

Draft **Terms of Reference**

Consulting Services for 'Preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR) to Implement Ecotourism facilities in selected sites of Assam'

I. Background:

Assam's population is expected to increase to 34 million by 2021¹ and continue to grow. A vast majority (86%) still resides in rural areas². Catering to the demands of a rising population as well as meeting its developmental goals is going to be a major challenge for the state, especially in terms of managing the pressure on its forests and natural resources to meet those needs. It is also important to note that Assam is a primarily rural state, with 53% of its population engaged in agriculture³. Production of all crop types has been increasing⁴, and the majority of the rising population is bound to stay within the sector. This means that the pressure on forest areas to make way for more agricultural land is set to continuously increase. This also sets the stage for increasing instances of man-animal conflicts as people breach natural habitats to meet their needs. Further, the global issue of climate change is a major threat to Assam's rich and complex ecosystems. Forest communities that depend directly on forests will be especially vulnerable. This interrelated web of challenges being faced by the state needs urgent solutions. The Forest Department, being the custodian of the forests, operates at the juncture where people and natural resources interact. The department needs to address these challenges, while also increasing its capacity to do so.

To support the Forest Department of Assam in its endeavor to effectively manage its forest and biodiversity, the French Development Agency – Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the State Government of Assam co-funded "Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC)". Phase – I of the project was implemented between February 2012 and May 2019.

After successful implementation of Phase I, APFBC Phase II began in August 2019, with a budget of € 62.5 million (INR 500 crore). AFD will contribute 80% of the budget at € 50 million (INR 400 crore) and Government of Assam will contribute 20% of the budget at € 12.5 million (INR 100 crore).

II. Project Description:

Forest Department in Assam is composed of three primary wings that manage the forest divisions – Territorial (33), Social Forestry (14), and Wildlife (8). The Forest department also has a Research, Education, and Working Plan (REWP) wing who are responsible for working plan preparation & forest resources inventory and assessment.

The Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation Society (APFBCS), a Special Purpose Vehicle created by the Government of Assam and registered under the Societies Registration Act is mandated with overall execution, management, and coordination of the project activities through a Project Management Unit (PMU) established to implement the project. Project implementation sites - Forest Divisions and other entities – is considered as Field Implementation Units (FIUs). The PMU is supported by the Project Management and Monitoring Consultant (PMMC) for technical assistance and project monitoring. The overall vision of the project is that it contributes through the Forest Department to the conservation of nature for a "*healthier ecosystem and happier communities*". This overarching vision/goal shall be reached through the following three main specific objectives:

- Developing participatory Sustainable Forest and Biodiversity management under changing climatic conditions
- Improving the livelihoods for Forest neighbouring communities through inclusive (collective and individual) supports
- Strengthening the Forest department to better fulfil its missions.

1 http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Projected_Population/Projected_Population.pdf

2 http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/censusinfodashboard/stock/profiles/en/IND018_Assam.pdf

3 <https://hfw.assam.gov.in/documents-detail/population-and-women-empowerment-policy-of-assam>

4 <http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/stateplan/present/assam.pdf>

The project is divided into four major components. Brief description of each component is presented below:

1. *Component 1: Conservation of Ecosystems*: the key focus of Phase II is conservation of forests and wildlife. The component is divided into two sub-components to ensure each receives due attention:

a. *Sustainable Forest Management*: activities will include

- State-wide forest resource mapping will be conducted to form a database of the state's natural resources and conservation needs.
- 12,500 ha of plantations,
- Setting up Climate Change and REDD+ processes and
- Improvement of infrastructure needed by frontline staff

b. *Biodiversity Conservation*: addresses the critical conservation needs of the rich biodiversity of the state through activities as

- Improvement of Protected Area management,
- Conservation efforts for a few key species (especially those that have not received enough attention so far),
- Outreach efforts to spread public awareness and
- Supporting the Assam State Biodiversity Board in making its Biodiversity Management Committees stronger.

This component will also contain a number of technological interventions aimed at enhancing the department's conservation efforts and effectiveness.

2. *Component 2: Community Engagement* aims to

- a. Further strengthen the 136 existing communities from Phase I as well as support 125 new communities through training and supporting JFMC/EDCs for joint forest management and linking them with alternate livelihood options.
- b. Build market linkages to ensure that the livelihood interventions are successful and sustainable.
- c. Converge with existing government schemes to ensure forest fringe communities reduce their dependence on forest resources
- d. Form Self Help Groups and Joint Liability Groups to allow beneficiaries to function independently and reap benefits from the activities initiated under the project even after the project is over.

3. *Component 3: Institutional Strengthening* addresses: Forest Department's most urgent institutional gaps, ensuring that it is equipped to deal with the complex challenges it faces.

Activities are as under:

- a. Conduct of a comprehensive HR study including strengthening of the legal cell, procurement cell and research and education cell
- b. Digitizing the department's work by strengthening the Forest Management Information System (FMIS),
- c. Improving the human resource module of the FMIS,
- d. Supporting the Forest Schools by addressing their infrastructural requirements.
- e. Project management of Phase II.

4. *Component 4: Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion*:

Throughout the project activities, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion will be recurring and cross-cutting themes for all activities. This is reflected in the Project's Environmental and Social

Commitment, which will be fulfilled through the Environmental and Social Management System and the Gender Action Plan. The project is committed to ensuring fair gender representation as well as inclusion of vulnerable sections of all stakeholders, especially in case of its beneficiary communities. This translates to a participative approach wherever applicable, such as for microplanning with the community; and an inclusive approach inviting a broad representation of community members, such as in case of livelihood trainings. Considering the wide ambit of project activities which would interact with forests, biodiversity and other large infrastructural undertakings (equipment, vehicles, buildings, etc.), the Project shall closely monitor its activities to ensure alignment with its climate, gender and social inclusion commitments.

III. Expected Outcomes of the Project:

The expected outcomes of APFBC Phase-II are as under:

- Enhanced sustainable and participatory forest management under changing climatic conditions.
- Sustainable and participatory management of biodiversity/ecosystems.
- Improved livelihood of forest-dependent communities.
- Strengthened institutional capacities for inclusive management of natural resources.

Project Documents: Further details of the project, implementation arrangements, and the project documents are available on the project website www.apfbc.nic.in .

IV. Promotion of the ecotourism

The APFBC Phase-II recognizes that ecotourism is a proven tool for sustainable biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation for the forest fringe communities. This is validated in the evaluation report of the APFBC Phase-I in the first five years by the Assam Forest Department⁵.

The goal of the Ecotourism Strategy of APFBC Phase-II Assam is: *“Environmentally and socially responsible ecotourism development that safeguards the integrity and diversity of its natural resources, provides education and enjoyment to visitors and delivers larger and more widely distributed income and employment opportunities to the local communities and their constituents, especially the women, youth, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable groups.”*

The Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan for 2021–2025 under Phase-II in a post-pandemic Assam maintains this recognition by sustaining the ecotourism principles namely:

- a. Sustainable management of natural and cultural resources through managing the crisis and mitigating the socio-economic impacts on livelihoods by ecotourism
- b. Empowering local communities to participate, boosting competitiveness, building resilience, and benefit from ecotourism
- c. Developing ecotourism products by advancing innovation and digitization that satisfy visitors and position the state of Assam as a globally competitive ecotourism destination
- d. Fostering sustainable, inclusive green growth and biodiversity conservation
- e. Strengthening coordination, partnerships, and solidarity for the socio-economic recovery by environmental education and conservation awareness

APFBC Phase-II has identified three major strategic directions for ecotourism development that are as follows:

- a) Development and marketing of competitive tourist products and destinations
- b) Improvement of market access, connectivity, and destination infrastructure; and
- c) Improvement of tourism institutional governance and industry manpower capabilities

⁵“Evaluation Report”, Evaluation of Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC) followed by Drafting of Phase II of the Project,2018. Evaluation-Report-APFBC.pdf (apfbc.nic.in), accessed on 14 December 2021

Towards implementing the strategic directions, APFBC has carried out site selection based on a set of criteria that ensure the elements of ecotourism. The criteria are based on components such as natural assets, communities & culture, awareness & sensitization, infrastructure, skill development, institutional strengthening, marketing, and linkages. A total of 10 sites (approximate) has been selected in the State of Assam.

V. The Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC) has received financing from Agence Française de Développement ("AFD"), and intends to use part of the funds thereof for payments under the following contract "Preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR) to implement Ecotourism facilities in selected sites of Assam".

VI. Scope of the Assignment:

The objective of the assignment is to develop an ecotourism model. The scope of the assignments shall include:

1. Examine the technical, social, ecological, financial, and economic feasibility of specific investments for community-based ecotourism development in ten (tentative) identified sites in Assam.
2. Conduct feasibility analysis:
 - i. *Business*: towards framing the required information in the form of resources, costs, benefits, and worthiness
 - ii. *Tourism*: existing tourism enablers in the sites and other factors that influence the demand and offer of tourist attractions
3. Prepare a Detailed Project Report (DPR) to implement ecotourism facilities and services development at selected sites in the state of Assam

VII. Tasks to be achieved:

- (a) Identify the infrastructure needs/gaps in the selected sites and propose ecotourism products in 10 (tentative) identified sites. It is emphasized that the consultants should adhere to the ecotourism strategy prepared by the project.
- (b) Assess existing demographic and infrastructural scenarios in each of the selected sites
- (c) Assess the existing ecotourism scenario in each of the selected sites
- (d) Identify cultural/ heritage trails around the villages drawing on unique elements of the region like temples with vernacular architecture, folklore, and festivals and others. Undertake all necessary written and visual documentation and develop promotional materials. Identify at least 10 youth to be trained on managing the trail.
- (e) Collate, analyze, consolidate, and prepare reports basis consultations, meetings, and interviews undertaken and conducted throughout the planning process
- (f) Conduct SWOT analyses of sustainable ecotourism development in each of the target sites
- (g) Suggest a network of 'minimalist' homestays offering basic comforts and 'authentic' local experiences including cuisine and engaging local communities. Identify at least 10 such homestays including guiding owners on undertaking necessary refurbishments.
- (h) Suggest exposure visit sites for the selected youth to show case successful initiatives of community based eco-tourism
- (i) Prioritize, plan proposals, land use zoning and frame the regulations considering the existing policy regime (wildlife, environmental, and social) in and around the sites and envisaged future development
- (j) Estimate the requirement of facilities, utilities, and social infrastructure to cater to ecotourism for the next two decades

- (k) Provide detailed designs that include construction drawings, detailed cost estimates, engineering drawings, bill of quantities (BOQ) for all proposed facilities/infrastructure/ecotourism products in each of the target sites. The technical specifications should be following the approved Indian Standards on sustainable infrastructure designs and adhere to the applicable regulatory standards of the Government of India.
- (l) Prepare a budget to understand the costs and income of the ecotourism business at each of the selected sites in detail. The budget would provide revenues projection, operating costs, and startup expenditures needed for launching and running the ecotourism business.
- (m) Prepare a business plan to attract financing for the ecotourism startup or expansion of the existing business
- (n) Prepare a marketing plan that includes the seven Ps (i.e., product, price, promotion, place, people, process, and physical evidence) of business marketing. The marketing plan should be committed to enhance the positive impact of ecotourism development on women lives and livelihoods.
- (o) Prepare a plan to leverage the partnership and converge with the schemes of the Government line Departments to sustain the proposed ecotourism products. Develop and designs collaterals, including guidebooks (with maps, GPS locations, information on accommodation, amenities etc.), with conservation significance of identified products /trails /spots.
- (p) Prepare Ecotourism Education and Awareness Plan to increase the capacity of communities to understand and assess the potential of sustainable tourism
- (q) Prepare a sustainability and maintenance plan of the ecotourism facilities
- (r) Suggest possible ecotourism business structures, their advantages, and disadvantages to operate the ecotourism facilities in each of the target sites
- (s) Assess the capacity needs of the stakeholders in operating the ecotourism business at each of the selected sites and prepare a roadmap to develop the capacity
- (t) Formulate monitoring framework and indicators to measure the progress of the implementation of ecotourism facilities, monitor the community-based ecotourism initiative, and measure the success
- (u) Assess the interest of defining, creating and granting an umbrella “Ecotourism Label”, such as “Fond of Assam Forest” or “Friend of Assam” or “Enjoy Assam Good Nature” or “Assam Treasure”
- (v) Assess the interest of having a centralized website and developed website content allowing to directly access the Labeled sites.
- (w) Submit regular progress reports to the APFBCS on the preparation of DPR

VIII. Expected Outputs:

Following are the expected outputs but not limited to:

1. Baseline development

- a) Selection and development of baseline of select communityyouth (including 40% women).
- b) Identify youth under various trades such as bird watching,nature trail, tour operator, homestay, tracking etc. thoughmapping of interest and skills (this shall be done throughrigorous mobilization and facilitation)
- c) Support in preparation of a database of the ecotourism initiatives

2. Situation analysis of the site

- a) Details of the sites
- b) Trend analysis of population, tourist flow, migration, land use, infrastructure provisions, jobs, and other economic opportunities of the target sites
- c) Details of the tourism activity season and duration wise, wildlife availability, and limiting factors

- d) Details of the existing infrastructure
- e) Community-based ecotourism potential
- f) SWOT analysis of the sites for operating community-based ecotourism business

3. Partnerships

- a) Institution framework to operate the business
- b) Avenues with line departments to sustain the community-based ecotourism business

4. Implementation plan

a) Foundation

- Assessments
 - Infrastructures need assessment
 - Tourism assessment
 - Capacity needs assessment of the stakeholders
 - Market assessment and market linkage
 - Environmental assessment
 - Feasibility assessment and break even
 - Business partnership assessment
- Raising awareness on tourism
- Ecotourism education and awareness plan
- Site development planning and zoning
- Institutional strengthening
- Developing management plan
- Monitoring and evaluation plan
- Sustainability and maintenance plan
- Establish a network, marketing, and communication plan

b) Preparation

- Sourcing human resources
- Accommodation development
- Ecotourism infrastructure development
- Capacity building/training plan for the community and FIUs and suggest site specific modules, domain experts/resource persons.
- Options for ecotourism certifications

c) Implementation

- Tourism operation and product establishment using growth strategies such as The Ansoff Matrix
- Market assessment and market linkage

d) Branding and content of website development

IX. Duration of the assignment:

The duration of the assignment is for 6 months. The duration may be extended depending on the need of the project with mutual agreement of the parties.

X. Technical expertise:

The consultant organization or the joint venture should have:

1. A demonstrated track record of preparing management plans or detailed project reports on ecotourism facilities in rural or wildlife settings (operation, design, evaluation, development, and implementation).
2. Provide handholding support to implement the management plans or detailed project report on ecotourism facilities in rural or wildlife setting
3. Former knowledge of working with the Government at a national or state level in India on designing and implementing ecotourism/tourism management plans, designing, and implementing tourism products in collaboration with stakeholders
4. Prior experience in preparing eco-tourism thought leadership, marketing, and communications plan on tourism or eco-tourism initiatives
5. Prior experience in preparing training packages of practices and guidelines based on the national or state level understanding of the tourism and community-based ecotourism issues and concerns

XI. Reporting Requirements and Time Schedule for Deliverables

Sl.	Format and contents of reports	Submission Timeline from contract signing
1	Finalized methodology, guidelines, study sites, and submission of the Inception Report	Within 1 month
2	1 st interim progress report	Within 2 months
3	2 nd interim progress report	Within 4 months
4	Draft final report with PowerPoint presentation	Within 5 months
5	Virtual consultation workshops for inviting inputs from all the stakeholders including the line department	Within 6 months
6	Final report with a PowerPoint presentation (incorporating comments raised by stakeholders)	Within 6 months

XII. Payment Schedule:

Sl.	Deliverables/Milestone	Submission Timeline from contract signing	% of payment
1	Deployment of team, submission and acceptance of the inception report	Within 1 month	10%
2	Submission and acceptance of the 1 st interim progress report	Within 2 months	20%
3	Submission and acceptance of the 2 nd interim progress report	Within 4 months	30%
4	Submission and acceptance of the draft final report	Within 5 months	20%
5	Submission of the proceedings and report on virtual consultation workshop	Within 6 months	20%
6	Submission and acceptance of the final report		

XIII. Team composition:

The consultancy firm needs to deploy the following key staffs, whose CVs are to be evaluated during evaluation of the technical proposal. The details of the non-key experts and support staff, if required for the execution of this project are also to be mentioned:

Sl.	Position	Qualification	Area of specific expertise desired / prerequisite	Person months required
Key Experts				
1.	Ecotourism Specialist cum Team Leader	Advanced university degree in ecotourism/ natural resource management/tourism/wildlife/ forestry/rural development or a related discipline with at least 10 years of national/international level experience in the tourism field.	Experience in rural tourism/ ecotourism and wildlife-based project. Experience in designing tourism management plans. An experience in tourism marketing and tourism development would be preferred.	6
2.	Landscape planner/ Architect	Advanced university degree (M. Tech/ M. Arch /M. Planning or higher) in Town Planning / Urban Planning / Architecture or a related discipline with 5 years of experience	Experience in structural design of tourism development facilities. Experience in designing tourist places and relevant products would be preferred	2
3.	Finance specialist	MBA in finance from a reputed university/institute with about 5 years total experience in financial management	Experience in financial analysis or financial projections	1
4.	Socio-economic Specialist	A postgraduate in sociology or rural development or a related discipline with about 10 years total experience from reputed university/ institutes or relevant experience in the same field	Experience of working with rural communities. Experience in community-based ecotourism would be preferred	6
Non-Key Experts				
5.	Field coordinator (2nos)	Graduate in Environment / Social Science or a related discipline with at least 3 years of experience in the same field.	Experience of working with rural communities. Experience of working in the tourism sector would be preferred.	12 (6 months x 2persons)

XIV. Data, Services and Facilities to be provided by the Client:

Services and Facilities: PMU shall provide the Consultant with all services, necessary/relevant inputs, and background information/documents at its disposal in respect of the project, as may be required, including training venue and logistics cost.

Counterpart Personnel from Forest Department's side shall be decided during the project inception meeting
