ICIMOD

TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToR)

Consultancy Service Contract: *Study on Sustainable Harnessing of Forest Resources for Economic Development and Community Engagement in Uttarakhand*

Action Area C: Economies

Strategic Group: Resilient Economies and Landscapes

ToR

About ICIMOD

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region stretches 3,500 km across Asia, spanning eight countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Encompassing high-altitude mountain ranges, mid-hills, and plains, the zone is vital for the food, water, and energy security of up to two billion people and is a habitat for countless irreplaceable species. It is also acutely fragile – and frontline to the impacts of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), based in Kathmandu, Nepal, is an international organization established in 1983, that is working to make this critical region greener, more inclusive, and climate resilient. For more information, read our Strategy 2030 and explore our website.

Strategic Group - Resilient Economies and Landscapes

This institutional consultancy work will be hosted in 'Action Area – Economies' of the Strategic Group on Resilient Economies and Landscapes at ICIMOD. This Action Area mainly focuses on sustainable livelihood solutions, green and inclusive enterprises, sustainable tourism, productive use of renewable energy, sustainable settlements, and anticipatory adaptation in mountain economies. Under this Action Area, the Himalayan Resilience Enabling Action Programme (HI-REAP), funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), implements and promotes Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for socio-ecological resilience and low-carbon economies in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, and building on knowledge and learning from China. HI-REAP also conducts technical assessments on natural resources and their potential for contribution to livelihoods and economies.

The proposed study on 'Sustainable Harnessing of Forest Resources for Economic Development and Community Engagement in Uttarakhand' will also be supported by HI-REAP project. Through this study, ICIMOD will provide technical support to the government of Uttarakhand to assess the potential of forest resources and their sustainable contribution to local economies. ICIMOD is looking for an institution/firm to conduct this study .

Background: Forest resources in Utrakhand

The state of Uttarakhand is focusing on reimagining and strengthening its institutions to realise the goal of "Sashakt and Vikasit Uttarakhand" (Developed and Empowered Uttarakhand). It envisions rapid strides in economic, social, industrial and other sectors across the hills and mountains and rural and urban areas of the state in pursuit of the goals outlined in its Vision 2047. This journey will be made ensuring the preservation and balance of the state`s ecology. Chaired by the Honourable Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, the State Institution for Empowering and Transforming Uttarakhand (SETU) was established through a government order on 21 July 2023, replacing the Planning Commission of Uttarakhand and model;ed on the lines of NITI Aayog. SETU aims to enhance the planning system, promote effective and evidence-based decision-making, encourage innovation, and improve interdepartmental coordination, along with the monitoring and evaluation of state government programmes, policies, and schemes.

Uttarakhand, with its extensive forest cover and rich biodiversity, provides significant natural resources that could play a crucial role in sustainable economic development. The forest areas in Uttarakhand serve as a livelihood source for local communities through the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), medicinal plants, agroforestry, and eco-tourism. Sustainable harnessing of these resources can create economic opportunities, especially for the tribal and rural communities, while also ensuring forest conservation.

Uttarakhand became the first state in the World to introduce the concept of Gross Environment Product Index (GEP Index) to quantify the economic value of its natural resources, highlighting the significant contribution of its forests. As per government estimates, Uttarakhand's forests provide an estimated ₹95,112 crore worth of ecosystem services annually, encompassing climate regulation, water regulation, soil conservation, biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods, recreation, cultural, and health benefits.

Uttarakhand's total forest area spans 37,999.60 sq. km, accounting for approximately 71% of its total geographical area of 53,483 sq. km, well above the national average. The reserved forest area constitutes 45.4% (24,264.65 sq. km), with 28.97% classified as non-forest, 13.41% as Panchayati forests, 2.80% as Unclassed and Vested, 0.18% as Protected Forest, 8.92% as Civil and Soyam Forest, and 0.29% as Private Forest. These forests encompass various types, including tropical deciduous, sub-tropical chir pine (*Pinus roxburghii*), temperate, and alpine forests.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

Economic:
- Assess the current use and economic potential of forest resources in providing formal and informal economic opportunities for the state and people.
- Assess sustainable utilisation approaches for forest resources and identify methods for harnessing these resources that align with conservation goals, ecological balance, and equitable benefit-sharing.
- Propose strategies for economic development through forest-based livelihoods, focusing on value addition, market linkages, and sustainable harvesting practices.

Social:
- Evaluate community engagement in forest management, identifying best practices and gaps in current policies and practices.
- Recommend community participation frameworks that empower local populations in decision-making, conservation, and benefit-sharing.

Scope of study

The scope of work will encompass the following key areas:

Analysis of forest resource utilisation and economic potential

- Map and analyse the key forest resources with economic potential, including NTFPs, medicinal plants, honey, bamboo, wild fruits, and agroforestry products.

- Assess the current extraction, collection, and utilisation practices, including their economic value and sustainability.
- Identify potential for value-added products and linkages with regional, national, and international markets for local economic benefit.

Economic development and livelihood opportunities

- Identify and evaluate forest-based livelihood opportunities, including ecotourism, sustainable NTFP collection, handicrafts, and small-scale agro-forestry enterprises.
- Analyse potential for establishing community-managed enterprises or cooperatives to enhance income and employment in forest communities.
- Assess market linkages, certification (e.g., organic, fair trade), and branding strategies that could enhance the economic value of forest products.
- Identify skill gaps, green jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities in forest value chains (e.g. job roles in ecosystem services, wellness, bioenergy, fodder, biomass, forest fire management, plantations, afforesttion, agro-forestry, pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals etc.)

Sustainable harvesting and conservation practices

- Evaluate existing harvesting practices and assess their environmental impact, sustainability, and scope for improvement.
- Identify innovative technologies, digital solutions, sustainable methods and best practices for conservation and use of forest biodiversity, and forest health.
- Develop recommendations for capacity-building initiatives focused on sustainable harvesting and conservation.

Community engagement and empowerment in forest management

- Assess current community involvement and institutional frameworks for participatory forest management, including Joint Forest Management (JFM), Van Panchayats, and eco-development committees (EDCs).
- Identify traditional knowledge and practices that contribute to sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation.
- Propose strategies for enhancing community participation and establishing benefit-sharing mechanisms that promote forest stewardship.

Policy and institutional support

- Review relevant policies, laws and institutional mechanisms affecting forest resource management, including forest rights, land tenure, and biodiversity conservation laws.
- Identify policy gaps and recommend reforms to support sustainable forest-based economic development and community empowerment.
- Suggest ways to strengthen collaboration among government agencies, local communities, Van Panchayats, NGOs, and the private sector for sustainable forest resource management.

Study Area

- To capture diverse perspectives, several forest factors should be taken into consideration such as prevailing climatic conditions, altitude, latitude, topography, slope and biotic factors.
- The sample must include minimum 1 each from Garhwal and Kumaon of the following divisions and types:
  - Tarai-Bhabar region: Divisions--Tarai East, Tarai West, Haldwani, Ramnagar and Tarai Central
  - Shivalik/ Outer Himalayas region: Divisions--Kalsi, Haridwar, Lansdowne and Doon
  - Lower Himalayas region: Divisions--Nainital, Almora, Bageshwar, Champawat, Mussoorie, Narendranagar, Rudraprayag and Tehri
  - Middle/ Lesser Himalayas region: Divisions--Pithoragarh, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Uttarakashi and Tons
- Further, the sample must include, 1 Wildlife Sanctury, 1 National Park, 1 Conservation Reserve, 1 Biosphere Reserve, 2 Civil & Soyam Forests (1 each from Garhwal and Kumaon regions), 2 Van Panchayat Forests (1 from each Garhwal and Kumaon regions).
- ***Caution:*** Any activity or study to be undertaken in any Reserved Forest or Protected Area or any other forest area will be subject to relevant provisions of the Indian Forest Act 1927, Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 as amended and various guidelines by MOEF & CC, New Delhi in this regard.

Methodology

The study will involve both primary and secondary data collection and analysis:

- Data collection: Conduct surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with local communities, forest officials, and stakeholders involved in forest management.
- Stakeholder consultations: Engage with government departments, local community representatives, NGOs, and private sector entities to gather diverse perspectives and insights.
- Case studies: Document case studies of successful sustainable forest resource management models and community-led enterprises.
- Environmental and economic analysis: Use quantitative tools to evaluate the environmental impact and economic viability of forest resource use practices.

Deliverables

The study is expected to be completed within 4 months from the date of signing of the consultancy contract. The Consultancy institution/firm will be responsible for the following deliverables:

Deliverables and activities	Timeline
Inception Report – Outlining study approach, methodology, and timeline	Within 2 weeks of commencement
A report with detailed analysis on resource utilization and economic opportunities	By week 6
Recommendations (in documented form) on sustainable harvesting and conservation Practices	By week 8

'Community Engagement Framework' for enhancing community involvement in sustainable forest management and benefit-sharing	By week 10
Draft report of preliminary findings and recommendations for feedback	By week 12
Final comprehensive report with findings, analysis, and actionable recommendations	By week 16
Policy summary outlining key policy recommendations for sustainable forest resource management and community engagement.	Alongside final report (Week 16)

Selection process

- The consultancy institution/firm will be selected through an open competitive process based on technical qualifications and experience that includes clarity in the proposed methodology and workplan, team composition and qualifications, and demonstrated expertise in carrying out studies on forestry in India, more specifically on livelihoods and other dependence of communities on forests.
- Based on the evaluation of EoIs, the top 5 firms will be invited to present (virtual) their relevance, technical competence, methodology, and human resource capacities (to deliver within the 4-month timeframe) to the selection panel (including one from the Government of Uttarakhand).
- Based on the evaluation, top 3 firms will be invited to submit their financial proposals. The firms should provide the financial proposals with a breakdown of all costs, including tax, in the budget.

Evaluation criteria (for presentations)

The technical proposal will be evaluated based on the following table:

Criteria	Maximum score	Details
Understanding of the proposed tasks	20	Well-structured and comprehensive, demonstrated understating of the requirements, clear plan to review existing strategies, team with required skills and competencies, and clarity in implementation
Robustness of methodology	20	Clarity and robustness of the methodology. Firms can build on the basic methodology outlined in the ToR.
Organisation experience	15	Experience with similar assignments
Human resources – qualification and experience		
Team lead	10	
Relevance and strength of the team	20	Relevant academic qualification and experience
Proposed timeline for deliverables	10	Reasonability of proposed delivery; connection of timeline with task approach

Proposed management & operation plan	5	Schedule of the engagement process and clarity of implementation plans & guidelines

The service provider will be selected based on the highest-ranked technical proposal (60% weightage) and the lowest-cost financial proposal (40% weightage).

The firm will be selected based on the highest cumulative scores obtained in the technical and financial proposals. The service provider with the maximum score based on the criteria will be awarded. However, the service provider should score at least 60 points in the technical proposal.

Duration and notice period

- The assignment will be carried out over a period of 4 months from the date of contract signing.
- All deliverables must be completed within the agreed timeline.
- Either party may terminate the contract with a 30-day written notice, subject to satisfactory settlement of pending obligations.

Expertise required

Essential
- Registered firm/institution with at least 5 years' experience in forestry, natural resource management, or related applied research.
- Demonstrated expertise in studies related to forest-based livelihoods, community engagement, and sustainable resource management.
- Proven track record of conducting technical and assessment studies using mixed methods approaches.
- Understanding on deliver gender-responsive and inclusive research methods and frameworks.
- Multidisciplinary team with expertise in forestry, economics, livelihoods, and social sciences.

Preferred
- Prior working experience in Uttarakhand or other Himalayan forest contexts.
- Demonstrated skills though past work in any regional countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.
- Experience in policy analysis and drafting actionable policy recommendations.
- Familiarity with ICIMOD's thematic areas (e.g., NbS, Climate Resilient Agriculture, ecosystem services valuation).
- Publications or knowledge products in relevant domains.

Reporting and supervision

The selected firm/institution will work under the overall guidance of Dr. Abid Hussain, Economies Lead at ICIMOD and in close coordination with the State Institution for Empowering and Transforming Uttarakhand (SETU). Progress will be monitored through regular virtual and in-person meetings. Draft and final deliverables will be reviewed and approved by ICIMOD before submission to government counterparts.

ICIMOD's core values

Our core values are integrity, neutrality, relevance, inclusiveness, openness, and ambition. These values are an expression of our culture and are central to the guiding beliefs and principles of our work and behaviour. Our core values will lie at the heart of ICIMOD operations and delivery. They will underpin everything we do and frame how we work with our partners. They reflect our founding intentions and the balances we seek to hold, while equipping ourselves for the future.

Ethical considerations

The firm will be required to take all the necessary actions to handle the collected data responsibly (see ICIMOD Responsible Data Policy) to ensure data privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. The consultant needs to adhere to the in-country regulations while executing the project.

Our commitment to the prevention of sexual harassment

ICIMOD is committed to prevention and redressal of sexual harassment at the workplace and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults and expects all staff, consultants, volunteers to share this commitment. We will do everything possible to ensure that only those who are suitable to work within our values are selected to work for us.

Confidentiality/non-disclosure

All material issued in connection with this ToR shall remain the property of ICIMOD and shall be used only for the purpose of this procurement exercise. All information provided shall be either returned to ICIMOD or securely destroyed by unsuccessful applicants at the conclusion of the procurement exercise.

During the performance of the assignment or at any time after expiry or termination of the Agreement, the consultant shall not disclose to any person or otherwise make use of any confidential information which s/he has obtained or may during this agreement relating to partner organisation/ICIMOD, the respondents or otherwise.

The consultant will be required to sign a non-disclosure / confidentiality agreement as part of their undertaking of this work.

Intellectual property, copyright, and ownership of all prepared information

The consultant shall retain all rights to pre-existing (background) intellectual property or materials used by the consultant in the delivery of this study. All arising intellectual property, ideas, materials, processes, or processes formed in contemplation, course of, or as result of this study shall be passed to ICIMOD without restriction.

The consult shall warrant that all arising intellectual property, materials and/or products produced in pursuit of this study shall be original and shall not infringe on any third party's claim. All technical or business information, in whatever medium or format, originated, collated, or prepared by or for the consultant in contemplation, course of, or as result of this assignment shall be transferred to ICIMOD without restriction on completion and shall not be used by the consultant for any other purpose without express written permission of ICIMOD.

Copyright of all arising documents, data, information, or reports produced by the consultant under this agreement shall belong to ICIMOD and will be passed to ICIMOD without restriction. Such documents, data, information, and reports shall not be used by the consultant for any other purpose other than in conjunction with this assignment, without the express written permission of ICIMOD's Head of Programme Funding.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and safeguarding

ICIMOD's human resource selection process is based on the qualifications and competence of the applicants. As an employer, ICIMOD is committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, and offers equal opportunities to applicants from all backgrounds and walks of life, including but not limited to gender, age, national origin, religion, race, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or social status. ICIMOD strongly encourages applications from all eligible applicants, especially women, from all parts of the HKH region.

ICIMOD is dedicated to establishing and upholding a safe and nurturing work environment, where all its employees can participate fully and meaningfully without fear of violence, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Any type of abuse or harassment, including sexual misconduct [including child abuse], by our staff, representatives, or stakeholders is not condoned or tolerated.

Method of application

In first phase, the firms are requested to submit their EoIs through email to Consultancy.int@icimod.org by 6 PM (Nepal Standard Time), on 15 October 2025.