



**The Asia Foundation**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Impact Assessment**

*Mobile banking-Financial Inclusion and economic empowerment for the low-income population and women in Vietnam*

*January 2023*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. The Foundation has maintained an office in Hanoi since 2000 and is recognized in Vietnam for its analytical strength, innovative programming and for its ability to collaborate with and build alliances between partners in government, the private sector and civil society. For further information about the Foundation, please visit our website at [www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org).

The “*Mobile banking – Financial inclusion and economic empowerment for the low-income population and women in Vietnam*” is a project funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as part of their Business Partnerships Platform funding scheme. The project has been implemented in collaboration with the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) – a public not-for-profit policy bank and Vietnam’s largest microfinance provider, providing preferential credit and savings accounts to poor and near-poor households and other priority beneficiaries, with women accounting for the largest portion of the priority beneficiaries. The project aims to support VBSP to develop its first-ever digital financial platform to increase and improve access to a full range of financial services for poor and low-income households, especially women-led microenterprises that lack access to traditional banking services.

The project has successfully completed Phase I (from 2016 - 2018) with the SMS notification services being successfully launched and rolled out across VBSP’s nationwide network, sending monthly account-related information via SMS text to more than 5.1 million of VBSP’s clients with information on repayment schedules, reminder, and monthly account balances. The project is now in the Phase II (from 2019 - 2023) with a focus on the bank’s system upgrade and building institutional capacity to facilitate VBSP in its different business agreements with interested technology partners and be able to provide a wide range of digital financial services responsive to the need of the target population. In Phase II, a Mobile Application (so-called ‘Policy Credit Management Mobile App’) has been developed to facilitate group leaders of VBSP’s saving and credit groups (SCGs) in collection loans and savings and to provide

updated information for entrusted stakeholders in the bank's delivery channel. By end of September 2022, the Mobile App has been tested and implemented among nearly 30,000 users in 19 selected branches. With positive feedback and responses from the users and communities, VBSP is gradually rolling out the use of this App in its whole system. The project has also supported VBSP to work with VNPAY and other technology partners, including Mastercard, on upgrading the Bank's core banking system and development of the 'VBSP SmartBanking' Mobile Application with an orientation of offering payment and then other financial services to interested individual clients. The VBSP SmartBanking App has been successfully tested, currently introduced among VBSP's staff nationwide, and will be offered to VBSP's clients, tentatively in early 2023.

In late 2019, the project conducted a Case Study assesment to qualitatively look into the innitial benefits and outcomes of the SMS notification services experienced by both the Bank and its clients. The Case Study captured positive feedback on the new service, however missed quantitative and statistical analysis on the Bank and its clients' feedback. The project is now in the final stage of implementation and in order to meet the project requirements, The Asia Foundation is seeking qualified consultant(s) to undertake an Impact Assessment of the project's results, particularly of the mobile applications under Phase II, tentatively scheduled in early 2023.

## **2. OBJECTIVE OF THE CONSULTANCY**

The overall objective of the Impact Assessment is to review and assess the project implemenation and its impact to VBSP and its clients. The Foundation expects that the Assessment will provide The Asia Foundation, VBSP and DFAT with an in-depth understanding and quantitative evidence of the benefits that mobile banking services (including SMS notification services where relevant and focusing on Mobile banking Apps) have brought or/and can potentially bring to both VBSP and its clients and group leaders in the long run, particularly in the perspective of financial inclusion and women empowerment.

The specific objectives of the Assessment are to:

- 1) Assess the **relevance** of the project outputs and outcomes to the goal and objectives of the project as well as to The Asia Foundation's and DFAT's overall policy goal and objectives.
- 2) Assess the **effectiveness and efficiency** in project implementation, particularly measuring to the extent to which the project succeeded in achieving its objectives, particularly in reaching its selected indicators as laid out in *Annex 1*.
- 3) Assess the **impacts** that the project implementation, particularly the Mobile banking services, have brought or/and can potentially bring to VBSP, its group leaders and clients, and how the project contributes to financial inclusion and women empowerment goals for the low-income people.

- 4) Assess the **sustainability** of the project results and/or activities, particularly measuring to what extent it is likely that the capacity building activities and the new services will continue to deliver benefits for target beneficiaries over the long term.
- 5) Document **lessons learnt** from the implementation of the project.
- 6) Provide practical and specific **recommendations** at both strategy and operational levels for the Bank to improve its services and enhance the impact of the project, as well as for The Asia Foundation and DFAT to identify areas for future programming.

### 3. SCOPE OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

The Assessment will involve mixed methods, combining secondary data analysis, quantitative and qualitative research to achieve the above-mentioned objectives of the Assessment. The Consultant(s), in collaboration with the Foundation's staff and VBSP, will be responsible for carrying out the following specific tasks/requirements using suggested methodologies:

- Conduct a desk review of the secondary sources, including relevant project documents, available reports/papers, and documents related to BPP gender questions and VBSP's digital finance program and the provision of mobile banking services.
- Conduct a quick cost analysis to assess the effectiveness of the Bank's operation resulting from the introduction of the new services, using available database/materials provided by VBSP and interviews with relevant VBSP's staff and other stakeholders.
- Conduct a quantitative survey using structured or semi-structured questionnaires with a sample of roughly 5,000 – 7,000 VBSP's group leaders and clients in selected branches in order to quantify the benefits and impacts that VBSP's new services (including SMS notification services and Mobile banking apps) have brought about to VBSP's staff, group leaders, and clients. The specific sites, sample selection and data collection method will be decided later in close consultation with the Foundation and VBSP.
- Conduct a qualitative study through interviews and/or focus group discussions with different key stakeholders to solicit their in-depth feedback on the Bank's mobile banking services, with more focus on the VBSP's Policy Credit Management and Smart Banking Mobile Apps, and perceived impact on their work and livelihoods. The specific number of interviews, group discussions, sample selection will be decided later in close consultation with the Foundation and VBSP. However, the Foundation expect the Consultant(s) will be able to conduct the following:
  - At least 8-10 key informant interviews with VBSP's staff, including the head of the Project Management Unit or/and project's coordinator, selected representatives from relevant divisions of VBSP and representatives from selected branches. We expect the Consultant(s) will be able to solicit in-depth feedback from the Bank's staff on how VBSP's new mobile banking services are contributing to institutional development and modernization strategy of VBSP, potential efficiency gains for staff and VBSP's

overall operation, as well as challenges and lessons learnt for the Bank when deploying these new services.

- At least 5-7 focus group discussions with VBSP's group leaders and entrusted stakeholders to solicit their feedback on VBSP's new mobile banking services and explore how the new services have impacted their work, changed their behaviour and attitude, and overall impact on their lives and livelihoods (e.g., better book-keeping, income gain through increased commissions, time and cost savings, change in relationship with and trust among their members, other potential impact on their economic activities and access to digital financial services) and interactions with the Bank.
- At least 8-10 in-depth interviews with VBSP's clients and group leaders to capture their feedback on the new mobile banking services and explore how the new services have changed their behavior and attitude, overall impacted their lives and livelihoods (e.g., more savings into their VBSP accounts, use these savings to pay loans, time and cost savings, change in relationship and trust with VBSP and group leaders, other potential impacts on their economic activities and access to digital financial services).

Guidelines for these in-depth interviews/group discussions will be discussed and agreed upon with the Foundation's program staff.

- Write a study report compiling the results of quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to evaluate the project implementation and highlight the impacts of the new services to the Bank's operations, its group leaders, and clients. The report should also cover findings and analysis of those selected indicators in Annex 1, which are key to measure achievement of the project.
- Write 2-3 case stories about how the new mobile banking services, particularly the Policy Credit Management and SmartBanking Mobile Applications, have benefited VBSP's group leaders and clients and impacted on their lives and livelihoods.
- Make all necessary revisions and finalize the draft reports and case stories, incorporating the comments from the Foundation and other project partners (if any).
- Provide debriefing(s) on the Impact Assessment results upon the request of The Asia Foundation.

#### **4. DELIVERABLES**

The main deliverables for this Consultancy will include:

- 1) An Inception report:** Upon desk review of available documents and initial discussions with the project team, the consultant(s) will prepare and submit to the Foundation an Inception Report, which will elaborate detailed methodology for undertaking the Assessment (e.g., sample selection, sample size, data collection methods, selection criteria of respondents for interviews, tools for both quantitative survey and qualitative interviews),

detailed workplan for the Assessment, and set out the outline for the Impact Assessment Report. The proposed methodology should include how ‘do no harm’ approach in data collection can be ensured, particularly in relation to gender questions.

- 2) **An Impact Assessment Report:** The report should compile the assessment findings and results of the desk review and interviews with different stakeholders, articulating their feedback and insights on the impact of the new services (SMS notifications and mobile banking) on VBSP’s operations, its staff, group leaders and clients. The report should document the approach by the Bank which supports deployment and roll-out the new services to the bank’s clients, mostly representing poor and low-income population as well as challenges faced during this process. The report should also highlight results of the cost analysis and impact of this new service on the bank’s operation. We also expect that the report will assess the project implementation in terms of relevance, effectiveness/efficiency, and sustainability. Finally, the report should propose recommendations for the Bank to improve its services and identify areas for future programming. The report should also include the completed Annex 1, which measures achievement of the project’s indicators.
- 3) **2-3 Case stories:** In addition to the Study Report, 2-3 impact stories will be captured through key informant interviews with VBSP’s group leaders and clients. The case stories should be stories from those group leaders and/or clients, who have been using the new services for a period of time to be able to show changes in attitude, skills and improvement in their life and transactions with VBSP. The Consultant will have to closely consult VBSP and the Foundation staff during the production of these case stories.
- 4) **Preliminary findings** of the Assessment to be shared with the Foundation and the project partners for debriefings and then tentatively presented at the project’s final workshop (if applicable) at the end of the Consultancy mission.
- 5) **Databases of the Impact Assessment:** All databases of the Assessment, including survey data and transcriptions of the interviews/focus group discussions should be submitted to The Asia Foundation.

All the above-mentioned final deliverables should be submitted to The Asia Foundation in an electronic format. The deliverables 2) and 3) should be submitted to The Asia Foundation in both English and Vietnamese. The deliverables 1), 4) and 5) can be submitted either in English or Vietnamese.

## **5. TIMEFRAME**

This assessment will be completed within 08 weeks from the signing date of the consultancy contract, which is scheduled in early February 2023. The total time allocated for the assignment is up to 40-45 days.

Deliverables	Proposed timeline
1. Finalization and agreement on the study methods and detailed action plan (Deliverable 1)	2 <sup>nd</sup> week of February 2023
2. Desk review, collection of secondary information/data	3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> week of Feb. 2023
3. Conduct data collection through the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews	March 2023
4. Submission of the first draft of the study report	Last week of March 2023
5. Submission of the first draft of the case stories	1 <sup>st</sup> week of April 2023
6. Submission of the final study report (Deliverable 2)	3 <sup>rd</sup> week of April 2023
7. Submission of the final impact stories (Deliverable 3)	Last week of April 2023
8. Provision of the debriefing (Deliverable 4)	3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> week of April 2023
<b>Total</b>	<b>40 – 45 days</b>

## 6. SCHEDULE OF PAYMENT

Payment will be realized based on days worked. The consultant fee is negotiable and will be based on the qualifications of the Consultants and the Foundation's cost norm. The total man days thus will be adjusted accordingly to the consultant fee and availability of the total budget for this assignment. Payments will be made in installments based upon satisfactory completion of the agreed deliverables.

## 7. QUALIFICATION OF THE CONSULTANT(S)

The following are the specific qualifications of the consultant (s) required:

- Post-graduate degree in development studies, gender, social sciences, economics or related fields;
- At least 10 years' experience in doing research and analytical work in gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the field of microfinance and ICT sector analysis;
- Knowledge and/or experience in microfinance sector, cost analysis and good understanding of VBSP's operation is an advantage;
- Strong communication and presentation skills;
- Excellent writing skills in English;
- Be committed to and able to meet the deadline.

## 8. APPLICATION PROCESS

Interested candidates or teams are requested to submit a 2 to 3-page expression of interest (EOI) in English together with CVs. The EOI should clearly describe the candidate(s)' understanding of this assessment topic and how she/he/they plan to conduct this assignment effectively. The EOI should also outline the candidates' key skills, experience relevant to the assessment and proposed daily consultancy rates.

***The Asia Foundation***

Lakeside Green Building, 5<sup>th</sup> Fl, 33 Truc Bach Str, Ba Dinh,  
Hanoi, Vietnam

Email: [tafvn@asiafoundation.org](mailto:tafvn@asiafoundation.org)  
[www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org)

Note that during the selection process, The Asia Foundation may ask the short-listed candidates for examples of their previous work as one of the considerations for making the final selection decision.

Please submit via email to:

*Ms. Tran Giang Linh – Senior Program Officer*

Email: [linh.tran@asiafoundation.org](mailto:linh.tran@asiafoundation.org)

Title: *Impact Assessment on VBSP's Mobile banking project.*

*Closing time for applications is **5.00 PM (Hanoi time, GMT+7) on February 1, 2023.***

Please note that only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interview.



## **ANNEX 1: SELECTED M&E INDICATORS**<sup>1</sup>

### **VBSP benefits:**

- Lower delinquency reported by VBSP
- % clients coming to the transaction points by loan due date (to pay back loan principles)
- Value of total revenue made by VBSP clients
  - Number of clients deposit money
  - Cumulative revenue of total cash-in
- Awareness and use of digital VBSP's products and services among VBSP staff
- Time and Cost savings for VBSP in Transactions with Group leaders/clients
- Number of VBSP clients who use SMS services
- Number of VBSP's group leaders and clients who use mobile apps for VBSP services
- Mainstreaming gender into VBSP operations
  - Awareness of VBSP's staff on gender-related issues increased
  - VBSP's information management system has gender data disaggregated
- Investments made by the VBSP in mbanking and improvements of SMS service
- Investments made by Mastercard and other technology partners in developing mobile banking system and related services by VBSP
- Commercial viability/sustainability of the business model (business revenue, reduction of operational cost, etc.) thanks to embarkation on mobile banking services.

### **Clients' benefits:**

- Time & cost savings (as they do not need to use alternatives to send/receive money) - calculate opportunity costs
- Savings banked into VBSP accounts
- Resilience (safety net) during tough time (i.e., saving would help)
- Increase in awareness about VBSP's services and relationship/trust with GLs and VBSP among clients
- Satisfaction with VBSP's new services among clients
- Increase in economic activities & income from economic activities
- Increased financial inclusion (i.e., thanks to the app, people who used to be deterred by the cumbersome paperwork and high transaction cost now can get access to the loans more easily and at much reduced cost)
- Women's empowerment: control over resources, decision on how money/resources are spent, gaining more work, change in status in community/household/workplace

### **Group leaders' benefits:**

- Time & cost savings (Group leaders do not need to travel very often now to their members, also spend less time with them now as members are informed on payments via SMS, or mobile banking system)
- Increase in income (more commission received) because clients pay on time and have more savings
- Increase in economic activities & income from economic activities

---

<sup>1</sup> The Foundation will consult with the consultant on which data/information require gender disaggregated.



***The Asia Foundation***

Lakeside Green Building, 5<sup>th</sup> Fl, 33 Truc Bach Str, Ba Dinh,  
Hanoi, Vietnam

Email: [tafvn@asiafoundation.org](mailto:tafvn@asiafoundation.org)  
[www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org)

- Better bookkeeping for group leaders in managing responsible groups
- Women's empowerment: control over resources, decision how money/resources are spent, change in status in community/household/workplace
- Increase in awareness and satisfaction with VBSP's new services among group leaders.