Request for Proposal: Trekking and Expedition Support Services for the Collaborative Long-term Monitoring of Glacier and Permafrost in Bhutan — Shodug Glacier, Barshong, Naro Gewog, Thimphu

Date of Issue:	**23 October 2026**
Submission Deadline:	**04 November 2026**
Submission Email:	**procurement@icimod.org**

1. Background

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is a regional intergovernmental knowledge and learning centre serving the eight member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. ICIMOD's primary mission is to promote sustainable and resilient mountain development through science-based solutions and regional cooperation.

ICIMOD and the National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology (NCHM) have been working together since 2024 on long-term glacier and permafrost monitoring at Shodug Glacier, near Thimphu. As part of this collaboration, ICIMOD and NCHM will carry out a joint field campaign at Shodug, Barshong, Naro Gewog, Thimphu, from 16 November to 09 December 2026. The work includes seasonal mass balance measurements on Shodug Glacier, data collection from the permafrost sensors installed in 2024, and reconnaissance of new monitoring sites.

The fieldwork involves multi-day trekking and camping from Barshong (about 3,692 m a.s.l.) to a base camp at Pam Luma (about 4,740 m a.s.l.), with glacier and permafrost work at about 5,020 m a.s.l., followed by a return trek to Thimphu. ICIMOD therefore requires a qualified and experienced service provider to deliver trekking and expedition support services.

2. Objectives of the Assignment

ICIMOD seeks to engage a service provider to deliver trekking and expedition support for the full field campaign (16 November – 09 December 2026). The specific objectives are:

- To ensure safe and timely transport and trekking support for 5 participants (1 ICIMOD staff and 4 NCHM staff, all Bhutanese) from Thimphu to Barshong, along the trekking route to Shodug (up to about 5,020 m a.s.l.), and back to Thimphu.
- To provide qualified guides, porters/pack animal handlers, and cooks for the full trekking period.
- To set up and manage camping, catering and welfare facilities at each campsite in the itinerary (Section 4), including an extended stay at base camp during the glacier and permafrost work.

- If required, to support the team in obtaining permits and clearances for the route. **Separate payment will be made for this service.**
- To implement safety, risk management and emergency response protocols suitable for high-altitude work in early winter conditions.
- To ensure compliance with applicable Bhutanese laws and environmental regulations.

3. Scope of Work

The selected service provider shall be responsible for the full operational management of the expedition. The scope covers the following areas:

3.1 Logistics and Transportation

The service provider shall arrange and manage all transportation requirements for the expedition, including:

- Vehicle transport for the Thimphu – Barshong route, for 5 participants, camping equipment, and personal luggage.
- Porter and/or pack animal transport for camping equipment, food, and personal luggage along the trekking route: Barshong – Naha – Jaradingtha – Pam Luma (base camp) – Shodug – Gunglayumtsho – Tshonam – Tsho Sum – Jimilangtsho – Simkota – Thimphu, including the extended stay at base camp (21 November – 03 December 2026).
- Optional vehicle pick-up from the trek end point to Thimphu on 09 December 2026 (separately priced).

3.2 Field Support and Staffing

The service provider shall provide adequately trained and experienced personnel, including:

- Experienced, licensed trekking guides familiar with the Barshong – Shodug route and high-altitude terrain, with experience of trekking in early winter conditions.
- Porters and/or pack animal handlers for camping equipment and luggage.
- Cooks and kitchen helpers meeting high-altitude catering requirements.
- Guide(s) to accompany the team on daily field trips from base camp to the glacier and permafrost sites.

3.3 Catering Services

Catering shall be provided for approximately 5 participants. The service provider shall:

- Record the dietary preferences and restrictions of all participants before departure.

- Ensure all meals fully accommodate individual dietary requirements, cultural restrictions, and nutritional needs, with adequate calorie intake for high-altitude work in cold conditions.
- Maintain the highest standards of food hygiene and quality throughout the expedition.
- Provide continuous access to safe drinking water (both hot and cold) at all times, including hot water in flasks for field days.
- Provide packed lunches and hot drinks for the team on field days away from the campsite.

The daily meal schedule shall be as follows:

Time	Meal	Items
07:00	Breakfast	Milk, tea/coffee, eggs, bread, muesli, cornflakes, oatmeal
11:00	Morning Tea	Tea/coffee with biscuits or light snacks
13:00	Lunch	Vegetarian/non-vegetarian main course, seasonal vegetables, rice, salad, fruit (packed lunch on field days)
16:00	High Tea	Tea/coffee with biscuits or light snacks
19:00	Dinner	Vegetarian/non-vegetarian main course, rice, chapati, dal, salad, fruit

3.4 Camping and Accommodation

The service provider shall arrange and manage all camping facilities for the full period, including:

- Individual four-season sleeping tents for each participant (subject to logistical feasibility at high altitude).
- Dedicated dining tent with adequate capacity for the full team, with a safe heating arrangement.
- Sanitation tent(s) with appropriate facilities.
- Fully equipped high-altitude kitchen set-up, including all cooking equipment, fuel and utensils suitable for operations up to about 5,000 m a.s.l.
- A base camp set-up at Pam Luma suitable for an extended stay of about two weeks.
- All camping equipment must be in good operational condition and appropriate for sub-zero temperatures and possible snowfall.

3.5 Technical and Safety Equipment

The service provider shall supply and ensure the operational readiness of all required safety and technical equipment, including:

- Fully stocked first-aid kits sufficient for the expedition team size, including medicines for altitude sickness.
- Portable oxygen cylinders with appropriate delivery equipment, and a portable altitude chamber (Gamow bag) if available.
- Pulse oximeter for daily monitoring of participants' health.
- Satellite phone(s) and/or walkie-talkie communication devices to ensure reliable communication throughout the route **(optional — to be separately priced).**
- Solar-powered charging devices for mobile phones and laptops for the entire expedition duration.
- Trained staff capable of safely operating all technical and safety equipment.

3.6 Risk, Safety, and Environmental Management

The service provider shall develop, submit, and implement:

- A Risk and Safety Management Plan covering altitude sickness, cold injuries (hypothermia and frostbite), adverse weather and snowfall, terrain hazards on and near the glacier, and medical response protocols.
- A clearly defined Emergency Evacuation Plan, including designated evacuation routes, nearest road heads and health facilities, helicopter evacuation arrangements where available, and communication procedures.
- A weather contingency plan, including how the team will be supported if snowfall or bad weather delays movement or extends the stay.
- An Environmental and Waste Management Plan ensuring minimal ecological footprint, carry-out of all non-biodegradable waste, and compliance with Bhutanese environmental and protected area regulations.
- All operations shall adhere to Leave No Trace principles and applicable national environmental guidelines.

4. Indicative Field Itinerary

The following itinerary is indicative only. The service provider must remain operationally flexible and adapt to actual field and weather conditions. ICIMOD shall confirm the final

departure date in writing no later than one (1) week prior to mobilisation, i.e. by 09 November 2026.

Date	From	To	Mode	Elev. (m)	Remarks	Support Required
16 Nov (Mon)	Thimphu	Barshong	By vehicle	3,692	Start of field campaign; overnight camp at Barshong	Yes
17 Nov (Tue)	Barshong	Naha	By foot	3,786	Trek commences	Yes
18 Nov (Wed)	Naha	Jaradingtha	By foot	4,321	Continued ascent	Yes
19 Nov (Thu)	Jaradingtha	Jaradingtha	—	4,321	Acclimatisation day	Yes
20 Nov (Fri)	Jaradingtha	Pam Luma	By foot	4,742	Set up base camp	Yes
21–26 Nov (Sat–Thu)	Base camp	Shodug Glacier	By foot	5,020	Glacier mass balance survey; field trips from base camp	Yes
27 Nov – 03 Dec (Fri–Thu)	Base camp	Permafrost sites, Shodug	By foot	>4,500	Permafrost data collection and site reconnaissance	Yes
04 Dec (Fri)	Shodug	Gunglayumtsho	By foot	3,786	Start of return trek	Yes
05 Dec (Sat)	Gunglayumtsho	Tshonam	By foot	3,692	Return trek	Yes
06 Dec (Sun)	Tshonam	Tsho Sum	By foot	3,538	Return trek	Yes
07 Dec (Mon)	Tsho Sum	Jimilangtsho	By foot	3,406	Return trek	Yes
08 Dec (Tue)	Jimilangtsho	Simkota	By foot	3,285	Return trek	Yes

Date	From	To	Mode	Elev. (m)	Remarks	Support Required
09 Dec (Wed)	Simkota	Thimphu	By foot	—	End of trek and field campaign	Yes

Note: Participants: 1 ICIMOD staff (Permafrost Lead, coordinating the overall activities) and 4 NCHM staff (glacier and permafrost activities). Total participants may vary marginally; the service provider must quote per-person rates where possible to allow final cost calculation based on confirmed numbers.

5. Deliverables

The service provider shall deliver under the contract:

- Complete expedition logistics management, including all transport arrangements (vehicle and pack animal/porter).
- Catering services for all participants for the full duration of the expedition.
- Fully equipped camping facilities at all campsites, including the base camp at Pam Luma.
- Technical and safety equipment as specified in Section 3.5.
- Implemented Environmental and Waste Management Plan.
- Emergency transport and safety support throughout the expedition.
- A short completion report within seven (7) days of the end of the expedition, confirming services delivered, any incidents, and waste management actions taken.
- Full compliance with all applicable Bhutanese laws, local regulations, and ICIMOD's operational requirements.

6. Proposal Submission Requirements

Interested service providers must submit a complete proposal package comprising the following components:

6.1 Company Profile and Legal Documentation

- Valid company/firm registration certificate.
- Tax registration and current tax clearance certificate.
- Valid trekking and/or tourism operating licence(s).
- Any other permits required for operations in the relevant areas of Bhutan.

6.2 Technical Proposal

The technical proposal shall address, in detail:

- Proposed approach to logistics and transportation, including arrangements for pack animals during the base camp period and contingency arrangements.
- Proposed campsite plan for the glacier and permafrost work (base camp and any high camp or moving camps).
- Staffing plan — names, roles, qualifications, and relevant experience of key personnel.
- Risk and Safety Management Plan covering altitude sickness, cold injuries, adverse weather, medical emergency, and evacuation.
- Communication plan for the expedition duration.
- Equipment inventory, including safety, camping and cold-weather gear.

6.3 Financial Proposal

Bidders must quote one all-inclusive cost per person per day for the itinerary in Section 4 (16 November – 09 December 2026). This rate shall cover all services in the Scope of Work, including vehicle transport, porter/pack animal transport, catering, camping, equipment, staff, and all applicable taxes and levies. The final payable amount will be calculated on the confirmed number of participants and days.

The following shall be quoted separately:

- Emergency evacuation, to be paid only if an evacuation is actually required.
- Optional services — satellite phone/radio communication, vehicle pick-up from the trek end point to Thimphu.

All costs must be quoted in US Dollars (USD), inclusive of all applicable taxes.

6.4 Relevant Experience and References

- Documented experience in similar high-altitude trekking and expedition support assignments, preferably above 4,000 m a.s.l. Experience of supporting scientific field teams or winter/late-season expeditions will be an advantage.
- Minimum two (2) verifiable client references with contact details.
- Summary profile of at least two comparable past projects.

7. Evaluation Criteria

All compliant proposals will be evaluated on a combined technical and financial basis. The evaluation criteria are as follows:

#	Evaluation Criterion
1	Technical approach, compliance with scope, and quality of methodology
2	Relevant experience and demonstrated capacity for high-altitude expeditions
3	Safety and risk management capacity and plan quality
4	Financial competitiveness and value for money
5	Environmental responsibility and sustainability approach

ICIMOD reserves the right to conduct clarification interviews, request additional information, or undertake reference checks as part of the evaluation process.

8. Submission Instructions

Proposals must be submitted electronically by the specified deadline. Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.

Submission Email	procurement@icimod.org
Email Subject Line	RFP Submission – Trekking and Expedition Support Services for the Collaborative Long-term Monitoring of Glacier and Permafrost in Bhutan – Shodug (Company Name)
Submission Deadline	30 October 2026
Queries / Clarifications	Queries must be submitted to procurement@icimod.org at least three (3) working days before the submission deadline, i.e. by 27 October 2026.

Proposals must be submitted as PDF or Word documents and must include all components outlined in Section 6. Proposals received after the deadline, or that are incomplete, will not be considered.

9. General Terms and Conditions

- Submission of a proposal does not guarantee award of contract.
- ICIMOD may seek clarifications from any bidder without this constituting acceptance or rejection of the proposal.
- All proposals shall remain valid and binding until the assignment is fully completed.

- Payment shall be made within thirty (30) days of satisfactory completion and acceptance of deliverables, or as specified in the final contract.
- Any additional costs incurred beyond those specified in the agreed financial proposal must be pre-approved in writing by ICIMOD.
- In the event of any addition or reduction in service requirements, the quoted unit rates shall apply to calculate the value of the added or removed service. ICIMOD reserves the right to increase or decrease the scope of services at the agreed unit rates, and the final payable amount shall be adjusted accordingly.
- The service provider shall not assign or subcontract any part of the engagement without prior written consent from ICIMOD.

10. Liability and Insurance

- The service provider shall bear full operational and legal responsibility for the safety and welfare of its own personnel.
- The service provider must maintain adequate insurance coverage for all staff and equipment throughout the engagement, including liability insurance and, where applicable, medical/evacuation insurance for high-altitude operations.
- ICIMOD bears no liability for any personal injury, equipment loss, or other damages arising from the service provider's operations.
- The service provider shall indemnify ICIMOD against any claims arising from its staff, subcontractors, or equipment.

11. Confidentiality

- All information shared by ICIMOD in connection with this RFP, including technical specifications, field itineraries, and equipment details, is strictly confidential and must not be disclosed to any third party without prior written authorisation from ICIMOD.
- The service provider shall not use ICIMOD's name, logo, or project information for promotional, media, or public communication purposes without explicit written approval from ICIMOD's authorised representative.
- This confidentiality obligation shall survive the conclusion or cancellation of the engagement.

12. ICIMOD's Rights

ICIMOD reserves the right, at its sole discretion and without obligation to provide justification, to:

- Accept or reject any proposal, in whole or in part.
- Cancel this RFP at any stage.
- Enter into negotiations with one or more bidders.
- Request clarification or additional documentation.
- Award a contract in the best interest of the organisation.

All costs and expenses incurred by bidders in connection with the preparation and submission of proposals, including but not limited to site visits, technical assessments, documentation, and provision of securities, shall be borne solely by the bidder.

This RFP is issued for solicitation purposes only and does not constitute a commitment, contractual or otherwise, on the part of ICIMOD to award a contract.