



TERM OF REFERENCE

Service Consultancy for Conducting Baseline Environmental and socio-economic (gender focus) assessment of project activities

1. General information

1.1 GRET in Việt Nam

Founded in 1976, Gret is a French development international NGO that aims to improve vulnerable populations' living conditions, promote social justice, and conserve our planet. GRET is working for the most vulnerable populations in 28 countries. Its actions take place locally, in territories and listening to communities, as well as internationally, through advocacy and knowledge sharing. GRET innovates by capitalising on its experiences, through a constant process of action-research, valorising local approaches and creating a link between various stakeholders, and spanning over sufficiently long periods, generate significant impact.

Operating in Vietnam for over 20 years, Gret currently focuses on energy, improving living conditions for female workers in industrial zones, land administration, and supporting sustainable livelihood development, with a wide network of partnerships in many different fields.

1.2 Context of the EMPOWER Project

The Puluong Nature Reserve (PLNR) is located in 5 mountainous communes of Pu Luong, Co Lung, Hoi Xuan, Phu Xuan Phu Le in Thanh Hoa province. It is home to a population of approximately 13,275 people, is also primarily inhabited by the Thai and Muong ethnic groups residing in 31 villages (8 in the core area and 23 in the buffer zone area). Having very limited agricultural land, **about 70% and 30% of these ethnic minorities in the NR's core and buffer zone areas endure high poverty rates** (according to 2023 statistics) and a majority of their **income is derived from forest products, particularly for poor households** (60%-80% of these households' income).

The forests of Pu Luong play a vital role in providing resources such as food, potable and agricultural water, handicrafts, pharmacopoeia, and cultural services for the local communities. As a result, **illegal access to the forests in the protected areas continues as communities try to make a living and maintain traditional cultural values** through the forests, despite the legal restrictions. One of the people's popular adaptation to make ends meet is for **the men to work elsewhere, leaving the women behind to secure household subsistence**. Outnumbering men in agro-forestry workforce (58%), women/female headed households from ethnic minorities tend to be the poorest and often rely more on natural resources. While men have greater opportunities for off-farm employment, women are more likely to remain at home, bearing traditional roles in securing household subsistence. The indigenous populations of the NR experience multifaceted challenges, encompassing socio-economic disparities, environmental conservation concerns, and gender-based marginalization. Despite its critical ecological

role in restoration and rich biodiversity protection, the Natural Reserve faces mounting economic and environmental pressures from surrounding socio-economic activities. Exacerbating these challenges and inequalities, **ethnic minorities' women and girls are often greatly marginalized** in their access to opportunities and resources due to gender and ethnicity-based norms and discriminations

1.3 Introducing the EMPOWER Project

Continuing the work that has already been started by the previous phase of the PULUONG project to address the different concerns of stakeholders of the PL Natural Reserve, particularly its ethnic women, GRET successfully developed and was approved by the European Union for a new phase. The action of this new phase seeks to facilitate a social and institutional dynamic, where the local authorities and agency (particularly the communes, the villages and the Pu Luong Natural Reserve), communities and private sector will engage together in building institutional arrangements and social commitment around green and responsible tourism in and around the Pu Luong Natural Reserve (NR). To achieve this, a specific objective will be that Ethnic minority women are economically and socially empowered for an improved management and better sustainability of the Natural Reserve. Four outputs are designed to achieve this specific objective:

- Biodiversity and climate change issues are mainstreamed in the local tourism strategies
- Targeted women are leading economic activities related to sustainable development
- Ethnic minority women in the core and buffer zone are strengthened with capacities and confident to promote better environmental and gender-responsive practices to mitigate socio-economic impacts on biodiversity in the Natural Reserve
- Green Label certification system is developed to promote responsible production and consumption in community-based tourism sector for sustainable enhancement of environmental values and biodiversity protection in the Natural Reserve.

2. Purpose of the Consultancy:

To establish a robust foundation for the project, a socio-economic and environmental baseline assessment is critical to gather essential data on sociological, environmental, and economic aspects of the direct and in-direct beneficiaries of the target core and buffer zone communities within and around the Pu Luong Natural Reserve. This would provide a deep understanding of their current realities including **community livelihoods, sociological experiences (including gender and ethnic realities), environmental and potential climate change influencor, ecosystem dependencies, and socio-economic conditions** in the area. A strong **gender focus** in the baseline assessment needs to be integrated to ensure a strong gender-orientation.

This assessment will serve as a crucial reference point for measuring project impact and guiding future interventions and thus design of the assessment should keep in mind of designed project indicators (based on project logical framework) to support the establishment of initial baseline values value while helping to design the M&E collection tools. To do so, the designed social and environmental baseline assessment should include primary and secondary data collection, covering aspects such as income levels, employment patterns, access to social services, perceptions of existing environmental realities

and challenges (including climate change impacts), and the perceptions of local communities regarding conservation policies and livelihood opportunities. It will also assess the current socio-economic activities of the core and buffer zone communities that depend on the Puluong Nature Reserve resources. These insights will be crucial in formulating a practical and realistic project monitoring and evaluation system that ensures both sustainable socio-environmental sustainability and the socio-economic well-being of the Puluong NR's direct and indirect beneficiaries. The active involvement of the community during the assessment will be key to their successful adoption and long-term adherence. Moreover, the assignment will also consider institutional engagement, recognizing the importance of coordinated governance for managing this NR effectively. Through integrating scientific research, participatory approaches, and evidence-based recommendations for M&E monitoring system development, this assessment will support the EMPOWER project strive to foster a resilient and sustainable future for both the PL NR ecosystem and its dependent populations.

3. Scope of the Consultancy

The social and environmental assessment consulting shall perform the following tasks in close coordination with the Project Manager and GRET international to fulfill the objectives of the assignment. When necessary, these tasks will be undertaken with the involvement of relevant governmental partners' officers and Project staff:

Task 1: Preparation of Baseline Assessment with gender focus perspective

- Prepare and submit a proposed assessment methodology for the project manager approval. Feedback and inputs will be provided by GRET international experts for improvements before approval.
- Carry out a desk review to study secondary information related to current social and environmental status of the communities within the Pu luong Nature Reserve (with some focus on gender perspective).
- Design a participatory baseline social and environmental assessment of current state of core and buffer zone communities. This assessment should be designed to be conducted with NR's government partners' officers as well as target villages' key representatives. Assessment should also ensure a strong gender focus.
- Present the designed baseline assessment methodology to PLNR key government partners and project for finalization.

Task 2: Conducting Social and Environmental Assessment with Gender focus in key target project villages (core and buffer zone)

- Introduce the designed Baseline assessment to PLNR key government partners for finalization
- With dynamic representatives from project's target core and buffer zone villages, conduct participatory field assessment in key Project's target villages and beneficiaries within the core and buffer zones of the NR.

- Present the results on current status of the NR's biodiversity highlighting concerned species and NTFPs and potential impacts from climate change.
- Presenting recommendations on actions that could be taken to preserve biodiversity within and around the PL NR while mitigating climate change impacts.

Task 3: Recommendations for developing a Project's Monitoring and Evaluation system

- Based on results of the baseline assessment and understanding of the EMPOWER project's Logical Framework, provide recommendations for developing a practical project's monitoring and evaluation system that aligns with the LF's indicators.

4. Methodology

The consultant is requested to propose a detailed methodological approach that integrates participatory and consultative tools, highlighting engagement of the project's key stakeholders and beneficiaries. The proposed method should include proposed participatory social and environmental assessment of the Nature Reserve, expertise to be mobilized, proposed stakeholders' participation and involvement, PPT presentation of key findings with recommendations, a draft and final report.

5. Key Outputs and Deliverables

The expected outputs of the consultancy are:

- The Project, project partners and project's key representatives from target villages have deep understanding of the current social (including strong gender perspectives) and environmental (include climate-related experiences and impacts) realities of the core and buffer areas of the Puluong Nature Reserve.
- A project monitoring and evaluation system is developed and can be applied to monitor project indicators.

The expected deliverables of the consultancy are for each mission:

- A Social and Environmental Baseline Assessment method with tools to be applied (Task 1) before implementation of Task 2
- A powerpoint presentation on results from the Baseline Assessment (Task 2) one week following completion of the field-based assessment.
- A final report that includes recommendations on the development of the project's monitoring and evaluation system that aligns with project's LF, 1 week after Gret feedback of the draft report.

6. Schedule (tentative)

No.	Activities	Deliverables	Tentative schedule
1	Inception meeting	Agreed methodology and workplan	10-14/11/2025
2	Desk research	Agreed evaluation tools and field trip plan	10-14/11/2025

3	Participatory Field assessments	Data and findings	24/11-28/11/2025
4	Analysing data and findings	PPT of findings	1-5/12/2025
5	Meeting with beneficiaries and partners	Verified findings and recommendations	5-12/12/2025
6	Submit 1st draft report	1st draft report (in English)	12-26/12/2025
7	Submit final report	Final, included an executive summary, approved by Gret (in English)	6/1/2026

7. Skills and Experience Requirements

- Vietnamese national.
- Hold a master's degree in international development, social and environmental baseline assessments, social sciences, economics or related fields.
- At least 5 years of experience in working with international organizations and donors. Preference will be for those with experience in iNGO's project baseline surveys.
- Have experiences baseline assessments, social-environmental actions in Nature Reserves, development project activity designs and implementation.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills in Vietnamese and English

8. Contact Details

The consultant(s) of matching criteria is/are kindly requested to send her/his/their application to gret.vietnam@gret.org CC to hanhdo.vietnam@gret.org before **5th Nov 2025**. The application should include:

- ✓ A letter of interest highlighting relevant experience and knowledge and availability;
- ✓ Updated CV (s) and contact details for 2 update references;
- ✓ A technical and financial proposal detailing approach and methodology and budget of the evaluation