



## Mekong River Commission

For Sustainable Development

# TERMS OF REFERENCE

## 1. CONSULTANCY SUMMARY

<b>Position title:</b>	Senior User Researcher and Stakeholder Engagement Expert
<b>Consultancy type:</b>	Service Contract (SC)
<b>Division:</b>	Technical Support Division (TD)
<b>Duration:</b>	12 months (August 2026 – July 2027), with the possibility of an extension up to June 2028
<b>Duty Station:</b>	MRC Regional Flood and Drought Management Centre (RFDMC) Phnom Penh, Cambodia
<b>Reporting to:</b>	Head of MRC RFDMC (direct line) Director of Technical Support Division (next line)
<b>Expected deliverables:</b>	Refer to Section 4 (below)

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) supports its Member Countries (MCs) to sustainably manage and develop the Mekong River Basin. A core function of the MRC, through the RFDMC, is the delivery of regional flood and drought forecasting services that support decision-making by national agencies, disaster management authorities, and other stakeholders across the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB). To address technical constraints and service delivery gaps, the MRC received support from the UK-funded WISER Asia Pacific (WISER-AP) program for a new project “*Enhancing MRC Operational Services for Advanced Forecasting and Guidance Systems to Support Sustainable Climate Resilience*” known as the “MOSAIC project”, implemented with technical assistance and partnership (TAP) from the UK Met Office (UKMO). The objective of this project is to evolve the MRC's current forecasting capabilities into more user-centered, impact-informed, and inclusive services that better support flood and drought risk management in the LMB.

To ensure logical progression from user-centered analysis to full-scale operational delivery, the project is designed around a structured, two-stage framework:

- **Stage 1: Service value improvement plan (Discovery and Preliminary Alpha):** This stage focuses on building a comprehensive understanding of user needs, service gaps, and institutional priorities. It begins with diagnostic studies and the collation of baseline information on existing forecasting systems and stakeholder expectations. Through iterative rounds of user-centered research and service development (including consultations, surveys, and usability testing), the project team will validate and refine service concepts. This stage culminates in the development of the MRC RFDMC Service Value Improvement Roadmap (**SVIR**), which defines priority service areas and an implementation pathway aligned with organizational objectives.
- **Stage 2: Development and trialing of the service improvement (Alpha, Beta, Live):** This stage translates the approved roadmap into tangible forecasting services through a phased, controlled delivery approach:
  - + **Alpha phase:** Initial versions of the highest-priority services are developed and tested in a controlled environment to validate technical assumptions and identify potential risks.
  - + **Beta phase:** Services are deployed to a broader group of users under real-world conditions for extensive testing of usability and reliability, utilizing user feedback for optimization.
  - + **Live phase:** The services are fully operationalized and made available for routine use, complete with mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and maintenance.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSIGNMENT

The overall objective of this consultancy position is to provide senior-level expertise in user research and stakeholder engagement for the **MOSAIC Project**, ensuring that all enhancements to the MRC's flood and drought forecasting services and the Water Status Dashboard (WSD) are grounded in an evidence-based understanding of user needs, decision-making contexts, and tangible service value. This position is regional consultancy.

The consultant will act as a senior practitioner and advisor, representing the voices of diverse and vulnerable users while embedding best practices for human-centered and inclusive service design within the multidisciplinary project team. Specifically, the consultant's objectives align with the project's two-stage framework:

- + During Stage 1: Service Value Improvement Plan (Discovery and Preliminary Alpha): The objective is to lead baselining activities, diagnostic studies, and iterative rounds of user research to uncover service gaps and validate proposed concepts. This work will directly inform the creation of the comprehensive SVIR, ensuring future developments seamlessly align user requirements, technical feasibility, and the MRC's institutional priorities.
- + During Stage 2: Development and Trialing of Service Improvement (Alpha, Beta, Live): The objective is to guide the co-development and user-centric trialing of tangible service solutions, including new Impact-Based Forecasting (IBF) product(s). The consultant will evaluate

prototypes through real-world user feedback during the Alpha and Beta phases, ensuring that the fully operationalized "Live" services are accessible, highly relevant, incorporate Gender, Equity, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) principles, and are ready to be embedded into the MRC's standard operations.

#### **4. DELIVERABLES & REQUIRED TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **4.1 DELIVERABLES**

This assignment requires close collaboration and work with the Project team, UKMO team, MRC Divisions and Offices, Project Coordination Officer and the Web Developer–data Visualization expert. The consultant will lead and significantly contribute to the following key deliverables:

- + Robust user research engagement plans and actionable insight reports to inform service improvements;
- + Documented gender and vulnerability mapping, including baseline data through GEDSI analysis;
- + Existing and future service catalogues, user journey blueprints, and evidence-based prototypes for services and for the MRC WSD;
- + Comprehensive MRC SVIR consolidating Stage 1 findings;
- + Technical support for Impact-Based Forecasting (IBF) initiatives, specifically regarding GEDSI integration and stakeholder engagement;
- + Guidance for the co-development and user-centric trialing of tangible service solutions, including new IBF products.
- + Quality assurance to ensure "live" services are accessible, highly relevant, and fully incorporate GEDSI principles.
- + Documented options and detailed processes for user-centric service improvements, along with clear guidelines for maintaining them; and
- + A documented service design framework and sustainability strategy to embed these practices into standard MRC operations.

##### **4.2 REQUIRED TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Working with minimal supervision and as part of a small, collaborative team, the consultant will be responsible for the following:

###### **1) User research & stakeholder engagement**

- + Collation of initial information and baseline activities;
- + GEDSI baseline activities (collating existing data and identifying gaps, gender and vulnerability mapping and analysis were relevant to improved service delivery);
- + Plan and lead user research and stakeholder engagement activities for the project, covering multiple services related to flood and drought forecasting and the WSD;

- + Design robust research and engagement plans, detailing objectives, methods, sampling strategies, data collection and analysis, and feedback loops into service design;
- + Design and implement mechanisms to collect, analyze, and utilize user feedback throughout the Alpha, Beta, and Live phases;
- + Apply qualitative, quantitative, and participatory methods, including online surveys, interviews, focus groups, workshops, field visits, and co-design sessions;
- + Lead the analysis and synthesis of research findings, translating insights into clear, actionable recommendations, with clearly define the coordination mechanisms, communication channels, and division of roles and responsibilities among the consultants, MRCS , UK Met Office TAP, MCs, and other project partners to ensure effective collaboration, timely delivery of activities, and alignment with national priorities throughout project implementation to inform service improvements; and
- + Present findings and user insights to diverse audiences, including senior MRC staff, technical teams, MCs representatives, and development partners to guide decision-making.

## **2) Service design, trialing, & implementation**

- + Create existing and potential future service catalogues, blueprints, and user journeys (mapping information pathways, user groups, and communication channels);
- + Develop options and detailed processes for user-centric service improvements and the WSD;
- + Support in developing the Mock-up for the development of the WSD;
- + Ensure that the creation of mock-ups and prototypes is based on evidence of user needs and conduct initial user research on these service mock-ups;
- + Trial of new user-centered techniques and approaches for service design; and
- + Mainstream successfully trialed services by preparing successfully trial services, approaches, and techniques to become MRC "business as usual".

## **3) Strategy, inclusion and capacity building**

- + Integrate/embed GEDSI principles into all research and engagement. This includes executing specific GEDSI baselining activities, such as collating existing data and conducting gender and vulnerability mapping relevant to improved service delivery;
- + Develop and prepare the MRC SVIR by consolidating initial stage information and ensuring alignment between user needs, technical feasibility, and organizational objectives;
- + Build and strengthen user-centered practices within multidisciplinary teams by providing mentoring, guidance, and informal and formal capacity building for MRC staff, MCs and partners;
- + Guide the co-development and user-centric trialing of tangible service solutions, including new Impact-Based Forecasting (IBF) products.
- + Assess the effectiveness of different research processes to produce a document for service design; and

- + Develop an exit strategy to support sustainability beyond this project duration, such as convening a Community of Practice to support continued learning.

#### **4) Monitoring, evaluation and reporting**

- + Contribute to the development and tracking of indicators and means of verification for project reporting;
- + Support team members by providing evidence to help prioritize service improvements and allocate resources effectively; and
- + Conduct ongoing MEL, collate improvements, challenges, and lessons learned to inform a further round of expanded trial services.

#### **5) Specific and additional tasks to be assigned upon request during project implementation.**

### **5. PAYMENT MODALITY**

- + Payment shall be made monthly, based on the expected deliverables per installment and workdays performed, with satisfaction assessment, subject to review and final approval made by the Head of RFDMC and the TD Director, or appointed Officer in charge.
- + Payment shall be made upon submission of an official invoice (or payment request), a timesheet verified by the Project Coordination Officer (PO) and Project Manager using the MRCS standard templates, and all required deliverables to the satisfaction of the MRCS.
- + Final payment will be made upon satisfactory completion of the assignment/s, and upon receipt of the evaluation form for consultancy services made by the Head of RFDMC and the TD Director, or appointed Officer in charge.
- + Deliverables will be reviewed by direct supervisor, including Head of RFDMC following the MRC relevant rules and regulations. However, NMCs may involve deliverables from regional consultants via MRC's mechanisms, regional and national consultation meetings, etc.

*\*Note:* MRC is a tax-exempt agency for the work done for the MRC. The position, if mission is required, will be covered with a return ticket to and from the assigned duty stations with a daily related subsistence allowance of 75% of the UN rate for the mission days.

### **6. REPORTING AND COORDINATION**

The Consultant will report to the Head of RFDMC (direct line) and the TD Director (next line), with coordination with the other consultants, Project Coordination Officer (PO), partners and relevant MCs. The consultant will provide weekly/bi-weekly, monthly progress reports, specific reports on technical inputs and community engagement and contribute to mid-year and annual progress reports, highlighting local perspectives and community-level impacts and annual training and capacity-building evaluation reports. Regular progress meetings are also required.

## 7. REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

To successfully deliver the objectives of this project, the candidate must possess the following qualifications and experience:

- + Master's degree in social sciences, development studies, environmental management, service design, public policy, natural resource management, sociology, risk disaster management or relevant interdisciplinary field.
- + A minimum of 5 years of proven senior-level experience leading user research and stakeholder engagement specifically for service development (such as, in public services, climate, weather, flood, or disaster risk management services).
- + At least 5 years of demonstrated experience in designing and delivering robust research programs. The candidate must have a proven ability to analyze and synthesize user research findings using a wide range of methodologies and techniques to develop actionable research insights.
- + Strong practical experience (minimum 5 years) successfully integrating GEDSI considerations directly into research and engagement activities.
- + Significant prior experience (minimum 3 years) working in the Lower Mekong region.
- + Demonstrated experience in hydrometeorological services, flood and drought forecasting, early warning systems, climate services, disaster risk reduction, or related fields is highly desirable and will be considered a strong advantage.
- + Excellent facilitation, communication, and synthesis skills tailored for complex, multicultural, and multistakeholder environments.
- + Proven experience in facilitating participatory processes, stakeholder consultations, and community-based training programs, especially within the context of Mekong countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam).
- + A demonstrated willingness to learn and rigorously test new research and engagement techniques that have been utilized successfully elsewhere for the development of weather and climate services.
- + Fluency in English (written and verbal) is essential. Knowledge of riparian languages is a strong asset.

## 8. DESIRED COMPETENCIES

- + Ability to work independently, influence others, and provide senior level advice;
- + Strong mentoring and capacity building skills;
- + Confidence working in agile, multidisciplinary environments; and
- + High professional integrity and commitment to ethical, user-centered practice.

**9. SIGNATURE BLOCK**

MRCS:

Incumbent:

Full Name:

Full Name:

Title:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_