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Terms of Reference for Senior Environmental Safeguards Specialist, specializing in rare earth mining infrastructure projects

Contract Term: Part-time, beginning in February 2026 until December 2027

Location: Primarily in Vientiane, Lao PDR, at the Department of Environment (DoE) office, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE), with travel to project sites as required.

I. Background

The Asia Foundation (TAF) is working in collaboration with the Department of Environment (DoE) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE), following a successful completion of Phase I (2022–2024). Phase I focused on building the technical capacity of staff to implement their duties and responsibilities in implementing laws, decrees, and relevant legal framework regarding environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs). MAE is seeking a second phase of technical assistance to continue the activities under the *Strengthening the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Report Review Process*, and to expand the activities to include capacity building for the ESIA review and monitoring process for investment projects related to mining technologies, including rare earth mining projects.

This collaboration is part of the Mekong Safeguards Program, which supports strengthened environmental and social (E&S) safeguards in large-scale infrastructure development across the Mekong subregion, focusing on the energy, transport, and water sectors. Mekong Safeguards is supported by the Australian Government through the Mekong-Australia Partnership (MAP) and implemented by TAF. Phase II of the program aims to: (1) support regional entities and developers in aligning E&S safeguard policies; (2) assist government agencies in applying and monitoring safeguards; (3) help the private sector enhance safeguard practices; and (4) promote inclusive engagement of civil society, including women and marginalized groups, in infrastructure planning and decision-making.

II. Objectives

The overall objective of this consultancy is to strengthen the capacity of DoE staff to effectively review and manage ESIAs for mining investment projects and/or activities, especially for rare earth minerals, and ensure compliance with the relevant laws, regulations, and standards of Lao PDR.

Specifically, the Senior Environmental Safeguards Specialist (Mining Specialist) will contribute to the achievement of the following project objectives:

- **Specific Objective 1 (Outcome 1):** Strengthened institutional capacity and skills for DoE staff in ESIA management and report review procedures for mining projects.
- **Specific Objective 2 (Outcome 2):** Reference material developed for DoE staff on how to adequately consider risks and impacts of rare earth mining technologies.

III. Reporting & Supervision:

The Senior Environmental Safeguards Specialist (Mining Specialist) will report directly to the Mekong Safeguards Program Director for Lao PDR and coordinate closely with the program technical team,



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including GEDSI and MEL.

IV. Scope of Work

TAF is seeking a senior environmental safeguards specialist, specializing in rare earth mining infrastructure projects and related ESIA. The senior environmental safeguards specialist will focus on strengthening DoE staff's capacity for the ESIA review and monitoring processes related to mining projects. This will be done through a mentoring and targeted training process at DoE, as well as a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) approach working with DoE staff to develop training materials for Provincial DAE staff. It is anticipated that the senior environmental safeguards specialist will work 2 to 3 days per week at DoE, Vientiane, as well as lead field trips to specific sites for rare earth mining projects in Lao PDR. The senior environmental safeguards specialist will also participate in a field trip to Vietnam, accompanied by approximately 8 to 10 senior and technical Government of Laos (GoL) officials.

The specific job responsibilities are the following:

Activity 1 – Support technical assistance for GoL officials based at DoE in Vientiane, as well as in the Provincial DAE.

The mining specialist will provide technical assistance and conduct five (5) specific training sessions for government staff related to ESIA reports and Environmental Management and Monitoring Plans (EMMP) for rare earth mining infrastructure projects. The specialist will provide DoE with the skills and tools that will help to ensure that E&S standards are met, including ESIA planning, implementation, management and monitoring phases as per the GoL's responsibilities.

Mentoring under this technical assistance will include biweekly or monthly technical sessions, on-the-job review of actual ESIA and EMMP submissions, and written technical feedback to strengthen analytical capacity.¹ The Specialist will support DoE staff in applying the ESIA processes to actual project proposals. Training modules shall include case studies, exercises, and practical examples from existing Lao mining operations.

The training sessions will be designed to equip government officials involved in the review and oversight of rare earth mining infrastructure projects with the knowledge and skills necessary to assess the environmental and social risks and impacts of mining projects, as well as improved site management. The goal will be to strengthen the institutional capacity and skills of officials in ESIA monitoring, management, and report review procedures for these types of investment projects. Given the growing importance of rare earth minerals and the increasing investment in this sector within Lao PDR, this training addresses the critical need for robust safeguards to ensure responsible mining practices that adhere to robust E&S standards, as well as evolving international standards from Multilateral

¹ The number of technical sessions and ESIA reviews will be dependent on the availability and schedule of DoE staff.



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Development Banks such as the ADB and World Bank.

The specialist will support DoE staff to develop a ToT training course for DoE staff to further train relevant staff at the provincial and district levels. The ToT package shall include presentation slides, case studies, and exercises tailored for provincial and district-level officials. They will also lead the DoE staff on-site visits to infrastructure projects under development within Lao PDR, as relevant.

Activity 2 - Development of Technical Guidelines related to rare earth mining projects for staff based in the Department of Environment, MAE, Vientiane, Lao PDR

The mining specialist will work with DoE staff to develop technical guidelines for an EMMP for a storage facility for rare earth minerals. These guidelines will be developed in close coordination with DoE technical teams and lecturers and professors from the Faculty of Environment at the National University of Laos (NUOL), and refined through consultations, field examples, and iterative review sessions to ensure usability and ownership.

These guidelines should be practical, user-friendly, and directly applicable to the Lao regulatory context, and should include, but not limited to, the following:

- Screening and Classification Criteria
 - Criteria for determining risk levels of rare-earth mining storage facilities (e.g., tailings dams, waste rock storage, chemical ponds).
 - Guidance on identifying hazardous materials, radionuclides, heavy metals, and potential acid drainage risks.
- ESIA and EMMP Review Guidance
 - Detailed review checklists for ESIA/IEE submissions related to rare-earth mining storage facilities.
 - Requirements for evaluating design, siting, engineering controls, seepage management, water quality impacts, and downstream community exposure.
 - Mitigation Hierarchy: Prioritize avoidance, then minimization, rehabilitation, and offsets
 - Methods to assess long-term stability, slope failure risks, and contingency planning.
- Waste Management & Handling
 - Characterization: Detailed analysis of solid residues (tailings, NORM/TENORM like Th/Ce residues) and liquid filtrates.
 - Conditioning: Neutralization/immobilization of wastes before storage.
 - Handling Protocols: Procedures for handling toxic/radioactive materials, minimizing dust/gas release.
- Environmental Controls
 - Air Quality: Local/general ventilation, dust suppression (sealing, extraction), air treatment systems.
 - Water Management: Recycling filtrates, preventing contamination of



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surface/groundwater.

- Safety & Worker Protection
 - Ventilation: Local exhaust hoods (closing type if possible), ducting, blowers, exhaust vents.
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): For workers handling hazardous materials.
 - Monitoring: Continuous monitoring for dust, gases, and radiation levels
- Operational and Monitoring Requirements
 - Environmental monitoring parameters (e.g., groundwater, surface water, soil quality, air emissions, waste tracking).
 - Social monitoring (e.g., community health impacts, livelihood disruption, emergency preparedness, grievance resolution).
 - Templates for routine compliance monitoring reports.
- Closure and Rehabilitation Requirements
 - Standards for closure planning, progressive rehabilitation, and long-term site management.
 - Monitoring protocols for post-closure stability and contamination risk.

Activity 3 - Enhance the capacity of DoE staff in implementing environmental and social safeguards within the mining sector, through knowledge exchange with regional peers during a field visit to Vietnam

Working alongside TAF staff, the mining specialist will lead a field visit to Vietnam on safeguards in rare earth mining projects. The goals will be to allow GoL officials to gain practical insights from regional peers on the implementation of safeguards and environmental management in the mining sector.

Following the field visit, the Specialist will prepare a structured learning report summarizing lessons learned, comparative safeguards practices, and recommendations for adapting relevant approaches to Lao PDR's mining sector.

V. Deliverables:

- Monthly technical assistance and mentoring memos, summarizing the type of technical assistance and on-the-job mentoring provided for ESIA review and monitoring of mining projects, particularly rare earth mining, including progress, challenges, and staff capacity updates.
- A technical guideline developed for the EMMP for a storage facility for rare earth minerals.
- Training-of-trainers (ToT) materials for provincial and district-level staff, including slides, exercises, and case studies.
- Field Visit Learning Report summarizing best practices from Vietnam and applicability to Lao PDR.



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- Activity report describing the practical training on the use of the technical guidelines

VI. Requirements:

- Master's Degree in Environmental Science, Environmental Management, Environmental Engineering, Natural Resource Management, or a closely related field.
- Extensive knowledge of the ESIA legal framework in Lao PDR
- Experience with rare earth mining processes, waste management, tailings, and geo-environmental risks
- Experience developing EMMPs and technical guidelines for government clients
- Expert knowledge and practical experience in the field of ESIA in Lao PDR, particularly with regard to mining infrastructure projects. Knowledge of the application of international standards and assessment criteria, such as those of the ADB Safeguard Policy, IFC Performance Standards and/or World Bank Group's Safeguards is an asset.
- Demonstrated experience conducting training and/or technical assistance on ESIA implementation, review and monitoring
- An understanding of gender issues in a development context.
- Proven ability to communicate effectively, to understand community and stakeholder perspectives and vulnerabilities, and to engage with project affected people and project management teams positively and constructively.
- Fluent English speaking, reading, and writing; knowledge of Lao language desirable.
- Ability to work under pressure and against deadlines.

Please send a cover letter specifying the position to which you are applying with your resume or CV by email to: mekong.safeguards@asiafoundation.org by January 30, 2026. **Please indicate your preferred daily rate in USD.** (Only short-listed candidates will be notified).