Terms of Reference

Consultancy to Support the Development of the Asia Regional Advocacy Strategy, Power Map and Action Plan

ToR Date: 15 May 2026
Research Report Publication target: 31 March 2027
Consultancy start date: July 2026
Location: Flexible (Remote work)
Budget: €15,000, all taxes included

1. Background and Rationale

Forus is an innovative global network of national NGO platforms and regional coalitions working to strengthen civil society's collective voice, influence and capacity to drive social change. It brings together 74 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Pacific, representing more than 24,000 civil society organisations worldwide.

National platforms of CSOs and regional coalitions play a unique and irreplaceable role in coordinating diverse civil society actors, influencing policy for sustainable development, and strengthening civil society's enabling environment at national, regional, and global levels.

In 2025–2026, Forus developed its new global Strategy (2026–2030) through an inclusive, consultative process with its members. Forus' new Strategy 2026–2030 is built around Forus' new Strategy 2026–2030 pillars: Connect, Support, and Influence, underpinned by Network Health. The Strategy aims to ensure the network is resilient, interconnected, and influential at all levels. To deliver on this ambition, Forus is supporting members in different regions to translate the global strategy into practical regional advocacy roadmaps.

These regional advocacy strategies are intended to reflect:

- the political, civic space and development realities members face;
- the regional and sub-regional power arenas that matter most;
- concrete opportunities for regional and inter-regional learning and joint influence;
- the specific role of national platforms and regional coalitions as bridges, convenors and amplifiers of civil society priorities.

In the Asia region, civil society platforms operate in an increasingly complex and diverse landscape. Members have highlighted several challenges, including:

- Restrictive NGO laws and increased administrative pressure in several countries
- Shrinking and diversifying funding landscapes, requiring platforms to adapt their business models
- Foreign agent narratives and public delegitimization in some contexts
- Increasing digital and physical security risks, particularly for platforms in fragile or politically constrained settings

These challenges vary significantly across national and sub-regional contexts. At the same time, the region presents significant opportunities for collective advocacy. Regional and sub-regional bodies (such as ASEAN, SAARC), a growing development finance architecture, multilateral spaces, emerging policy arenas and strong traditions of civil society networking and cross-border solidarity all offer potential entry points for coordinated influence.

This consultancy will support Forus members in Asia to develop a practical, member-led regional advocacy strategy that helps identify shared priorities, leverage points, advocacy opportunities and concrete next steps for regional and inter-regional collaboration.

This process is member-led. The consultant or consultant team will not define advocacy priorities on behalf of members. Rather, they will facilitate and accompany a structured process through which members can analyse their context, identify shared priorities, map influence opportunities, and agree on practical advocacy directions.

2. Purpose of the Consultancy

The purpose of this consultancy is to support Forus members in the Asia region, **through a facilitated member-led process**, to develop a practical, regional advocacy strategy that translates the Forus Strategy 2026–2030 into clear regional and sub-regional advocacy priorities, influence opportunities and concrete next steps.

The consultancy will facilitate a process through which members:

- Ground the Forus 2026–2030 Strategy in the regional context, including members' priorities, narratives, risks, and opportunities;
- Identify where members have leverage for joint advocacy objectives, including mapping key actors, spaces, moments and pressure points;
- Define key regional advocacy priorities or influence tracks to implement the Forus' global strategy at regional level;
- Develop a practical action plan clarifying possible roles at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels;
- identify concrete opportunities for inter-regional collaboration within the Forus network;
- propose light monitoring markers to help members follow progress and adapt the strategy over time.

The consultancy will also explore the feasibility of incorporating a resource mobilisation framework and communications strategy, responding to members' expressed needs around fundraising capacity and visibility.

3. Scope and analytical approach

The consultancy will produce an evidence-based, member-driven and action-oriented regional advocacy strategy rooted in the experiences of Forus members in Asia, including national platforms and regional coalitions.

The analysis should draw on:

- Forus strategic documents and relevant internal materials;
- member strategies, reports and advocacy priorities where available;
- relevant EU SEE monitoring information and other civil society evidence;
- consultations with Forus members across the Asia region;
- selected external sources on regional policy processes, civic space trends, development finance and civil society engagement opportunities.

The assignment is not expected to provide a comprehensive analysis of the full civil society landscape in Asia, nor detailed country-by-country political or legal assessments. Instead, it should use the collective experience of Forus members as the primary evidence base for identifying key priority areas for regional influence, key stakeholders, potential allies, advocacy opportunities and realistic pathways for collective action.

Given the diversity of the Asia region, the methodology should include sub-regional conversations, as relevant, including South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and other sub-regional perspectives represented within Forus' Asia membership. These sub-regional inputs should not result in separate full strategies, but should inform one coherent Asia regional advocacy strategy that identifies shared priorities, differentiated risks and possible sub-regional entry points for action.

Opportunities for inter-regional collaboration should also be identified, in connection with Forus' global influence workstreams and the Connect pillar of the Forus Strategy 2026–2030.

4. Scope of work

The consultant (or consultant team) will work closely with the Asia Regional Steering Committee and the Forus Secretariat.

The scope of work will include:

A. Inception and work planning

a. Hold a kick-off meeting with the Asia Regional Steering Committee and Forus Secretariat.
b. Confirm the scope, methodology, timeline, risks, consultation approach and expected deliverables.
c. Prepare an inception note and detailed workplan.

B. Desk review and regional landscape mapping

a. Review relevant Forus documents, member inputs, regional advocacy processes and complementary civil society evidence.

b. Identify key regional and sub-regional trends affecting civil society advocacy in Asia.
c. Map relevant institutions, policy spaces, regional bodies, development finance actors, multilateral processes and advocacy moments.

C. Member engagement and consultations

a. Design and facilitate a participatory member engagement process.
b. Consult national platforms and regional coalitions across the Asia region.
c. Organise sub-regional consultations, focus groups, interviews and/or surveys, depending on feasibility and members' availability.
d. Ensure the process captures both shared regional priorities and differentiated sub-regional realities.

D. Power mapping

a. Identify key decision-makers, allies, pressure points, advocacy spaces and windows for influence at regional and sub-regional levels.
b. Analyse where Asia members already have access, legitimacy, relationships or potential influence.
c. Identify possible entry points for national, regional and global-level advocacy.

E. Strategy development

a. Synthesise consultation findings and desk review results.
b. Support members to identify 2–4 priority advocacy tracks or "influence bets."
c. Draft the Asia Regional Advocacy Strategy and accompanying action plan.
d. Ensure the strategy is practical, focused and usable by members.

F. Validation and revision

a. Support at least one regional validation session with Asia members.
b. Present the draft strategy and gather feedback.
c. Revise the strategy package based on member and Steering Committee input.

G. Finalisation and handover

a. Finalise the regional advocacy strategy, power map, action plan, inter-regional collaboration proposals and monitoring markers.
b. Provide a short handover note with suggested next steps, source list and possible update points.
c. Where agreed and feasible, include a light annex on resource mobilisation and/or communications considerations.

5. Methodology Requirements

The consultant is expected to propose a robust, participatory methodology that includes:

- **Desk review:** Synthesis of existing Forus / Forus member strategies, relevant regional policy processes, and complementary civil society monitoring sources.
- **Member and stakeholder engagement:** A strong and inclusive sampling strategy covering national platforms and regional coalitions across sub-regions (South Asia, Southeast Asia, East

Asia), using a combination of tools (online surveys, key informant interviews, sub-regional focus group discussions / calls).

- **Sub-regional approach:** Given the diversity of the Asia region, the methodology should contain dedicated sub-regional conversations that feed into an overall regional strategy. These sub-regional inputs will serve as the foundation for the overall regional strategy.
- **Power mapping:** A structured methodology to identifying key actors, allies, and windows for influence at sub-regional and regional levels.
- **Validation:** A clear process for member validation of the draft strategy, involving at least one validation session (online or hybrid).
- **Quality assurance:** Triangulation of sources, clear documentation of evidence, and an approach that supports future updates and replication.
- Practicality: a strong focus on producing a strategy that members can realistically use, rather than a long descriptive report.

Do-no-harm and confidentiality

Given the sensitivity of civic space and enabling environment issues in several Asian contexts, the consultant or consultant team must apply a do-no-harm approach throughout the assignment.

This includes:

- protecting the confidentiality of member inputs where needed;
- avoiding attribution of sensitive comments without consent;
- adapting consultation methods to members' security concerns and availability;
- taking care when documenting country-specific risks;
- ensuring that politically sensitive findings are presented in a way that does not expose members or partners to unnecessary risk.

6. Tasks of the Consultant

The work is expected to be organised in phases (indicative timeline below):

Phase 1 — Inception (July-August 2026)

- Kick-off meeting with the Regional Steering Committee and Forus Secretariat to confirm objectives, scope, methodology, and risks.
- Submit an inception note: methodology, detailed workplan, proposed strategy outline, sampling and engagement plan, and risk mitigation measures.

Phase 2 — Desk Review and Mapping (September 2026)

- Desk review of relevant documentation, including Forus member strategies and reports, regional policy processes, and complementary sources.
- Initial power mapping of key actors, spaces, and opportunities at sub-regional and regional levels.
- Design of engagement tools (survey, interview guides, focus group prompts).

Phase 3 — Member Engagement and Synthesis (October-November 2026)

- Implement agreed engagement methods: sub-regional calls or focus groups (South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia), surveys, and key informant interviews.
- Synthesise findings into an interim memo; and identify emerging priorities, risks, opportunities and advocacy entry points for Steering Committee review.

Phase 4 — Drafting (December2026 – January 2027)

- Draft the regional advocacy strategy and action plan (v1) and share with the Steering Committee and Forus Secretariat for feedback.
- Revise to v2 incorporating feedback and additional evidence as needed.

Phase 5 — Validation and Revision (January- February 2027december 2026)

- Facilitate at least one online (or hybrid) validation session with Asia members.
- Incorporate feedback and strengthen clarity, accuracy, and usability of the strategy and action plan.

Phase 6 — Finalisation and Handover (March 2027)

- Submit the final regional advocacy strategy, action plan, power map, inter-regional collaboration proposals, and monitoring markers.
- Deliver optional companion products (resource mobilisation framework, communications plan) if included in scope.
- Provide a light handover note (sources list, contacts list, and suggestions for next steps and future updates).

7. Deliverables

Core deliverables are listed below; optional components will only be included if feasible within the available budget. Indicative deliverables (to be confirmed in the inception phase):

D1. Inception note (methodology, detailed workplan, proposed outline, engagement plan, risks and mitigation).

D2. Desk review and power mapping pack: annotated overview of the regional landscape and key actor map; finalised engagement tools.

D3. Interim findings and draft priorities memo: key findings and draft advocacy priorities for Steering Committee internal review, including emerging advocacy priorities and possible influence tracks.

D4. Draft strategy and action plan (v1) and revised draft (v2) after Steering Committee feedback. Including proposed priorities, narrative framing, target arenas, power mapping, roles at national/sub-regional/regional/global levels, and first steps.

D5. Validation session package: agenda, presentation slides or equivalent materials, and a short summary of feedback received from members.

D6. Final package: Asia Regional advocacy strategy (2026–2030) + power map + action plan + inter-regional collaboration proposals + monitoring markers + optional resource mobilisation framework and/or communications plan.

8. Profile and Qualifications of the Consultant or Team of Consultant

Key qualifications:

- Proven expertise in civil society advocacy, civic space, and/or enabling environment issues, with strong knowledge of the Asia regional context.
- Good understanding of regional dynamics and bodies relevant to civil society advocacy in Asia (e.g., SAARC, ASEAN, regional development banks, UN regional mechanisms).
- Demonstrated experience with participatory, mixed-methods research and strategy development processes.
- experience facilitating participatory, member-led process and translate diverse perspectives into a coherent, actionable strategy.
- Experience working with civil society networks and facilitating inclusive, multilingual-friendly processes.
- Knowledge of development finance, Agenda 2030 / post-2030 processes, and/or resource mobilisation for CSOs, and the parameters determining civil society's enabling environment
- Excellent writing and communication skills in English; proficiency in one or more Asian languages is an asset.
- Familiarity with Forus or similar global civil society networks.

9. Location, Duration and Costing of Research

Location: Flexible. The consultant will work remotely. All activities (desk review, interviews, consultations, validation sessions) can be conducted online.

Duration: July 2026 – 31 March 2027. Estimated 25–35 working days (indicative) over the period.

Costing: The maximum budget is €15,000 (all taxes included). Bidders should submit a detailed budget (day-rates, number of days, and any direct costs).

Payment schedule (linked to deliverables):

- 20% on D1 approval
- 40% on D4 acceptance
- 40% on D6 acceptance

Proposals should clearly prioritise deliverables to ensure quality within the available budget.

10. Member-Led Governance: Regional Steering Committee

In line with Forus' core principles, this process is member-led. A Regional Steering Committee (RSC) composed of Forus member representatives from the Asia region, including national platforms and regional coalitions, will oversee and guide the process.

Role of the Steering Committee:

- Define the scope and priorities of the regional advocacy strategy process
- Oversee the selection of the service provider / consultant
- Review key deliverables and provide substantive feedback
- Validate the final strategy and action plan
- Ensure the process reflects the collective ownership and priorities of Asia members

Secretariat support: The Forus Secretariat will support the process logistically and help ensure alignment with the Forus 2026–2030 Global Strategy, without driving the substance of the work. Support may include coordination and scheduling, set-up of calls and interpretation where needed, and sharing of common templates.

> ⚠ **Conflict of Interest — Important Note**
>
> Any Forus member or organisation represented on the Regional Steering Committee who wishes to apply for this consultancy is welcome to do so. However, to avoid conflicts of interest, any Steering Committee member who submits an application must fully step out of the proposal review and selection process for that application. They will not have access to competing proposals and will not participate in any scoring or deliberation for the round in which they are a candidate.

11. Composition of the Application and Deadline

Eligibility / contracting restrictions:

This consultancy will be contracted under EU funding eligibility rules. As a result, Forus can only contract consultants/legal entities established in an EU Member State or in an eligible ODA recipient country. This means that Forus cannot accept proposals from legal entities established in (non-exhaustive list): the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Australia, or South Korea. Consortium applications are welcome, but the contracting entity must be eligible and able to invoice Forus.

The application file should include:

- Motivation letter addressed to the Asia Regional Steering Committee and Forus' Advocacy Coordinator.
- Technical proposal (max 10 pages): understanding of the assignment, proposed methodology, engagement plan, power mapping approach, risks and mitigation, and detailed workplan.
- Financial proposal: day-rates, number of days, direct costs, and confirmation that VAT/taxes (if applicable) are included. Please include optional costed components (resource mobilisation framework, communications plan, in-person meeting) as separate line items if relevant.
- CV(s) of consultant(s) / team members (max 2 pages each).
- Two writing samples or examples of comparable strategy or advocacy documents produced.
- Two to three references from comparable assignments.

Selection process: Applications will be assessed by the Regional Steering Committee (with Forus Secretariat support) on: (i) understanding of the assignment and quality of methodology; (ii) relevant experience with civil society advocacy in the Asia region; (iii) feasibility and value for money; and (iv) ability to deliver a practical, member-owned product within the timeline.

Application deadline: by the 30th June 2026.

Applications should be submitted in electronic format to: recruitment@forus-international.org (subject line: "Consultancy – Asia Regional Advocacy Strategy").

For questions about these terms of reference, please contact: recruitment@forus-international.org