milestones described in the proposal.</p> <p>Procurement should not constitute the sole activity under the proposed action. All procurement financed through the grant must be conducted in accordance with applicable GIZ procurement policies, procedures, and financial guidelines.</p>
Is the forwarding of funds to third parties an eligible activity?	<p>No. The forwarding or re-granting of grant funds to third parties is not an eligible activity under this Innovation Challenge. Grant recipients are responsible for the direct implementation of the approved activities and may not transfer grant funds to third parties for the purpose of further distribution.</p> <p>However, recipients may procure goods, services, or consultancy support from third parties where these are necessary for the implementation of the approved action and are procured in accordance with GIZ procurement rules and procedures.</p>
How will Value Added Tax (VAT) be treated?	<p>Applicants must declare whether VAT incurred on goods and services purchased under the grant is recoverable or deductible under applicable tax legislation.</p> <p>VAT may be reimbursed only if all of the following conditions are met:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The invoice clearly indicates the VAT amount.- The invoice is issued in the name of the Recipient.- The underlying goods or services are subject to VAT in accordance with applicable legislation.- The Recipient is not entitled to recover or deduct the VAT incurred.- VAT will not be reimbursed if the Recipient is generally entitled to claim an input VAT deduction but has not fulfilled the administrative or legal requirements necessary to do so.- Applicants are encouraged to seek advice from a qualified tax professional if there is uncertainty regarding VAT eligibility.
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