

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS – TERMS OF REFERENCE INTELLECTUAL SERVICES

Agence Française de Développement
5, rue Roland Barthes
75598 Paris Cedex 12 - RCS PARIS B 775 665 599
Téléphone : + 33 (0)1 53 44 31 31

In respect of the service

« Supporting the development of sustainable mountain
tourism in protected areas in the North of the State of West
Bengal in India »

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ARTICLE 1. AFD Presentation

Agence Française de Développement (AFD) group is a public institution that finances, supports and accelerates the transition to a more just and sustainable world. A French development aid and sustainable development investment platform, we build shared solutions with our partners, with and for the people in developing countries.

Our teams are involved in over 4,000 projects in France, in the overseas territories and in 115 other countries, for the common good of humanity – the climate, biodiversity, peace, gender equality, education and health. In this way, we are thus contributing to the commitment of France and of the French people to the Sustainable Development Goals. For a shared world. Through [grants](#), [loans](#), [guarantee funds](#) or [debt reduction and development contracts](#), AFD funds projects, programmes and studies and supports its partners in developing countries with their [capacity building](#).

Its subsidiary [Proparco](#) (www.proparco.fr) provides support for private investments. Dedicated to mobilising French public expertise, [Expertise France](#) (www.expertisefrance.fr) is expected to join AFD Group in 2022.

AFD also works with French and international academic networks to feed into forward-looking discussions and debates on development. It manages the [French Global Environment Fund \(Fonds français pour l'environnement mondial - FFEM\)](#), which co-finances projects that bridge environmental and development issues.

Full information on AFD, and in particular, its Code of Ethics, which the service provider is strongly encouraged to read, can be found at www.afd.fr.

AFD Sport and Development strategy

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights sports as a unifying and inclusive vehicle: they contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular in terms of education, health, social cohesion, peace, and inclusion.

In February 2019, AFD Group adopted a “Sport and Development” strategy as part of its “100% Social Link” commitment. It has thus made sports an important field of activity in support of youth, the reduction of inequalities and social cohesion.

Under this strategy, AFD Group promotes and supports the development of Sport for development initiatives in the projects it finances. The objective is to improve access to sport for all, especially for young people, women and girls, and thus contribute to increasing access to education and strengthening gender equality.

AFD Group has thus created an innovative space for investment and impact; ii) A space for dialogue, encouraging governments to mainstream sports in public policies; and iii) A space for Mobilization and partnerships. AFD's Sport and Development Strategy is based on four priorities:

- Financing local sports infrastructure that promotes sports for young people, especially girls, with sustainable governance models and sports animation programs
- Strengthening the capacity of key actors who play an essential role in promoting sports for all (Ministries, municipalities, federations, Olympic committees, NGOs, etc.)
- Support the professionalization of the sport sector through capacity building and improved governance
- Strengthen the ties with civil society and sport entrepreneurs by continuing to fund call for projects that support initiatives with immediate impact

AFD Cultural and Creative Industries strategy:

The United Nations 2030 Agenda recognizes culture as “a transversal theme and tool of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”. Improved access to culture and greater participation in cultural life promote social cohesion and integration, especially for young people. Because culture fosters social ties, especially through intergenerational and intercultural dialog, it improves the resilience and capacity of communities to cope with the ecological, social, and moral crises they may encounter.

The cultural and creative sectors (CCI) is a powerful leveraging tool for inclusive local development and encouraging freedom of expression. The structuring of these sectors also helps create economic opportunities while improving access to cultural goods and services for local communities. According to UNESCO, in 2022 the cultural and creative sectors represented 3.1% of global GDP (€2.28 trillion in 2022) and 6.2% of total jobs. This demonstrates the scale of their economic potential.

In this context, the French Development Agency (AFD) was entrusted in 2018 with a new mandate to support cultural and creative industries (CCIs). This support is structured around four key areas of intervention:

- Cultural infrastructure and facilities
- Professional training for cultural professions
- Cultural entrepreneurship
- Cultural policies and governance

The AFD supports the development of Cultural and Creative Industries in both their economic dimension—given their significant impact on growth, GDP, and job creation, particularly for youth—and their social dimension. Notably, Axis 5, “Encouraging social cohesion and inter-population ties through projects with high social impact,” of the 2021–2025 100% Social Bond Strategy adopted by the AFD in 2021 identifies culture (CCIs) as catalysts for social cohesion and drivers of population inclusion. CCIs offer numerous opportunities to enhance the well-being of populations and strengthen societal resilience. As such, they contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Over the period 2018-2024, nearly €400 million has been invested by the AFD Group in ICCs. This concerns more than 100 projects and more than 170 micro-projects. 2024 is a record year with €130 million committed across 24 new projects.

ARTICLE 2. Presentation of the Contracting Department

Biodiversity, Rural Development and Agriculture Division (ARB)

ARB is a technical division of AFD and has three main areas of action: Contributing to the productive and ecological transitions Supporting cohesive, inclusive, and resilient rural areas Promoting institutions and policies that support the ecological, productive, and territorial transitions.

Social Link Division (CLS)

The mission of this division is to support, facilitate and consolidate the Agency’s various activities in the field of social ties, gender, sport and development, and cultural and creative industries (CCI). The role of the CLS has been strengthened and its ambition reinforced by the adoption in March 2021 of the 100% Social Link Strategy 2021-2025, a central marker of AFD’s overall strategy within the framework of the 2030 agenda

Dedicated teams to Sport and Cultural and Creative Industries are part of CLS division

ARTICLE 3. Contexte et objectifs de la mission

Background

Protected areas in the mountainous regions of West Bengal, such as the Singalila and Neora Valley national parks, are known for their spectacular landscapes and outstanding biodiversity.

Local communities living on the outskirts of these parks play a key role in conservation. These communities have a rich cultural heritage and are the custodians of the region's natural resources. In this context, The French Development Agency (AFD) and the Forest Department of the State of West Bengal are developing a project that include a component to develop sustainable ecotourism at high altitude. The objective of the activities identified is to create economic opportunities (ecotourism services such as guidance, accommodation, small businesses, guest houses and transport services) while preserving the fragile environment.

A) Focus on Singalila National Park

Nestled along the India-Nepal border, Singalila National Park is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, dominated by the majestic Himalayan range. Spanning 78 km², the park offers iconic trekking routes, including the Sandakphu-Phalut trail, which provides panoramic views of Mount Kangchenjunga, Mount Everest, and other Himalayan peaks. Key trails include the 31 km trek from Manebhanjan to Sandakphu and the 21 km trek from Sandakphu to Phalut. Along these routes, trekkers encounter diverse ecosystems, from rhododendron forests to alpine meadows.

Singalila is a biodiversity hotspot, home to the elusive red panda, Himalayan black bear, and over 120 bird species, including pheasants and tragopans. The park's features rhododendrons, magnolias, and oaks, particularly striking during spring.

B) Focus on Neora Valley National Park

Located in the Kalimpong district, Neora Valley National Park covers approximately 159.89 sq Km and is one of the most pristine tropical forests in the Eastern Himalayas. Known for its remoteness and untouched landscapes, the park offers notable trekking routes such as the trail from Lava to Rachel Pass, a 12 km hike that takes visitors through dense forests and bamboo groves, culminating at a ridge with panoramic views of Bhutan, Sikkim, and the plains of Bengal. Neora Valley has a remarkable wildlife, harboring species such as the red panda, clouded leopard, and Himalayan flying squirrel. Birdwatchers are drawn to its rich avian diversity, including the Satyr Tragopan and the Rufous-necked Hornbill. The park's flora includes orchids, ferns, and towering conifers.

The park's rugged terrain and limited accessibility have preserved its ecological integrity, making it an ideal location for sustainable, low-impact tourism.

C) West Bengal Forest Department: Mandate and Role in Protected Areas

The West Bengal Forest Department is the primary government body responsible for the conservation, management, and sustainable development of the state's forests and wildlife. Its mandate includes safeguarding the biodiversity of West Bengal's rich natural heritage, which encompasses diverse ecosystems such as tropical forests, mangroves, and high-altitude habitats. The department plays a critical role in the protection and management of the state's extensive network of protected areas, including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and biosphere reserves.

The department's responsibilities in protected areas focus on habitat conservation, wildlife protection, and community engagement. This includes implementing anti-poaching measures, restoring degraded habitats, and conducting research and monitoring to support evidence-based management practices. Additionally, the department promotes eco-tourism as a tool for sustainable development, creating opportunities for local communities while minimizing the ecological footprint of tourism activities.

Objectives

The mission aims to **set-up the sustainable high-altitude ecotourism component of the project in Singalila and Neora Valley national parks** by strengthening ecotourism services, enhancing local capacity, and balancing biodiversity conservation, economic development, and community empowerment while ensuring environmental sustainability

The mission will assist the Forest Department in developing technical and strategic proposals in the following areas:

A) Development of sustainable tourism infrastructures:

- Through survey of the area to identify low impact tourism activities potential including trekking, camping, paragliding etc.
- Design eco-friendly facilities for 10 sustainable campsites, integrating solid and liquid waste management and energy-efficient solutions.
- Propose the development and enhancement of at least 15 trekking routes in Singalila and in Neora Valley, identifying infrastructure needs such as shelters, toilets, signposts, and rooms for guides.
- Listing tourism infrastructure needed or required to be upgraded to attract high end tourists in each of the identified stretches.

B) Renovation of forest rest houses and suggestion for improvement of home stays

- Assess the feasibility and potential of renovating key forest houses in Sandakphu, Phalut, Neora Valley, and Buxa Dooars.
- Explore options for their adaptative reuse, considering models such as interpretation centers, eco-museums, research facilities, etc. to enhance cultural and tourism services.
- Develop a framework addressing the technical, financial, and governance aspects of these renovations, ensuring alignment with local and national policies.
- A survey of existing homestay facilities along the trekking routes, Examination of the facilities and suggestion for improvement (better housekeeping, catering, emergency case etc.) of these facilities aligning with the policies of GoWB in this regard to encourage the sector

C) Capacity building

- Conduct a needs assessment for local communities and park staff in sustainable tourism and conservation management.
- Implement targeted training programs for local ecotourism service providers (guides, operators, artisans), park officers responsible for ecotourism infrastructure management; and women and marginalized groups to promote gender-inclusive tourism initiatives.
- Successful or parallel model can be illustrated to draw from the experience of Europe and Africa.

ARTICLE 4. Purpose of the contract

The purpose of this contract is to *Support the development of sustainable mountain tourism in protected areas in the North of the State of West Bengal in India.*

The Forest Department has requested to AFD a support of French expertise to concretely develop an action plan on sustainable mountain tourism that will be implemented through the *Singalila and Neora Valley national parks* project.

ARTICLE 5. Service expected under this tender

5.1 Details of the expected service

The expected service could be divided into 3 phases of work:

Phase 1: Diagnosis and strategic planning

The 1st phase is dedicated to the diagnosis in order to better frame the future activities. At that stage, the selected consultant will explore the needs of the Forest department and other stakeholders; analyze the existing offer in term of tourism, sport and culture in the area and sub-region; identify sites and start design mountain tourism activities; question their compliance with the vision and objectives of the *Singalila and Neora Valley national parks* project. An on-site mission will be required for this phase.

The activities should include (not limited to):

1. Site assessment and mapping:
 - Conduct a spatial and environmental diagnosis of trekking routes and potential ecotourism zones with their respective eco-tourism activities (including sites for paragliding, camping, viewpoints, mountain biking, etc.)
 - Identify critical constraints and risks
2. Tourism and cultural offer analysis:
 - Assess existing and potential tourism offerings, ensuring alignment with conservation goals.
 - Identify complementarity with existing cultural, ecological, and adventure tourism initiatives in the region.
 - Identify the priorities of the Forest Department and public authorities in terms of Tourism and Cultural offer
3. Stakeholder engagement and governance planning:
 - Identify key stakeholders, including local communities, tourist guides, homestay owners, tourism operators, NGOs, and government agencies.
 - Develop a stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure participatory decision-making.
 - Benchmark similar ecotourism models in India and internationally, identifying success factors and challenges, and lessons to be learnt.

Deliverables: Comprehensive diagnosis report including:

- ecotourism potential and environmental risks;
- tourism and cultural landscape analysis;
- stakeholder engagement plan;
- forest house renovation plan.

Phase 2: Pre-programmation – architectural and cultural/touristic of some identified sites

The 2nd phase aims to go deeper in the analysis in order to propose a sport/cultural/touristic programming of the selected site. The selection of the pre-identified site will be discussed with the Forest Department and AFD on the basis of their relevance, location, constraints and budget limitation.

The activities should include (not limited to):

1. Conceptualization of tourism and cultural services:

- Define visitor experiences for each site (nature trails, thematic guided tours, workshops).
- Develop museography/signage for each site in order to ease the interpretation of the site and the parks and to convey the message defined with the Forest Department (education; awareness; protection of the environment; etc.). To this end, the development of potential eco-museums, interpretation center of the park or cultural centers should be explored.

2. Infrastructure design and sustainability integration:

- Identify low-impact construction techniques and bioclimatic solutions.
- Propose eco-friendly energy and waste management systems.
- Ensure climate adaptation measures.
- Propose Drawings and Estimates for the various activities/constructions/interventions

3. Economic feasibility and business model development:

Develop a sustainable financial model, considering:

- Revenue sources (entry fees, guided tours, local crafts sales).
- Operational costs and maintenance needs.
- Public-private partnership (PPP) opportunities.

4. Regulatory compliance and risk management:

- Ensure adherence to protected area regulations and environmental standards.
- Propose risk mitigation strategies

Deliverables:

- Blueprint/Concept note for selected sites, detailing: tourism, cultural, and environmental objectives; financial and governance models; proposed visitor experiences and site-specific features.
- Technical and economic feasibility plan for key infrastructure (camping sites, trekking routes, forest houses, paragliding, mountain biking).

Phase 3: Capacity building

The phase 3 aims to support the Forest Department team, stakeholders or local communities in the implementation of the eco-tourism proposed activities by strengthening their capacities. The selected consultant will be in charge of ensuring that their proposals are feasible to implement by the local actors of the project. It ensures the autonomy of the different partners and the long-term sustainability. This phase can be transversal and occur before, while or after the two others phases

The activities should include (not limited to):

1. Identify the training needs of local communities and forestry staff, focusing on ecotourism management, waste management, and maintenance of trekking routes and campsites.
2. Deliver targeted capacity-building programs, emphasizing skills for local guides, eco-tourism entrepreneurs, and park officers.
3. Develop practical guides and training materials for long-term knowledge transfer.

Deliverables:

- Training needs assessment report
- Training modules and practical guides.

5.2 Specific procedures and requirements

Throughout all phases, the selected consultant must bring concerns to the following principles:

- Social and Environmental responsibility:
 - The *Singalila and Neora Valley national parks* project has a general objective of preserving the environment and promote eco-activities inside the national parks. All activities proposed by the consultant must take important consideration of the environmental aspects. Such consideration should also be taken within the methodology of the consultant
 - AFD gives important regards and credit the community and stakeholders engagement. The activities should be developed alongside the Forest Department and other stakeholders in a consultative and co-construction approach. Also, critical concerns must apply on the potential impact of the local communities of the proposed activities and ensure that the *do no harm* principle is respected (especially on their economic (existing agriculture, tourism, etc.) and cultural/spiritual (relationship with nature) activities).
 - The consultant will ensure a gender-sensitive approaches by promoting the involvement of women in tourism-related activities.

Part of the evaluation of the tender will concern the social and environmental responsibility.

- Long-term sustainability: the support brings by the consultant is expected to last 09 months. Concerns must be taken to ensure the sustainability and feasibility of the proposals over that period. Tool-kit, ready-made solution, capacity building can be explored.
- Use of Sport and Culture to preserve the environment: AFD understands Sports and Culture as transversal tools to ensure the development. In that regard, Sports and Culture can also be effective ways to preserve the environment which is at heart of the present services. Efforts can be made to develop this thinking and detail the logic of the proposed methodology by the Consultant.

5.3 Delivery, performance conditions and contact

The contract shall be performed in West Bengal, India. Field visits will be conducted. Travel expenses must be included in the technical and financial proposal.

The work will be undertaken under the responsibility of the ARB and CLS AFD division and the agency of New Delhi. The project manager will be Laura BUIS, Florence GREVET and Ronan PEZZINI

5.4 Expected Methodology

The service provider may propose the methodology deemed most appropriate for carrying out its activities, in accordance with the Terms of References.

Participative and collaborative approaches must be undertaken by involving as much as possible stakeholders recommendations.

The methodology will also specify in detail the number of trips planned per expert for each phase, as well as the volume of expertise assigned to each deliverable, along with a clear timeline.

5.5 Estimated time frame

The mission will be over a period of approximately 9 months (to be confirmed and re-evaluated as required). Start of the mission estimated in January 2026

The service is broken down into the different technical phases described above or proposed and approved in the Consultant proposal. The proposed methodology must precise the milestones.

A steering committee composed of an AFD representative, Forest Department representative and Consultant team leader will be created. A following-up committee can also be set-up accordingly to consultant recommendations.

5.6 Expected deliverables

Deliverable 1: Comprehensive diagnosis report including:

- ecotourism potential and environmental risks;
- tourism and cultural landscape analysis;
- Stakeholder engagement plan ;
- forest house renovation plan.

Deliverable 2:

- Blueprint/Concept note for selected sites, detailing: tourism, cultural, and environmental objectives; financial and governance models; proposed visitor experiences and site-specific features.
- Technical and economic feasibility plan for key infrastructure (camping sites, trekking routes, forest houses, paragliding, mountain biking).

Deliverable 3:

- Training needs assessment report
- Training modules and practical guides

Indicators for following-up the service can be proposed by the consultant.

5.7 Qualifications and skills required

The Contractor shall allocate employees with the appropriate qualifications and experience for the services described in these specifications, so as to achieve the results set out therein. Several expertise can be covered by one expert. The Contractor's team must be composed of a Team Leader, in charge of coordinating the Service. Expertise in the following sectors is required:

The selected consultant must have proven experience in sustainable ecotourism, conservation, and infrastructure planning in protected areas, particularly in high-altitude environments

Key qualifications:

1. Ecotourism and sustainable tourism development
 - Experience in ecotourism planning and management in national parks.
 - Knowledge of low-impact tourism infrastructure (eco-campsites, trekking routes, paragliding, mountain biking, sustainable visitor facilities).

- Expertise on nature-based cultural & sport activities and offers
2. Environmental and infrastructure expertise
 - Experience in waste & water management solutions for sensitive environments.
 - Understanding of bioclimatic architecture & climate-resilient infrastructure.
 3. Conservation and protected area management
 - Expertise in integrating tourism with biodiversity conservation strategies.
 - Experience in mitigating environmental impacts of tourism.
 4. Stakeholder engagement and community-based tourism
 - Experience in working with local communities & authorities to develop inclusive tourism models.
 - Strong skills in participatory planning & governance frameworks.
 5. Business and financial sustainability
 - Ability to develop economic models & revenue strategies for sustainable tourism.
 - Experience in financial planning & cost-benefit analysis for tourism projects.
 6. Training and capacity building
 - Experience in training local communities, park rangers & tourism operators.

Additional assets:

- Proven experience in similar projects in the mountains and in France
- Experience in India or South Asia is a plus.
- Fluent English required; knowledge of Bengali or Nepali and Hindi is an advantage.
- Strong analytical & report-writing skills.

ARTICLE 6. Validation of deliverable by AFD

6.1 Deliverable validation process

On receipt of each deliverable, AFD will have 20 working days to validate it or not. If AFD wishes to alter the deliverable, it shall send the Service Provider its comments on those deliverables within 7 working days of receipt. The Service Provider will have 7 working days in which to take those comments into account and produce a new version of the deliverable. This process may be repeated until AFD is satisfied with the deliverable.

AFD will communicate the deliverable with the Forest Department to collect their comments and approvals

The deliverable will only be validated by decision of AFD.

6.2 Validation criteria for deliverables

- The clarity and readability of the deliverable;
- Compliance with deadlines;
- Compliance with the scope of the requested Service;

- The operational nature of the conclusions of the deliverables;
- The added value compared to the current situation.

ARTICLE 7. Costraints imposed by AFD

7.1 Use of English

Under the contract, English must be invariably used with the project owner: documents, meetings, reports, telephone calls, e-mails, all deliverables, etc.

7.2 Field visit

The service must necessarily include fieldwork assignments. Field presence must exceed the workload performed remotely

7.3 Project Monitoring

The contract holder undertakes to appoint a single contact person responsible for monitoring this contract.

7.4 Access by the service provider's employees

Upon notification of the contract, the service provider shall have at its disposal the existing documentation relating to the subjects on which it shall intervene.

ARTICLE 8. Resources made available to the Service Provider

AFD makes available to the Service Provider all the documents in its possession that may be useful for their mission. The following list is non-exhaustive:

- AFD's 100% Social Link – 2021-2025 Strategy
- AFD's Sport and Development strategy
- AFD's Gender Equality strategy
- AFD's Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) strategy
- AFD's Strategy with CSOs
- Guide: Sport & Development A methodological approach
- Guide: Identification of Sport & Development projects
- Documentation related to the *Singalila and Neora Valley national parks project* and any similar projects implemented by AFD in other regions.
- Any related India national plans or studies.

ARTICLE 9. Previsionnal planning

The duration is estimated to be 09 month and the definitive planning should be proposed by the Consultant, reviewed by the Forest Department and approved by AFD.

Phase	Deliverables	Timeline
Kick-off: meeting with AFD and the Forest Department	Report of the meeting	End of January 2026
Phase 1	See above	End of April 2026
Phase 2	See above	End of July 2026
Phase 3	See above	End of September 2026