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**AGA KHAN RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR**

**LOCAL CONSULTANTS/FIRMS FOR**

**MERL STUDY**

**BEST4WEET CASE STUDIES: FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION: REFLECTIONS, LESSONS LEARNT AND BEST MODEL STORIES**

**Broadening Economic and Social Transformation for Women’s Economic Empowerment and Recovery (BEST4WEER) project**

Submitted by

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# Background

The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) is a programme of the Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan (AKF, P) which further is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The AKDN is a group of private not-for profit, non-denominational international development agencies, institutions and programmes that work primarily in the poorest parts of Africa and Asia to improve the quality of life of communities in remote and resource poor areas. The AKRSP carries out rural development programmes of AKF-AKDN in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral (GBC) regions of Pakistan. It works with partners to improve the quality of life by promoting and developing innovative solutions to challenges of development in GBC.

The *Broadening Economic and Social Transformation for Women’s Economic Empowerment and Recovery (BEST4WEER)* project is a five-year (2021 to 2026), $20.16 million (GAC: $17.41 million; AKFC: $2.75 million) project funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The project is executed by the Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC) and implemented by Aga Khan Foundation Pakistan (AKFP) in partnership with Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and Accelerate Prosperity (AP). The goal of this community-driven project is to improve women’s social and economic empowerment during the process of COVID-19 recovery and rebuilding in Gilgit-Baltistan province and Chitral district (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province), Pakistan. The project has two project components: Economic Inclusion (EI), and Civil Society (CS). Through these interrelated components, BEST4WEER aims to:

1. reduce the social, cultural, institutional, and economic barriers for women’s engagement in economic and social spheres while
2. enhancing the social and economic agency of women. BEST4WEER is coded GE-3, a gender-equality-specific initiative and has been designed specifically to address gender inequalities.

# 2. The Study

AKRSP through the BEST4WEER project, have implemented a comprehensive program focused on gender equality, social norm transformation, economic recovery, and women's empowerment in the fragile contexts of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. Building on the legacy of the EELY and AWEP projects, BEST4WEER integrates capacity building, economic support, behaviour change communication (BCC), institutional reform, and civic engagement through a rights-based and intersectional approach.After more than four years of implementation, a wealth of field-based insights, tested models, policy innovations, and community engagement strategies have emerged. This presents a timely opportunity to synthesize these learnings into a consolidated, accessible Knowledge Product/case studies that serves internal learning, external advocacy, and strategic scaling.

The study objective is to engage an external evaluation or research firm to develop a high-quality Evaluation Knowledge Product that captures key insights, best models, field reflections, lessons learned, and strategic recommendations emerging from the implementation of BEST4WEER project. This study will support institutional learning, inform future programming, and provide an evidence base for gender-transformative recovery and women’s social and economic empowerment initiatives for GBC and beyond.

## 2.1 Objectives of the Survey

The key objective of the study is to:

* Analyze and document effective strategies, models, and success stories from BEST4WEER, highlighting adaptive methods used in fragile and gender-unequal contexts.
* Assess the scalability and replicability of tested interventions and partnerships across thematic areas to inform future program design for AKRSP, AKDN, and external stakeholders.
* Present project insights in user friendly knowledge products including case studies, component briefs, infographics, and digital outputs to support advocacy, learning, and broader dissemination

## 2.2 Scope of the study

**1. Desk Review & Work Plan**

* Review core BEST4WEER documentation (project documents, progress reports, baseline study, outcome study, project briefs, and media content) to frame key approaches and results. Develop an interview guide and detailed work plan in consultation with AKRSP.
* Participate in a consultative session with project team including MERL team, Project specialist and thematic leads to design the study.

**2. Field Data Collection**
Use participatory methods; Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews and Most Significant Change to document:

* The most significant changes achieved under BEST4WEER project components.
* Document leading strategies, best practices, innovations, and challenges across all thematic components.
* Sustainability, systematization, and scalability of interventions and partnerships.
* The impact of contextual shifts (e.g., COVID-19, socio-political changes) on project outcomes.

**Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**

* + With AKRSP staff, implementing partners, government stakeholders, and employers.

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

* + With women beneficiaries, CBSGs, Gender Pairs, community members, and male allies, COEs.

**3.Data Analysis and Report Writing:**

Identify and articulate leading approaches under each component of BEST4WEER, linking them with outcome indicators, case studies, and lessons learned. Map approaches against the Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) to show how results were achieved.

**Most Significant Change:** To identify stories of deep transformation and unanticipated results stated by the beneficiaries.

**Case Study Documentation:** Selection of 12 compelling success stories or innovations for each project component (2 per thematic pillar).

**Data Stories**

* + One pager/Infographics for each component in consultation with MERL team
	+ Short-form video of case studies for AKRSP social media and project oversight committee meetings

For example, approaches may include Social norm change through gender pairs, BCC, and engagement with religious/traditional leaders. Women’s empowerment through entrepreneurship, employability, and civic participation. Institutional strengthening of civil society and policy advocacy for gender equality. Economic recovery interventions such as childcare provision, digital skills hubs, and women-led markets.

**4.Data validation sessions/Workshops**

Co-facilitate data validation sessions with core MERL team and project leads. The lead consultant will present findings iteratively to AKRSP project team in consultation with MERL team and deliver interim presentations for feedback, culminating in a final Knowledge Product, case studies, and advocacy briefs.

Two rounds of draft reviews are expected before finalization. The consultancy team will lead the reflection and documentation process, with technical support from AKRSP’s MERL team and project leads and AKF team. Field research will be conducted by subject experts and local researchers from the firm.

## 2.3 Key Components of the study

The study will review and synthesize key learnings and replicable models across the following project 6 main components of Best4weer and will refine during inception phase.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Civil Society | Work and Enterprise |
| 1. Social Norms & Gender Equality Promotion* Gender Pairs and BCC strategies
* Engagement with religious/traditional leaders
* Multimedia advocacy (radio, theatre, social media)
* Exposure visits and community campaigns
 | **1. Entrepreneurship and Innovation*** START entrepreneurship training
* BPO and digital worker linkages
* Incubation, micro-awards, and access to finance
* Women-led business associations/chambers
 |
| 2. Voice, Representation & Civic Engagement* Life skills, decision-making, and civic education
* CBSG mobilization for social empowerment
* Legislative training and female leadership
* Civic advocacy and online organizing
 | **2. Employability and Skills Development*** Digital and IT skills hubs (spoke model)
* Employer-led training and internships
* Curriculum integration at universities
* Career advisory services and future-of-work programs
 |
| 3. Institutional Strengthening & Civil Society Engagement* Capacity building of WOs, LSOs, CBSGs, CSOs
* Gender budgeting and policy advocacy
* Multi-stakeholder platforms
* Accountability and compliance support
 | **3.Gender-Responsive Economic Recovery*** Recovery grants and business support
* Childcare provision and care economy pilots
* Market linkages and women-only markets
* Employer engagement and workplace transformation
 |

# Methodology

The firm will employ a mixed-methods approach using Most Significant Change (MSF) method combining qualitative, quantitative, and participatory research techniques. Study design and sampling will be finalized in coordination with MERL team. In terms of target beneficiary reach, the study will cover all districts of GBC and implementation levels. Following is the expected population frame for the study.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Project Targets  | Project Target (Y1-Y6)  |
| Beneficiaries | **F**  | **M**  | **TOTAL**  |
| Women 15-34 | 281,158 |   | 281,158 |
| Women 35+ | 195,380 |    | 192,840 |
| Total Beneficiaries | 476,538 |   | **476,538** |
| Intermediaries  |  |  |  |
| Religious and Traditional Leaders | 457 | 286 | 743 |
| Employers and Coworkers | 1,549 | 776 | 2,325 |
| Entrepreneurs | 4,114 | 1,266 | 5,380 |
| Government officials, local government representatives | 473 | 202 | 675 |
| Staff and members of civil society (CSOs, LSO, WOs, CBSGs) | 9,008 | 101 | 9,109 |
| Community Members  | 32,218 | 18,463 | 50,681 |
| Total Intermediaries  | 47,819 | 21,094 | **68,913** |
| Total | 524,357 | 21,094 | **545,451** |

# Consultant’s ToRs

The consultant will be responsible for following task.

1. Draft an inception report, receive feedback from AKRSP and incorporate feedback. The inception report should discuss in detail the study plan, methodology, refined ToRs, sampling scheme, survey tools and survey protocols,
2. The consultant team of experts will closely work with the MERL team of AKRSP for aligning field data, report drafting till finalization.
3. Engage local experienced researchers and graphic designer for the study and conduct pilot testing of the survey tools and revise and refine the tools (if it is required) in consultation with AKRSP,
4. Develop survey manuals/guides and implement the full-scale study,
5. Collect data from the field/beneficiaries in coordination with AKRSP field teams
6. Maintain database in Qualitative Software’s, Word (Transcripts), Excel and submit the database with analysis to AKRSP at the end of the study,
7. Cleaning and analysing comparative quantitative and qualitative data with results and preparing a concise endline study report documenting all preliminary findings based upon qualitative and quantitative findings
8. Finalizing the report incorporating feedback/input given by AKRSP and its submission within the timeline agreed.
9. Prepare and submit a draft study completion report to the AKRSP on the agreed template and on agreed deadline,
10. Present findings based on the draft report in a workshop and receive feedback,
11. Incorporate any further feedback provided by AKRSP in the report.
12. Develop a consolidated report which includes findings of the study including MSC stories, Component wise infographics, Best Replicable Models for each component, Video stories
13. Incorporate feedback within a week after the validation workshop
14. Ensuring confidentiality of collected information and safeguarding (No Harm to anyone) of data collection teams, all respondents and participants in the survey will be mandatory.

# Key Deliverables

The consultant will submit the work in the form of a final report on an agreed template of AKRSP. Overall, the report should cover the overall objectives/purpose and scope of the work. Specifically, the report should be discussed in detail:

1. Inception Report: focusing on objectives, methodology, tools and detailed work plan
2. Copies of NOCs from relevant authorities for data collection and approval of an ethical board (if required)
3. Draft Report – covering Objectives, methodology, key findings, initial tables and programme recommendations. Formal format of report will be shared with approval of inception report.
4. Final Report along with Data Sets (both quantitative and qualitative)
5. Data interpretation workshops with AKRSP

# Data analysis plan

The consultant will share data analysis plans to assess each project component and tables, graphs and infographics/video stories to be used to highlight key findings.

# Qualification and Experience of Consultant

The consultant/firm should include the technical expertise and practical experience required to deliver the scope of work and evaluation outputs, in particular, with regards to:

* Proven track record of conducting evaluations, project reflections, or knowledge product development using MSC method in women’s economic empowerment, gender equality, and social transformation and related themes.
* Availability of a pool of at least three subject expert researchers and one graphic designer with demonstrated expertise in data visualization for gender-transformative programming, civic engagement, employability, and economic recovery.
* Ability to conduct field visits through qualified local researchers in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, with proficiency in relevant local languages (Shina, Balti, Wakhi, Khowar, Burushaski).
* Strong capacity in qualitative and participatory research methods (KIIs, FGDs, Most Significant Change) and mixed-method evaluations.
* Proven ability to produce high-quality, user-friendly knowledge products (case studies, policy briefs, infographics, short videos, reports) tailored for donors, government, and civil society.
* Strong project management capacity to handle multi-component studies, ensure timely delivery, and incorporate feedback through iterative processes.
* Experience working with donor-funded programs (preferably Global Affairs Canada) and alignment with AKRSP/AKDN reporting standards.

# Reporting and management

The AKRSP MERL team will provide technical support during the study designing, its implementation and finalization of the report. After selection the consultant/firm will work closely with AKRSP team. The lead consultant will be monitored and supervised by MERL team, Specialists M&E with technical support of thematic Specialists. All deliverables will be reviewed by PM Civil Society, PM Work and Enterprise, and Head Gender from AKRSP and AKFP during the assignment and all deliverables will be approved by Head M&E, AKRSP.

# Study Execution Plan

# Timelines

The Consultant deliverables will be reviewed by Specialists M&E at core office along with thematic specialists and project thematic leads. The final reports will be approved by Head M&E, AKRSP. The consultancy is expected to start by Mid of September 2025 and completed by November 15, 2025, and be completed in 50 days from signing the contract, including time for design, review, and finalization of feedback. The selected firm’s responsibilities and deliverables will include the following, with an estimated level of effort for each area:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assignment / Task | Estimated Days | Written Deliverables |
| Step 1: Desk Review & Work Plan Development | 10 | Inception Report with finalized methodology, tools, interview guide, and detailed work plan. |
| Step 2: Field Data Collection | 20 | Field notes, transcripts/summaries of FGDs and KIIs, outcome data stories, and preliminary findings. |
| Step 3: Analysis, Validation & Reporting | 20 | * Final Report (20–30 pages) covering all 6 BEST4WEER components.
* 12 Case Studies highlighting success models.
* Data story Briefs (infographics/data stories) tailored for donors, government, and CSOs.
* Final Presentation / Slide Deck.
* Annex package: tools, data summaries, and references.
 |
| Total LOE | 50 | Final Report |

# Hiring Process

AKRSP will hire services of consultant/firm through competitive process through RFPs and evaluating proposals. After the initial bidding evaluation, the shortlisted firm will be invited to present the technical proposal along with subject experts to conduct the study in field. The MERL team will assess the Firm for

1. Willingness to work under strict timelines,
2. Relevance of the local experts/researchers available in the field with the scope of work,
3. Ability of the candidate to deliver the deliverables,
4. Plan for executing the task, and
5. Budget/renumeration expectations.
6. Detailed CV(s) of subject experts and sample of similar work(Most Significant Change reports)

# Application package

Applicants are required to submit following as part of the application package.

1. **Letter of interest**, including the names and contact information of two previous clients who can be contacted regarding relevant experience. Consultants are also expected to disclose any conflict of interest related to this mandate with AKRSP and AKF.
2. Detailed **technical proposal** of not more than 8 pages clearly demonstrating a thorough understanding of this request for proposals and including the following:
	* 1. Description of study approach and methodology, including preliminary sampling strategy, data collection, data management and data analysis, gender equality and ethical standards
		2. Demonstrated previous experience in conducting similar endline studies and other qualifications outlined in this TOR
		3. A proposed timeframe detailing activities and a schedule/work plan (including a Gantt chart)
		4. Team composition and level of effort of each proposed team member
3. A **financial proposal** with a detailed breakdown of costs for the study (taking into account an additional VAT as per Pakistan’s taxation rules)
	* 1. Itemized consultancy fees/costs
		2. Itemized field data collection expenses
		3. Itemized administrative expenses
		4. Validity period of quotations
		5. Expected payment plan and method
4. CVs of all proposed team members outlining relevant experience (annexed to technical proposal)
5. Two copies of a previous report of similar work undertaken on: a) Knowledge/Learning product study for a project/program; OR b) Most Significant Change Reports of projects
6. Copy of legal registration (for registered firms)
7. A Consulting Firm profile

# Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following set of criteria:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| CRITERIA | MAXIMUM SCORE |
| Technical Component |
| Demonstrated experience in conducting and coordinating similar studies | 25 |
| Education and Technical Experience of Team | 15 |
| Proposed Methodology, Workplan and Approach(Gender lense and technical) | 30 |
| Relevance of Sample work to study | 10 |
| Total Technical Component | 80 |
| Financial Component |
| Realistic and appropriate costs for proposed work | 10 |
| All relevant costs included to carry out proposed work | 10 |
| Total Financial Component | 20 |
|  | 100 |

# Confidentiality and Ownership of the Data, Documents, and Equipment

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* AKRSP shall be the owner of all the data collected, data sets, reports, documents, etc. prepared by the consultant,
* All the data sets/tools and reports, MoVs must be handed over to AKRSP MERL team before final payment,
* All documents, reports and information from this assignment will be regarded as AKRSP's intellectual property, so the mentioned outputs or part of it cannot be sold or used in any case without the prior permission of AKRSP.

#  Ethical/Safeguarding Considerations

The responses will be taken after the consent of the respondents. The informed consent section will be added in the beginning of the questionnaire/tool. The consent will be taken after informing objectives and purpose of the survey and abiding by the AKRSP’s safeguarding policy.

*AKRSP-AKF is an Equal Opportunity Employer and is Committed to Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children and Vulnerable Adults and Expects all Staff and Partners to Share this Commitmen*