



Background

We are seeking a consultant/consultancy to help Hand in Hand conduct a qualitative/ mixed-methods deep dive study with participants of one of our projects in Herat province, Afghanistan. This study will seek to answer a set of research questions (see below), with Hand in Hand participants, related to the process of certification of their saffron produce to EU Organic or ISO standards, the set-up of a sustainable value chain linking the companies to high value markets and the improvement of working conditions and incomes for the workers.

The person/firm we're looking for will be experienced working with companies and workers in Herat, Afghanistan, as part of research or evaluation studies, skilled in qualitative and mixed-method assessment, sampling, data collection and analysis, and with experience of women's economic empowerment and value chain development for international trade in Afghanistan. If this sounds like you, we'd love to hear from you.

Consultancy: Optimising Value Chain Programming for MSMEs and Women-Led Enterprises. An End of Project Study in Herat.

Reports to: Laura Maio, Izzy Quilter

Location: Remote + Herat (Afghanistan).

Contract: Fixed term, Delivery 8^h March 2027.

Languages required: English, Dari and Pashto

Daily rate: To be agreed with selected candidate¹

¹ We treat all applications equally, however we actively encourage applications from people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, people who identify as LGBT+, who have a disability, as well as those from a working-class background, as these groups are currently under-represented in the charity sector. Our aim is to become a truly inclusive organisation, with a workforce as diverse as the communities we serve.

Organisation

Hand in Hand International (HiHI) is part of a global network operating from Afghanistan to Uganda that has helped create or improve 10 million jobs since 2003, 80% for women. HiHI supports its partners through donor reporting, capacity building, technical assistance, and strategic oversight, working with marginalized communities to promote economic and social empowerment through a self-help, market-based approach.

Hand in Hand Afghanistan (HIHAO) is a not-for-profit and non-governmental organization registered with the Ministry of Economy of the Government of Afghanistan. HIHAO promotes women's economic empowerment to deliver higher incomes, greater mobility, and increased decision-making power for vulnerable Afghan women. Since 2020, HIHAO has increasingly provided humanitarian support to households most at risk of food insecurity and has helped 50,000 women and men beat the odds and succeed as entrepreneurs since 2007, running profitable enterprises that stand the test of time.

Promoting market-driven and sustainable growth and employment – the saffron sector in Herat, Afghanistan

With support from the Danish government, this 5-year programme has sought to scale a certified and climate-resilient saffron value chain in Herat province, Afghanistan. The goal was to drive income for the companies by supporting the achievement of EU Organic or ISO certifications, linking them to high value markets and improve working conditions and incomes for their workers.

Impact: Premium quality organic saffron creates new farm and job income opportunities, especially for women, through a stronger export market

Objective 1: Seven saffron companies, applying responsible business practices, achieve ISO standard (5) or EU Organic (2) certification

Objective 2: Price premiums on ISO and EU Organic certified saffron exports increase incomes along the saffron value chain

Objective 3: A stronger, more inclusive saffron value chain in Herat exports more and higher quality saffron to international markets

Objective and Scope

The primary objective of this consultancy is to co-design and deliver robust study at end of project, integrating the standard evaluation results, to assess and strengthen the effectiveness of value chain-based interventions for MSMEs in Afghanistan, with particular attention to women-led enterprises. The study will run alongside the project's endline data collection, providing additional value and insight.

The research should generate reliable insights that can be used for programme learning, adaptation in future programming, and donor reporting.

It will build on the insights gathered during annual evaluations on changes on Responsible Business conduct (RBC), UN Compact, wages etc.

Research Objectives:

1. How can value chain-based programmes be better optimised in Afghanistan, both for micro enterprises and SMEs
2. What are the markets and value chains for which there is potential, either at local or international level
3. How can women led enterprises specifically better be supported in this context

Timelines

This project must be completed within the timeframe of the funded programme; final reporting should be delivered by Monday 8th March 2027.

Deliverables

1. Documented and validated study methodology and timeline (PDF and Word).
2. Data collection tools (PDF and Word).
3. Analysis framework and report template
4. Translation of data collection tools into Dari and Pashto.
5. An anonymised, cleaned and analysed qualitative dataset (e.g. transcripts, coded summaries, or notes), in line with Hand in Hand data protection requirements.
6. A landscape analysis drawing on primary data collection and literature review.
7. A presentation of early findings for HIH stakeholders.
8. Full written report of findings, available for 2 rounds of review by HIH stakeholders.

Skills and knowledge

The consultant (individual or firm) should demonstrate the following skills and knowledge:

1. Proven expertise in designing and delivering high-quality qualitative research or evaluation studies in fragile or complex operating contexts, including development of data collection tools, purposive sampling strategies, facilitation of FGDs and KIs, and qualitative data analysis.

2. Strong knowledge and practical understanding of women's economic empowerment, particularly in restrictive and conflict affected contexts, and value chain development for national and international trade in Afghanistan.
3. Experience conducting research with businesses and workers in Afghanistan.
4. Experience conducting landscape analyses combining primary data and literature review
5. General awareness of certification schemes (e.g. EU Organic, ISO) and their relevance to producer value chains
6. Demonstrated ability to produce clear, well-structured, and actionable reports.
7. Knowledge of and commitment to ethical research practices, including informed consent, confidentiality, safeguarding, and a do-no-harm approach.
8. Excellent communication and facilitation skills, including the ability to engage respectfully with diverse stakeholders.
9. Fluency in English required; fluency in Dari and Pashto or ability to engage qualified translators from Dari and Pashto required.
10. Ability to work collaboratively with remote MEL teams and to deliver outputs within tight timeframes.

Ethical considerations

The consultant will be expected to adhere to Hand in Hand's safeguarding and data protection policies. This includes obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants, and applying a do-no-harm approach throughout the study.

How to apply and enquiries

Please submit your CV and a covering letter (max. 3 pages) to impact@hihinternational.org with the subject line "Optimising Value Chain Programming for MSMEs and Women-Led Enterprises. An End of Project Study in Herat" **by 18th September 2026 at 11:59pm GMT**, incorporating the following:

1. Summary of relevant skills and past relevant experience
2. An outline of how you would approach this assignment
3. A proposed workplan, timeframe, and full budget

Candidates will be invited to a short Interview about the project, dates tbc. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

Successful applicants may be subject to a reference check.