

Terms of Reference

Establishing Baseline for the Green Resilient, and Adaptive Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Economy (GRACE – LoCALplus) project in Bangladesh

ToR

1. About ICIMOD

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is an intergovernmental knowledge and learning centre working on behalf of the people of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH). We are based in Kathmandu, Nepal and work in and for our eight regional member countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. We work to improve the lives and livelihoods of men, women, and children of the HKH and protect mountain environments and cultures. The knowledge we create, and share helps the people of the HKH become more resilient, make the most of new opportunities, and prepare for change. Our work strengthens regional cooperation for conservation and sustainable mountain development. For more information, please explore our [website](#) and read our [strategy 2030](#).

2. Overview of the project and context

Bangladesh is ranked as the 29th most vulnerable country worldwide and 167th in terms of readiness to adapt to climate change. This connexion of high vulnerability and low readiness underscores a critical adaptation gap. The Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT) – within Bangladesh, illustrate the multidimensional nature of these adaptation needs. Characterized by rugged hilly topography, remoteness, infrastructural challenges, and a unique sociopolitical outlook, the CHT is socioeconomically dependent on subsistence agriculture, cottage industries, tourism and hospitality, and related informal services. However, escalating climate change impacts and environmental degradation, and the weak adaptive capacity has heightened exposure and sensitivity of the area to climate-related risks. In its recent National Adaptation Plan (NAP), the Government of Bangladesh, has declared the CHT as one of the country's 'climate stress areas', highlighting its strategic importance in national climate policy. In the face of these vulnerabilities, the CHT is also a biodiversity hotspot and an ecosystem service provider of national and regional significance, contributing to water regulation, soil fertility, and biodiversity conservation. These ecological functions extend benefits well beyond the local scale, reinforcing the need for integrated, area-based adaptation strategies that align biodiversity conservation with socioeconomic resilience. The baseline will establish reference points across the project's results framework, including adaptation capacity, climate finance access, governance systems, and ecosystem conditions, enabling evidence-based tracking of progress and results.

ICIMOD and United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) jointly implementing the **Green, Resilient, and Adaptive Chittagong Hill Tracts Economy (GRACE)-LoCALplus** project in CHT. The project is funded by the **Adaptation Fund**. Building on the experience of the **Local Climate Adaptive Living (LoCAL)** mechanisms designed and managed by the UNCDF, **GRACE-LoCALplus** promotes access to climate finance by local government authorities for locally led climate action. Fundamentally, it addresses adaptation investment deficits in hazards, vulnerability, and exposure in the hilly regions of CHT through innovative financing that rewards local government for their performance.

The **GRACE-LoCALplus project** will be implemented in a phased geographic expansion approach. In its first two years of implementation phase, the project will target **15 district sub-units or Upazilas** (UPs) - namely Alikadam, Baghaichhari, Dighinala, Kaptai, Kawkhali, Khagrachhari, Lakshmichhari, Mahalchhari, Manikchhari, Matiranga, Naikhongchhari, Naniarchar, Panchhari, Rajasthali, and Ramgarh. This focus is intended to generate early evidence of effectiveness, build institutional capacity, and establish localized models for climate adaptation finance delivery. Following the first two years of implementation, the project will expand its coverage to the **other 10 Upazilas** that were previously part of the **Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC)** – a multi-donor collaborative initiative. In this phase Upazilas including Bandarban Sadar, Barkal, Belaichhari, Juraichhari, Lama, Langadu, Rangamati Sadar, Rowangchhari, Ruma, and Thanchi will benefit from the project’s scaling approach.

GRACE-LoCALplus is designed to improve the climate change resilience of local communities by intervening at the local level – the target UPs of the CHT, and through funding adaptation activities using the Performance-Based Climate Resilience Grants (PBCRG) model and capacity development (CD) support. The PBCRG grants will provide a financial top-up to cover the additional costs of making investments climate resilient and are channelled through existing government fiscal transfer systems - Unidentified Sub Projects (USPs), rather than through parallel or ad hoc structures.

Over its **four-year duration**, the project seeks to enhance the climate resilience of vulnerable hill communities in the CHT, with particular emphasis on empowering women and indigenous groups while safeguarding local ecosystems and economies. The project follows a two-pronged approach – work components:

- I- Enhancing the capacity of local governments and vulnerable communities to build resilience to climate change impacts; and,
- II- Enhancing country systems to access climate finance and deliver on locally led adaptation efforts. The underlying premise is that strengthened institutional capacity and improved access to adaptation finance at the community and local government levels will enable more effective climate risk management and foster long-term resilience.

GRACE-LoCALplus is designed to deliver the following results.

Outcome 1: Enhanced capacity of local governments and vulnerable communities to build resilience to climate change impacts.	Outcome 2: Enhanced country systems to access climate finance and deliver locally led adaptation.
Output 1.1: Data and evidence on local climate risks to inform local decision making.	Output 2.1: Annual programmes of adaptation for targeted Upazilas identified in line with the Performance-based Climate Resilient Grant (PBCRG) mechanism.
Output 1.2: Capacity building of local governments and communities delivered (on	Output 2.2: Locally led climate adaptation interventions and investments are implemented.

the-the-job training, workshops, accessible knowledge products).	
Output 1.3: Local government plans and Local Adaptation Action Plans developed and updated for the selected Upazilas.	Output 2.3: Output 2.3: PBCRG system for local-level action, including M&E and reporting.

For the identification of required data domains and key variables, the firm or institution must undertake a thorough review of the project [Results Framework and Theory of Change \(ToC\)](#), as well as the [project document](#). Based on this review, the successful firm/institution is expected to propose a **baseline (evaluation) design** and **methodological approach** that are:

- **Contextually appropriate**, taking into account the project’s geographic, institutional, and socio-economic setting.
- **Triangulable**, ensuring multiple lines of evidence are integrated to strengthen the validity and reliability of baseline findings (estimates) and recommendations.
- **Closely aligned** with the identified data domains and key variables for measuring project outcomes and impacts.

2.1. Project Partners

- **Designated Authority (DA):** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
- **Regional Implementing Entity (RIE):** International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
- **Executing Entities (EEs):** UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), ICIMOD, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), and the Local Government Division (LGD).

ICIMOD invites Expressions of Interest (EoI) from qualified firms or institutions to undertake the baseline study for the project. **The call is open to both national and international firms, institutions or consortiums** (led by a firm or an institution) **with an established operational presence in Bangladesh**. Preference will be given to firms or institutions that can demonstrate a proven track record in designing and implementing baseline, midline, and endline studies for bilateral and multilateral climate change adaptation programmes. Firms or institutions interested in this call are expected to possess the institutional capacity to **obtain all necessary approvals and clearances from relevant government authorities** for conducting field-based data collection in the **Chittagong Hill Tracts**. In addition, firms should be able to assemble a technically strong and balanced team with demonstrated technical expertise required of the project including the design and execution of rigorous baseline studies that establish reliable benchmarks for subsequent assessments to inform project implementation and measure progress over time. The team should also bring applied experience in gender-responsive evaluations, and rights-based and inclusive approaches, ensuring that the baseline is methodologically sound, contextually relevant, and aligned project requirements.

3. Objectives of the baseline assessment

The overall objective is to establish a robust baseline (evaluation) design that generates reliable, disaggregated data to inform the planning, implementation, performance monitoring, and evaluation of the project, while also providing a framework (basis) for conducting linked midline and endline assessments for evaluating outcomes and impacts of the project.

3.1. The specific objectives of establishing the baseline include:

1. **To generate reliable and disaggregated data** on key indicators outlined in the project results framework to inform adaptive planning and implementation, evidence-based decision making, refine target setting, and strengthen projects performance monitoring system. The assessment will ensure that gender, age, disability, and vulnerability-disaggregated data are collected in accordance with the Adaptation Fund's emphasis on equity and inclusion.
2. **To establish benchmarks** against which project performance can be measured during midline and endline assessments.
3. **To assess readiness** of institutions, infrastructure, the environment, and communities for the execution of effective climate adaptation strategies, while also identifying critical deficiencies, risks, and opportunities.
4. **To provide evidence informed and practical recommendations** for adaptive management of the project to ensure the interventions are responsive to Bangladesh's National Adaptation Plan (NAP).

3.2. The baseline (evaluation) design¹

Given the project outcomes, duration, and objectives of the baseline study, interested firms are expected to **propose a robust and contextually appropriate baseline evaluation design** for the project. The proposed design should integrate **gender-responsive evaluation** methodologies, and grounded rights-based and inclusive approaches, to establish reliable benchmarks for systematically measuring project performance and impacts during the linked midline and endline assessments, as well as to assess the contributions specifically attributable to project's interventions.

¹ A baseline (evaluation) design refers to the overall evaluation architecture (established at the beginning of a project) - the blueprint that determines how evidence will be generated, compared at meaningful intervals, and attributed. These could be experimental, quasi-experimental, or non-experimental designs. **While preparing this technical section**, it is important to recognise that the baseline is intended to establish a rigorous evaluation design at the onset of the project. A design that is contextually grounded in the GRACE project and aligned with its priority focus areas. Specifically, the design should be structured to track project outcomes and impact across the project's required data domains and thematic priorities, while simultaneously generating robust and reliable baseline benchmarks for the project's quantitative as well as qualitative targets. These benchmarks will serve as the foundation for systematic measurement of change at midline and endline, thereby ensuring methodological rigor in tracking outcomes and impact over time. By adopting such a baseline evaluation design, we aim to maximize the validity of causal inference and strengthen confidence in attributing observed results (outcomes and impacts) directly to the GRACE interventions, and to ascertain the projects contributions at the least. **In this context**, please also carefully review the overall purpose and specific objectives of the baseline, the project's core focus, and its target beneficiaries as outlined in the ToR, and the project document.

4. Potential methodology²

Interested firms or institutions are expected to **propose a comprehensive methodology and sampling plan** that are **fully aligned with the baseline evaluation design they propose** for the project. The proposed approach should be methodologically rigorous and contextually appropriate, **ensuring it captures** the complex socio-ecological, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) dynamics. It should integrate both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a holistic understanding of baseline conditions. The use of innovative tools and technologies, such as mobile data collection platforms for surveying baseline subjects, i.e., beneficiaries, reference groups etc, remote sensing and GIS mapping of infrastructure, areas susceptible to hazards, water sources such as Watersheds and Springsheds, and associated ecosystem services, using participatory approaches, is strongly encouraged to enhance data accuracy, efficiency, and inclusivity. Furthermore, the methodology should adhere to gender-responsive, rights-based and inclusive principles, ensuring the collection of disaggregated data that reflects the diverse perspectives. The sampling plan should be robust and statistically sound to enable reliable analysis and establish benchmarks for systematically measuring project outcomes and impacts during midline and endline assessments. The proposed methodology should also outline the mechanisms that the selected firm or institution will establish to ensure **traceability** of the baseline subject for midline and endline assessments with **clear data validation, reliability checks, and quality assurance** protocols.

The proposed sampling strategy must outline **stratified sampling frames for each beneficiary category**, results data domains, and provide justification for how sample sizes will be determined within each group. The methodology should also distinguish data collection tools and methods for different population cohorts, including households, women's groups, institutions, and community members as primary stakeholders in project interventions.

5. Scope of work

a. Baseline study design development and execution

1. Conduct a comprehensive **desk review** of existing baseline data, baseline data requirements and other relevant literature.
2. Develop a **methodologically sound, gender-responsive and inclusive baseline evaluation design** that is closely aligned with the project's objectives and Performance Results Framework, while adhering to the [results-based management guidelines](#), and the [guidelines for project evaluations](#) of the Adaptation Fund, and Fund's [project level results frameworks and baseline guidance document](#).
3. In close consultation with project team, develop baseline instruments (household/community survey questionnaires), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) checklists and guidelines, Key Informant Interview (KII) checklists and protocols

² The methodology details the practical implementation strategies within the chosen baseline (evaluation) design. Major components include sampling strategy, data collection methods, data collection tools and instruments, triangulation and validation mechanisms, and analytical approaches, e.g., quantitative statistical methods, qualitative frameworks, mixed-methods et cetera. Methodology, in this way, translates the baseline (evaluation) design into specific operational steps that will generate the evidence primarily focusing on how many respondents, who, where, which tools, what indicators, how will data be analysed.

that are **inclusive, culturally sensitive, and participatory** incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure robust and triangulated findings. All the tools must be aligned with project results framework, associated indicators, mapped results and indicators of the Fund and adapted to the socio-cultural context of CHT to ensure relevance, inclusivity, and consistency across the project sites.

b. Data collection and analysis

4. Develop and deliver a data management plan, including metadata and codebook.
5. Lead and **manage the execution of baseline data collection**. Work in close coordination with the ICIMOD and UNCDF core team and project partners, while maintaining strong communication and engagement with all relevant stakeholders throughout the assessment process.
6. Undertake primary and secondary data collection using participatory and inclusive methodologies that amplify the voices of marginalized and vulnerable groups, particularly women and disabled.

c. Baseline report(s)

The selected firm or institution is expected to produce **high-quality baseline report** in line with the baseline report format agreed upon during the inception phase and to the highest satisfaction of ICIMOD and UNCDF. Prior to finalization of the baseline report, the selected firm or institution will **conduct a validation workshop** preferably in Rangamati district, present preliminary findings and solicit feedback. In addition, the selected firm or institution will **present findings of the baseline** to stakeholders during inception workshop that will be held in Bangladesh. The selected firm or institution is also expected to produce and deliver a high-quality **knowledge and dissemination brief** summarizing key baseline findings for policy and project use.

6. Onboarding processes and stages

The most promising firms or institutions expressing interest in this assignment, to the best satisfaction of ICIMOD and UNCDF, **will be shortlisted and invited to submit full technical and financial proposals**. The selected firm or institution will then be required to prepare and submit an inception report and subsequently execute the baseline data collection under ICIMOD's oversight and quality assurance framework, as the Regional Implementing Entity (RIE).

Full Proposal (for shortlisted firms or institutions)

Shortlisted firms or institutions will need to submit a full proposal to undertake the Project's baseline assessment, which outlines comprehensively:

1. An understanding of the assignment
2. All team members' qualifications and relevant experience
3. Detailed baseline (evaluation) design and methodology including a rational of the proposed baseline (evaluation) design, sampling plan. In close consultation with the project team, agree on key indicators and variables for the baseline to ensure consistency across midline and endline assessments.
4. Final baseline report structure (format).

5. Full, itemised budget provided on the prescribed budget format
6. Proposed work plan and corresponding timeline

7. Important next steps

- i. The successful firms or institutions **shortlisted through the EoI process** shall submit their full proposals to ICIMOD in the prescribed format. Full proposals **should be** submitted via email to: ieu@icimod.org
- ii. Additionally, **shortlisted firms or institutions** shall submit their financial proposals to ICIMOD in the prescribed format. Financial proposals (in USD)³, along with the firm's registration certificate, tax compliance certificates, and audited financial statements for the past three years, **should be** submitted via email to: consultancy.int@icimod.org. However, this is not a requirement for EoIs.
- iii. The ICIMOD Technical Services Procurement Panel shall review both the technical and financial proposals against the following criteria.

Criteria	Weight
Technical Proposal	(70%)
Firm's or institution's demonstrated capability to execute the assignment, and adherence to ethical standards and safeguards	10%
Baseline (evaluation) design, methodology and detailed work plan and its alignment with the ToR.	35%
Team composition, balance, their qualifications, experience and technical expertise	25%
Financial Proposal	(30%)
Value for Money	30%

- iv. The firm selected through this process will then be required to submit an Inception Report and subsequently carry out the baseline study under ICIMOD's oversight and quality assurance system.

8. Reporting and supervision

The selected firm or institution will report to the head of ICIMOD's Strategic Results, Partnership, and Business Development (SRPBD) Unit, and work in close collaboration with Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist and the GRACE Project Lead.

9. Qualifications & Experience

³ ICIMOD strictly adheres to the principles of transparency in all its technical service procurement processes. Dedicated panels review the technical and financial proposals independently of each other. Therefore, applicants must submit their technical and financial proposals only to the prescribed respective email IDs.

- **Technical depth and rigour:** The firm or institution must have an excellent track record in developing robust baseline evaluation designs and conducting baselines, midline and endline assessments in multidisciplinary settings. They must demonstrate proven expertise in applying gender-responsive evaluation guidelines and integrating inclusive and rights-based approaches. Eligibility will be validated through client testimonials and submission of a high-quality sample report produced within the last five years.
- **Implementation capability and logistics strength:** The firm or institution has a demonstrated proven capacity of executing studies similar to the GRACE LoCALplus baseline in culturally sensitive settings, delivering high-quality outputs within sharp timelines for international organizations.
- **Team composition and balance:** The firm or institution has assembled a well-balanced team of highly qualified **technical experts aligned with the GRACE LoCALplus thematic priorities**. The team demonstrates hands-on expertise in designing and executing **gender-responsive and research** as well as applying **inclusive rights-based approaches**.
- **Core team members** should hold at least a Master's degree (preferably a PhD) in disciplines relevant to the project's thematic priorities, with a **minimum of 10 years** of demonstrated experience in their respective fields. The **core team must have** a thorough understanding of Bangladesh's local governance frameworks, climate vulnerabilities, and socioeconomic contexts, **particularly in the CHT region**. Technical team members must possess excellent knowledge and understanding of advanced statistical techniques, GESI-informed qualitative and quantitative data analysis, geospatial methods with proven expertise in generating high-quality analytical reports. Both the core as well as technical team members must have **demonstrated experience working with indigenous peoples and ethnic minority groups in Bangladesh**. Team members must have demonstrated expertise in planning, designing and conducting high-quality socioeconomic surveys in climate change adaptation and environmental settings. The proposed team must be clearly structured, with **defined roles and responsibilities** for each member. For every role, the firm or institution should explicitly outline the individual's area of expertise and the number of years of relevant professional experience, demonstrating alignment between their competencies and the requirements of the assignment.

10. Ethical Considerations

All baseline assessment activities must strictly comply with ICIMOD's data protection standards, and international research ethics and safeguards on conducting research with human and environmental subjects. Comply with ethical research standards, encompassing Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), anonymity, confidentiality, and secure data management, with heightened sensitivity towards indigenous and vulnerable populations. Comprehensive data collection protocols must be developed to the best satisfaction of ICIMOD. Sensitive data – if applicable, must be collected and stored securely, with strict confidentiality and anonymization protocols where applicable.

All information and data collected under this assignment shall be transparently declared for potential use in regional reporting, analysis, and knowledge dissemination. Prior permission must be obtained from ICIMOD, as custodian of the data, before any form of data sharing or

publication. The selected firm or institution must ensure that all protocols related to ethical clearance is obtained from a respective institution in Bangladesh. Furthermore, data storage, security and usage rights are adhered to in line with ICIMOD's policies.

11. Specific deliverables & Timeline

Deliverable	Description	Timeline
Received Expression of Interest (Eoi) from interested firms or institutions	Firms or institutions Justification of interest in response to the preliminary questions asked in the call for Eoi.	October 17, 2025
Assessment of Eois completed	Shortlisting of the most promising firms or institutions for next stages of the process. Shortlisted firm or institution notified	October 30, 2025
Full (technical) and financial proposals received by the firms shortlisted through call for Eoi process	Firms or institutions shortlisted from the call for Eoi are invited to submit full technical and financial proposals	November 21, 2025
Assessment of technical and financial proposals completed	Firms or institutions shortlisted from the call for Eoi are invited to submit full technical and financial proposals. Selected firm or institution notified	December 05, 2025
Inception meeting	First inception meeting with the selected firm or institution	December 08, 2025
Inception phase (Inception workshop and Inception report)	Draft inception report received from the selected firm or institution	December 22, 2025
	Inception workshop held in Bangladesh for baseline (evaluation) design, and methodology review.	
	ICIMOD and UNCDF provides inputs on inception report	December 31, 2025
	Final inception report received from the selected firm or institution	January 12, 2026
Field work	Selected firm initiate baseline data collection	Jan. 15 th – Feb. 16 th , 2026
Validation workshop of baseline preliminary findings	Selected firm or institution conducts a validation workshop and shares preliminary findings in a face-to-face workshop modality in Rangmati district of CHT.	Week of 23 rd Feb. 2026
Draft baseline report	Selected firm shares the first draft of baseline report for review.	March 16, 2026
	Knowledge and dissemination brief summarizing key baseline findings for	

	informed decision making (policy, adaptive management, and project use).	
Inputs provided on the draft baseline report	ICIMOD and UNCDF provides inputs on the draft baseline report	March 28, 2026
Final baseline report	Selected firm or institution submits the final report to ICIMOD	April 13, 2026

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