

TERMS OF REFERENCE

CONSULTANCY FOR STUDY ON INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES AND COORDINATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AT COMMUNE LEVEL

Project “Gender Equality through Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education” (GEVEE)

I. BACKGROUND

Aide et Action (AEA – soon to become Action Education) is an international NGO with headquarters in Paris, France. AEA International has been active since 1981 and has projects in 19 countries in Europe, Africa, and Asia. With the vision “Changing the world through education”, AEA uses a lifelong approach to education for vulnerable youth and children. AEA has been working in Vietnam since 2003, and implementing projects in seven provinces: Khanh Hoa, Dak Lak, Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho (formerly Hoa Binh), Lai Chau, Lao Cai, and An Giang. AEA's projects focus on three main interventions:

- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
- Access and Quality of Education (A&Q)
- Livelihood

The **GEVEE project** is a cross-border initiative that addresses gender inequalities in Laos and Vietnam by promoting the economic empowerment of women and girls and advocating for changes in societal perceptions of gender roles. The project responds to the recognized needs of both countries to advance gender equality across all areas of life. GEVEE works in close collaboration with local government actors, the private sector, and two gender-specialized organizations - the Research Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) in Vietnam and the Gender Development Association (GDA) in Laos - to drive transformative change. The project's overarching goal is to promote a shift in economic systems that expands opportunities for women and girls to thrive in both countries.

In Vietnam, the project has been implemented in 19 communes: three communes in Phu Tho Province (formerly part of Da Bac District, Hoa Binh Province) and sixteen communes in Lao Cai Province (previously under Sa Pa Town, Bac Ha District, and Lao Cai City). To promote gender-responsive local economic development, the project established Gender Action Teams (GATs) in four former districts/towns as multi-stakeholder platforms bringing together representatives of local government, the private sector, GEVEE partners, and women entrepreneurs.

In its original design, the GATs served as coordination and learning platforms with four core functions:

1. Collating and sharing good practices, tools, and approaches for women's economic empowerment;
2. Facilitating gender-sensitive planning and coordination among stakeholders at local and national levels;
3. Acting as a technical reference group for project activities related to local economic development, market linkages, and access to finance for young women; and
4. Promoting peer learning and cross-country exchange between Laos and Vietnam.

During implementation, the district-level GATs played a key role in coordinating gender equality initiatives and sharing good practices among local stakeholders. However, following administrative mergers and the abolishment of certain district-level structures, the project's operational landscape has changed significantly. The former district-level GATs were dissolved due to the Government and administrative restructuring, therefore, the project is in the process of re-establishing GATs at the commune level.

The new Commune-level GATs are expected to:

- Promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment;
- Mainstream gender into local socio-economic development planning; and
- Coordinate local initiatives for gender-responsive governance.
- Gather and share information, including promising practices, tools, and approaches for women's economic empowerment

Each commune-level GAT is expected to include representatives from the Commune People's Committee, the Fatherland Front, the Women's Union, the Youth Union, and the Commune Cultural Office (responsible for labor and education).

In this new context, the project plans to conduct a study to assess the feasibility and identify appropriate mechanisms for the establishment and operation of Commune-level Gender Action Teams (GATs) or other suitable coordination models. The study will help identify practical and context-appropriate approaches to strengthen coordination and capacity among local stakeholders - including commune authorities, the Women's Union, the Youth Union, and other relevant actors - to promote gender equality and integrate gender perspectives into local socio-economic development planning.

This study also aims to deepen understanding of the capacities, needs, and expectations of local stakeholders, thereby enhancing the role and effectiveness of GATs (or equivalent structures) in advancing gender equality at the community level.

II. OBJECTIVES

Overall objective: The overall purpose of this consultancy is to assess the feasibility, institutional arrangements, and operational mechanisms for promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment at the commune level under the new administrative structure.

The study will generate evidence and practical recommendations for establishing or adapting commune-level coordination mechanisms that can effectively support gender-responsive planning, facilitate cross-learning, and ensure the sustainability of gender equality efforts beyond the project's life cycle.

The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

- Assess opportunities, challenges, and institutional capacities of local actors (Commune People's Committee, Women's Union, Youth Union, Fatherland Front, and others) in promoting gender equality.
- To map and analyze the existing institutional structures, coordination mechanisms, and responsibilities related to gender equality and WEE at the commune level
- To identify the understanding of gender knowledge, gender perspective, and gender approach of GAT members.
- To identify challenges and opportunities for GATs members to promote gender equality in their communities.
- To identify the needs of GATs members to build their operational capacity related to governance, financial management, gender-sensitive project planning, communication and so on.
- To identify and recommend effective mechanisms that both integrate project activities into GATs' routine functions and support the sustainability to maintain/scale up of commune-level GATs as a coordination mechanism.

III. METHODOLOGY

The consultant are expected to clearly describe the overall research methodology they will carry out the research assignment. This may include outlining the research design, identifying appropriate data sources, methods of data collection that are well-aligned to the objectives of this study and the local context. The methodology should demonstrate a thoughtful and systematic approach in gathering data and relevant information ensuring that the tools and techniques used are both practical and rigorous. The consultant should also explain how they

will ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected, and how they will adapt their approach to reflect cultural sensitivities and logistical realities.

A combination of methods is recommended to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues. These may include desk reviews of relevant literature and project documents, structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews with key informants, and focus group discussions with target groups. The consultant should propose a sampling strategy that ensures diverse and representative input, and describe how each method will be implemented. The proposed methodology will be reviewed and agreed upon with CGFED and the AEA project team at the start of the consultancy, and the consultant should be prepared to refine their approach based on feedback and evolving project needs.

IV. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ensure that the research adheres to ethical guidelines and principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of participants' rights. Obtain necessary approvals from relevant ethics committees or institutional review boards.

V. DELIVERABLES

The research project should deliver the following outputs:

- a. Inception report with specific and comprehensive tools and methodologies, sample, timeframe and budget.
- b. Final data collection tools;
- c. All raw and processed field survey data;
- d. Research report + a Summary document (2-pagers: the report will address each of the above objectives of this study and relevant recommendations which should take steps/actions that relevant stakeholders should take to establish or adapt commune-level coordination mechanisms effectively. The draft report (in both English and Vietnamese) is anticipated to be a brief narrative (not exceeding 25 pages) with summary tables, photos as appropriate (appendices, if any, will be not counted into the page limit). Once the final report is completed, the consultant also needs to develop) a 2-pager summary (in both English and Vietnamese) of this study for wider dissemination. The timeline of final report development is as the below:
 - The consultant will submit the 1st draft report electronically to AEA for review within two (02) weeks since the completion of field work. AEA will provide feedback within 10 working days;
 - Revisions should be made if necessary, based on comments and feedback from AEA and its partners via validation workshops/sessions;

- The Consultant will submit the revised final report within five (05) working days after receiving all comments and inputs on the draft report;
- The final report will be approved by AEA upon satisfaction.

VI. TIMELINE AND LEVEL OF EFFORTS (LOE)

The research is set to commence from October to December 2025. An indicative timeline is set out in the table below.

#	Activity	Timeline	Number of working days	Person in charge
1	Call for proposals and review proposals	10 Oct – 24 Oct	0	AEA, CGFED
2	Interview and sign a contract	27 – 28 Oct	0	AEA, CGFED
3	Review project documents and develop an inception report.	01 – 05 Nov	2	Consultant
4	Design and finalize research tools	05 – 15 Nov	3	Consultant
5	Data collection in fields and training AEA staff and their partners for collaboration and support	17 – 29 Nov	9	Consultant & AEA, CGFED
6	Data analysis and validation sessions	01 – 04 Dec	2	Consultant
7	1 st draft of report (including online sharing for AEA and CGFED)	04 – 12 Dec	5	Consultant
8	2 nd draft of report	15 – 19 Dec	2	Consultant
9	Final report and deliverables	22 – 25 Dec	2	Consultant
	TOTAL		25	

VII. QUALIFICATION AND COMPETENCIES OF CONSULTANT

The lead consultant will work with AEA staff and their partners to conduct the research. The consultant should have the following qualifications to effectively carry out the final evaluation:

- At least 10 years of continuous professional experience in conducting researches/surveys/evaluations.
- Postgraduate degree in the field of sociology, research or any relevant profession.
- Proven understanding and experience in research/surveys/evaluations on gender, gender equality, women empowerment, career orientation, vocational training, livelihood, or sustainable development.

- Proven knowledge, experience and skills in working with local authorities, communities, children, and human rights, especially in the remote and ethnic minority areas.
- Strong knowledge of the regional context in Vietnam.
- Excellent knowledge and experience in conducting both quantitative and qualitative research/surveys.
- Strong experience and skills in participatory approach, capacity building, facilitation of workshop/training, team leadership, policy advocacy, behavior change communication, related cross-cutting issues.
- Excellent written and verbal English.

VIII. REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION

The consultant will regularly update progress to the project team through weekly updates, bi-weekly meetings.

The consultant will inform AEA in a timely manner if any unexpected issues happen.

IX. BUDGET

The budget includes all costs relating to the research.

Expenses of logistics for travel expenses, accommodation and any other relevant expenses associated with the research at locality will be arranged and covered by AEA according to the organization cost norm.

X. HOW TO APPLY

Interested candidates are invited to send a complete application package in English **by 16:00, 24th Oct 2025**, via email to **hr.vietnam@action-education.org** and cc: **cuong.tran@action-education.org** and **thanhnguyen@cgfed.org.vn** with the subject “GEVEE - consultant for research on gender action teams”, including:

1. An updated curriculum vitae.
2. Expression of interest of not more than 4 pages, outlining how the consultant meets the selection criteria.
3. A technical proposal for the research including outlined time frame, frameworks and detailed methodologies to answer research questions, logistics, personnel, and others.
4. Proposed budget for Consultancy fees to undertake the research.
5. At least 3 examples of recent similar work done by the consultant.

Please note that only short-listed candidates will be contacted for further interview and selection.