Mekong River Commission
For Sustainable Development

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. CONSULTANCY SUMMARY:

Consultancy Title:	Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender (ESSG) Officer to support implementation of the GEF Mekong Fisheries Project
Consultancy type:	Special Service Agreement (SSA)
Consultancy level	Level C
Division:	Environmental Management Division (ED)
Duration:	Full-time from 1 January 2027 to 31 December 2027
Duty station:	Office of the MRC Secretariat in Vientiane, Lao PDR.
Reporting to:	• Director of ED (*overall supervision*); and • MRCS Fisheries Management Specialist/Project Manager of the Mekong Fisheries Project (*direct supervision*).
Expected Deliverables:	• **Please refer to Section 3 and 4**.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1. Introduction

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established under the 1995 Agreement on Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin, signed by the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The role of the MRC is to coordinate and promote regional cooperation in the sustainable development, utilization, management, and conservation of the water and related resources across the Mekong River Basin.

The MRC Secretariat (MRCS) serve as the operational arm of the MRC and its four Member Countries (MCs). It provides technical and administrative support to the MRC Joint Committee (JC) and the MRC Council to help deliver the organization's mission and strategic objectives.

Within the MRC, the Environmental Management Division (ED) is responsible for environmental monitoring, assessment, planning and management. It plays a central role in supporting basin-wide planning and ensuring that development in the Mekong River Basin is environmentally sustainable.

The ED is responsible for implementing "the **Enhancing Transboundary Fisheries Management in the Lower Mekong Basin**" project (hereafter referred to as the "**Mekong Fisheries Project**") over the period 2026 – 2030,with financial support from the GEF IW-8, and implemented in collaboration with the IUCN. The project is implemented under the framework of MRC and contributes directly to the MRC Strategic Priorities for 2026–2030.

2.2. Project summary

The Lower Mekong Basin (LMB) is home to the most productive inland fisheries on the planet, and one based on the most diverse range of species, generating an estimated annual value of $8-$9 billion from fish

and Other Aquatic Animals (OAAs). They make a substantial contribution to the economics of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, while also supporting food security, cultural identity, and local livelihoods. Freshwater fish provide a major share of national animal protein intake and play a vital role in untrient, particularly for children, contributing directly to health and development outcomes.

The LMB's extraordinary productivity stems from a complex mosaic of dynamic freshwater ecosystems, with fish species diversity per unit of catchment estimated to be roughly three times hiigher than that of the Amazon. These ecosystems rely on interconnected wetland landscapes that serve as crucial habitats for fish throughout their life cycles. The resilience of these biodiversity hotspots is a critical indicator of ecosystem health, sustainable livelihoods, and economic stability.

However, the LMB's fisheries are facing a growing and widely recognized crisis. Since 2018, fish catches and related incomes have declined significantly due to habitat fragmentation, degradation, and loss. The constructions of dams and irrigation structures have disrupted connectivitiy between the Mekong River and its tributaries, impedingfish migration, altering reproductive cycles and affecting nutrient flows. At the same time, wetland conversion has reduced criticalhabitats, while unsustainable agriculture, forestry and urban development practices have further diminished water quality, nutrient dynamics, and wetland recharge.

The "**Enhancing Transboundary Fisheries Management in the Lower Mekong Basin**", aslo known as the **Mekong Fisheries Project**, responds directly to these challenges by strengthening the connectivity, productivity, and resilience of transboundary capture fisheries, aquatic biodiversity, and the broader ecosystem services provided by the LMB. The project will strengthen fisheries co-management systems, support value chain development, and promote income diversification. Through the MRC, it will also integrate fisheries conservation into key sectoral polices, particularly in hydropower, irrigation, and agriculture.

The project contribures to the GEF focal area of International Waters, Biodiversity, and Land Degradation. it aligns with the GEF 8 Programming Direction, particularly the objective of advancing sustainable fisheries management, and supports key regional frameworks, including the MRC Basin Development Strategy (2021-2030) and the MRC Mekong Basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy (2018-2022).

Field activities focus on six landscapes spanning 2.7 million hectares: the Lower Songkhram River Basin and Ing River Mouth in Thailand; Siphandone in Lao PDR; Kratie-Stung Treng and Eastern Tonle Sap in Cambodia; and the Upper Mekong Delta in Vietnam. These areas were selected based on their importance role for supporting regional fisheries and the opportunity to rapidly scale up successful community fisheries models. Work in these landscapes will generate the evidence needed to strengthen public investment in capture fisheries, while also encouraging more active participation from national fisheries agencies.

The project's outcomes are also aligned with its theory of change, aiming to restore fish stocks and fish habitats, conserve and enhance biodiversity, improve livelihoods through sustainable value chains, and embed ecosystem-based fisheries management into policy. By reconnecting critical habitats, incentivizing sustainable practices, and fostering knowledge-sharing across stakeholders, the project provides a scalable and replicable model for transboundary fisheries management.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTANCY:

The main objective of this assignment is to support the implemention of Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) and Gender Action Plan (GAP) and other gender aspects under project activities, while establishing the project Grievance Mechanism.

The consultant will work closely with Knowledge Management and Communication Specialist and Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and other project team members, national field coordinators, and other

technical consultants to ensures the project complies with approved Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) principles and standards.

4. REQUIRED TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To achieve the aims and objectives of this consultancy, the Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender (ESSG) Officier is expected to carry out the following key tasks and responsibilities during his/her period of consultancy services.

- **Support to baseline studies and Rapid Social Analysis in site/activity selection:**
  - Support the design and implementation of site-specific baseline studies and rapid social analyses to inform intervention site selection.
  - Coordinate with consultants and partners to collect and analyze baseline data, ensuring alignment with Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) requirements.
  - Facilitate stakeholder consultations and implementation of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) to support site validation and final selection.
- **Updated Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF):**
  - Review and update the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and related management plans based on field findings and project requirements.
  - Ensure effective implementation of the ESMF and compliance with applicable Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) standards across all project activities.
- **ESMF, Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) and Gender Action Plan (GAP) Compliance report:**
  - Develop and apply monitoring methodologies for ESMF, SEP, and Gender Action Plan (GAP) indicators.
  - Maintain records and prepare compliance reports demonstrating implementation of ESS requirements, stakeholder engagement activities, and gender-related actions.
  - Monitor and report on environmental, social, and gender performance throughout project implementation.
- **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**
  - Support implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP), promoting gender equality, inclusion, and meaningful participation of women and vulnerable groups in project activities.
- **Grievance Mechanism**: establishment and maintenance of project-level Grievance Mechanism, aligning with stakeholder engagement and disclosure of project details.
- **Capacity Building and Technical Support:** Technical support provided to project teams and partners to strengthen their capacity in project implementation, ensuring effective application and full compliance with the ESMF, SEP and GAP across all project activities.
- **Selection and screening of sub-projects:** where projects sites and corresponding activities may be confirmed during project implementation, identification of intervention sites and screening for environmental and social risks to determine need for site level ESMP and any other supporting ESMS instruments/actions. Clearance needed. ESMS screening of sub-projects (where sites and activities are clearly defined) to ascertain need for site-level Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) and associated instruments.
- **Other duties:** Perform other ESS- and gender-related tasks as assigned by the Project Manager in support of effective project implementation.

5. PAYMENT MODE:

The payment is made on a monthly basis at the end of each completed month, subject to an approved monthly timesheet and signed invoice. The payment of the final amount payable is subject to certification of satisfactory performance by the PM or authorized staff.

Note: Consultancy rate is defined by the MRCS consultancy rate policy and the level of consultancy. MRC is a tax-exempted agency for the work done for the MRC. Consultant, in case 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 for the mission days.

6. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS:

Intellectual property rights - IPR: Information, data, database, knowledge resources in the forms of briefings, reports, proceedings, articles, essays, etc. issued by and for the MRCS will be the MRCS property.

Any utility, announcement and disclosure that are without MRCS highest levels of authority' permission is considered illegal and will be charged by relevant local and international legal procedures.

7. DECLARATION OF NON-FRAUDULENCE AND PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA:

The Consultant shall adhere to the MRC's relevant rules and regulations of the MRC on personal data protection, business exclusion, and fraud prevention and anti-corruption principles, and shall be under strict disciplinary measures should any violation occurs.

8. WORKING ARRANGEMENT:

- Overall supervision: The consultant will be working under the overall supervision of the Director of the Environmental Management Division.
- Communication line: The consultant will be working under the direct supervision of MRCS Fisheries Management Specialist/Project Manager of the Mekong Fisheries Project.

9. QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS:

- A Master's degree in a relevant field such as environmental science, social sciences, gender studies, or a closely related discipline.
- A minimum of five (5) years of progressively responsible experience in stakeholder engagement, environmental and social safeguards (ESS), gender mainstreaming, or related areas.
- Demonstrated strong understanding of environmental and social safeguards policies, standards, and their practical application in project implementation.
- Proven experience in gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality within development or environmental projects.
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills, with the ability to work effectively with diverse stakeholders at regional, national, and local levels.
- Familiarity with the institutional, social, and cultural context of the MRC Member Countries.
- Excellent command of the English language, with strong writing, speaking, and reading skills.
- English is the working language of the MRC Secretariat; therefore, fluency in both oral and written English is required. Knowledge of Khmer, Lao, Thai, or Vietnamese is considered a strong asset.

10. SIGNATURE BLOCK

MRCS:

Name and Title: Theerawat Samphawamana

Director of the Environmental Management Division

Incumbent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____