

Request for proposals: IWMI website redesign

Annexure A – Terms of Reference (TOR)

ABOUT IWMI

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is an international, research-for-development organization that works with governments, civil society and the private sector to solve water problems in developing countries and scale up solutions. Through partnership, IWMI combines research on the sustainable use of water and land resources, knowledge services and products with capacity strengthening, dialogue and policy analysis to support implementation of water management solutions for agriculture, ecosystems, climate change and inclusive economic growth. Headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, IWMI is a CGIAR Research Center with offices in 15 countries and a global network of scientists operating in more than 55 countries.

IWMI focuses on three strategic priorities: Mitigating water risks; Overcoming global inequalities; and Managing water sustainably. We use four transformation levers for action: Water data science; Water governance; Gender, youth and social inclusion; and Scaling, finance and investment.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is seeking proposals from forward-thinking web development agencies for the redesign of our website, www.iwmi.org.

Our website serves as a primary communication tool, providing information about our work and the issues we care about. It is a platform to attract new opportunities and to share our work with partners around the world.

Our website is built on WordPress and uses a custom theme. It was last refreshed in 2019.

As IWMI continues to grow and evolve, **a website redesign is needed** to better reflects our strategic focus, positioning and brand, scale and ambitions, value proposition, offerings, and values.

The **goal** of this redesign is to create an attractive, high-quality and user-friendly website that effectively promotes our work.

The **objectives** of this redesign are:

- Refresh the visual look, so the website feels contemporary and forward-looking.
- Have a consistent design system across the site.
- Make the website stand out from other organizations in the sector.
- Improve user experience (UX) and usability, particularly navigation, content discovery and site search.
- Improve page load speed and performance.
- Increase traffic (from both traditional SEO and Generative AI searches) and engagement (session length, page events, page views, etc.).
- Increase conversion rates and KPIs: publication downloads, contact clicks, email marketing subscriptions, etc.
- Enable content editors to have flexibility and easy access to visually powerful elements.
- Contribute to shifting the perception of IWMI beyond research, and the relevance of our work in generating evidence, creating innovations, supporting effective policies, and energizing networks.
- Showcase impact by highlighting success stories and flagship projects.

After the redesign, the website will continue to be maintained by our in-house Web team.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Primary audiences

- Funders, development agencies, multilateral development banks, foundations, and philanthropic organizations.
- National and subnational governments, particularly in the Global South.
- Researchers in universities and academic organizations, particularly in the Global South.

Secondary audiences

- Communities, user groups, and service providers.
- Civil society and non-government organizations (CSOs and NGOs).
- Private sector associations, venture capitalists, business incubators, impact accelerators.
- International and regional organizations.
- CGIAR network.
- Young people engaged in social issues.
- Middle- and high-income adults interested in science and the environment.

Our audiences are diverse and located in different subregions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

They will visit our website through referrals — such as direct links, email marketing, or social media — and searches.

TECHNICAL SPECS

Platform

- The website must be built on our existing CMS: WordPress.

Hosting and security

- Hosted on our existing server infrastructure: WP Engine.
- Ensure compatibility with the current hosting environment, including PHP, MySQL versions, and server configurations.
- Follow secure coding practices to prevent vulnerabilities like XSS or SQL injection.
- Use HTTPS, regular backups, and a firewall to safeguard site data and functionality.

Theme

- The WordPress theme should preserve customizations and allow for future in-house development and scalability.
- If based on a popular commercial theme, it should use a child theme, to ensure compatibility with future base-theme updates. If based on an open-source starter theme, the approach should be justified and easily allow future in-house upgrades.
- The theme will include templates for 4 page types, 8 post categories and custom post types, and 7 archive and search pages.

Design system and visual styles

- Must have a comprehensive design system, including color palette, typography, iconography, and defined styles for all core UI elements: body width, navigation menus, breadcrumbs, headers, headlines of all levels, body text, photos (normal, full-width, parallax, right- and left-aligned), photo captions, photo galleries, accordions, tabs, dynamic content, search fields, filters, forms, CTA buttons, pill buttons, pull quotes, photos, metadata boxes, featured call-to-action, etc.
- Consistent and streamlined dynamic content across the site, with a few style options: grid, wide horizontal blocks, text-only list, etc.
- Streamlined CSS styles across the site, consistent with the design system, and structured/named intuitively for content editors, so they can use them within the standard WordPress editing tools. Easy to iterate and update by the in-house Web team.
- Follows UX/UI best practices for positioning of elements on the page (header, headline, breadcrumb, hero image, child-page navigation, etc.) based on latest evidence and research.
- Clean, modern, visually appealing design that aligns with IWMI's brand identity.

Content management

- The design must provide website users with a frictionless experience: easy navigation, intuitive content discovery (explore topics, countries, projects, related posts, etc.), and relevant dynamic content.
- Must consider the existing taxonomy and sitemap of the site.
- Templates must be intuitive and easy to use for content editors.
- Media management supports adaptive image scaling and metadata preservation.

Content blocks

- The theme must exclusively leverage the native WordPress Block Editor (formerly known as Gutenberg), without relying on third-party page builders like Elementor or WPBakery.
- Any new blocks must be powerful and flexible, while keeping the interface and field names in the backend intuitive and self-explanatory — so content editors can use them without the need for inductions.

Plugins

- The theme/design and blocks should not rely on plugins, particularly for basic functions.
- Evaluate what plugins are essential. When not essential, recommend removal or replacements.
- The website should maintain compatibility with essential plugins and integrations, including analytics, forms, and Publications search.

Performance metrics

- Optimized loading times to achieve a Google PageSpeed Insights score of 90+ for both desktop and mobile.
- Clean up any unnecessary code, particularly redundant CSS styles and JS libraries.
- Optimized practices for caching, CDN, image optimization, minified CSS and/or SASS/SCSS, deferred JS, inline loading, etc.
- Prefetch linked posts/pages, and preload fonts and other key elements.
- Conduct stress tests to ensure the website performs efficiently under high traffic loads.

SEO and GEO

- Clean and semantic HTML, proper heading hierarchy (H1, H2, etc.), metadata management, schema markup, and structured data for enhanced search engine visibility.
- Ensure URLs remain clean and readable, with redirects set up for any necessary structural changes.

Responsive design

- Fully responsive design for best user experience and consistent functionality across devices (mobile, tablet, and desktop) and screen sizes.
- Tested for printing or saving to PDF.
- Tested for browsers' dark mode.
- If necessary to use CSS frameworks (like Bootstrap, SASS or Tailwind), avoid creating dependencies that hinder scalability and future in-house upgrades.

Accessibility

- Optimized for accessibility (with ambition to adhere to WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards), ensuring compatibility with screen readers, keyboard navigation, and assistive technologies.

A more detailed brief with further details on these specs and examples will be shared with the selected agency.

Please note some of these specs are already implemented on the website.

PROJECT SCOPE

The selected vendor will be responsible for:

- Theme selection/development and customization.
- User experience (UX) and user interface (UI) design.
- Testing the theme on existing content.
- User testing of wireframes and design mockups.
- Deployment, migration to production site, and launch (with support from IWMI's Web team).
- Documentation and handover.
- Revisions and updates, within an agreed hourly support package.

IWMI will be responsible for:

- Providing all site content.
- Content strategy.
- Selecting photos and graphics for pages.
- Advising on organization of templates and cornerstone pages.
- Technical support during deployment to production site, migration, and launch.
- Updating pages to any new content blocks.

DELIVERABLES

The deliverables for this project include:

- **Detailed project plan** with timelines and milestones.
- **Analysis of the current website**, considering the technical setup and design. This will include evaluating the existing plugins (see *Technical Specs* for more details). The agency will also suggest a tentative approach, indicating the stack and frameworks they plan to use for design and development. IWMI will provide a detailed website redesign brief and existing website documentation, which the agency can corroborate and/or expand upon.
- **Initial design concepts**. The agency will present at least three options, including mockups of a few key web sections and content types, for feedback. They will represent differentiated visual directions and design approaches. They will be based on IWMI's input during the Discovery phase, including key features and reference websites from analogous organizations.
- **Wireframes and design mockups**. Based on the selected concept, the agency will prepare prototypes of pages/posts, with functional versions of key elements, for IWMI's review and approval.
- A fully functional, tested, and deployed **website** with the agreed features (see the *Technical Specs* section for an overview). The new WordPress theme/s must include templates for:
 - 4 page types: Homepage, page, page with children, page full width.
 - 8 post categories and custom post types: News, Features, Blogs, Multimedia, People profiles, Project profiles, Data profiles, Events.
 - 7 archive and search pages: posts archives, author archives, People archives (directory), Projects archive (directory), Data archive (directory), Publications search, site-wide search results.
- **WordPress Blocks for common elements**. Please consider 5 blocks for the quotation. The exact number and specs will be agreed during the Discovery phase, based on the analysis and proposed design approach.
- **Source code and associated files**, including editable files for any graphic elements and templates.
- **Website documentation and training materials**. Well-documented code for any theme developed as well as any custom functionality or plugins. Clear design style book for headlines, text, photos and other elements. Suggestions for future upgrades.
- **Support package**, for a limited number of hours/days, for post-launch maintenance and upgrades.

BUDGET

We are seeking proposals in the range of US \$15,000–45,000.

Actual budget will depend on the final scope and proposed solutions.

Proposals should include a breakdown of costs for each phase of the project.

TIMELINE

- RFP Release Date: November 12, 2025
- Question period: November 12 to EOD November 25, 2025
- Response deadline: EOD December 5, 2025
- Vendor selection: January 16, 2026
- Project kickoff: February 2, 2026
 - Discovery
 - Design
 - Development
 - Testing
 - Deployment
- Desired website launch date: by July 6, 2026

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please submit your proposal electronically by EOD December 5, 2025. Proposals received after this date will not be considered.

Offers must be **submitted by email** to g.halvitige@cgiar.org.

They must be addressed to:

Head of Finance
International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
127 Sunil Mawatha
Battaramulla 10120, Sri Lanka

The submission must include a cover letter on letterhead, including the bidder's name, address, email, and telephone number, with signature and official stamp.

IWMI will be accepting questions on this RFP until EOD November 25, 2025. For questions, please contact Surani Liyanaarachchi (s.liyanaarachchi@cgiar.org), who will forward your request to the relevant person.

Proposals must include:

- A brief **introduction to your agency/company**, including experience and expertise in web design and development, UX/UI, and related areas.
- **Examples of at least three similar websites** your company has successfully developed.
- **Proposed project team members and their roles**, including an overview of their experience and qualifications.
- **Proposed approach to the project**, including details on project management, suggested stack, etc.
- **Communication and review plan**. Briefly describe how we will discuss the initial concepts and the selected designs. Please specify how you will share work updates (adjustments, options, etc.) for IWMI's review, how often, and if you follow a particular methodology (Agile, Scrum, etc.).
- **Tentative timeline for each phase of the project** (see the *Timeline* section of this RfP for reference).
- **Quotation in USD, valid through at least January 30, 2026**, and indicating **payment terms**. Please include a **detailed budget breakdown**, indicating the costs for each phase of the project. Please consider 11 templates and 5 blocks (see *Deliverables*) and indicate unit cost for additional ones. Please also include a post-launch support package, suggesting a # of hours/days and indicating unit cost.
- **Contact information for at least two references** for whom you have completed similar projects.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Creativity.
- Platform expertise: WordPress, theme development, and custom blocks development.
- UX/UI design skills: Experience creating coherent web design systems in a range of styles.
- Relevant experience and past performance.
- Proposed budget and cost effectiveness.
- Proposed timeline.
- Alignment with IWMI's goals and values.
- Experience with similar organizations: policy think tanks, universities, and research centers.

The redesign project will be overseen by the Head of Communications & Knowledge Management, with close support from the managers of the Web and Communications teams. External partners (related to our target audiences) and the IWMI Management Team may be consulted when testing design options.

We look forward to receiving your proposal and we thank you for your interest in partnering with IWMI for this important project.