



**Terms of Reference/Call for Proposals
Professional Learning Communities
(PLC) in the Global South:
a Systematic Literature Review**

Deadline proposals: 29 March 2021

Content

Summary of the research or consultancy	2
1. General Provisions	3
1.1. Contracting Authority / Tendering Organization	3
1.2. Background on the organization	3
2. Technical Provisions	4
2.1. Context of the Consultancy	4
2.2. Objectives and scope of the consultancy	4
2.3. Methodological requirements	5
2.4. Deliverables and Timeframe	6
2.5. Profile of the researcher(s) or consultant(s)	6
2.6. Location	7
2.7. Budget and Duration	7
2.8. Background documentation	7
2.9. Ethical considerations	7
2.10. Expectations regarding proposals	7
3. Administrative Provisions	7
3.1. Eligibility criteria	7
3.2. Awarding criteria and procedure	8
3.3. Supervision and monitoring of the consultancy	8

Summary of the research or consultancy

- **Title:** Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in the Global South: a Systematic Literature Review
- **Contracting Authority:** VVOB – education for development, Brussels, Belgium
- **Timeframe:** Research or consultancy from 12 April 2021 to 30 September 2021 (6 months)
- **Approach:** Desk study with regular follow-up meetings over Microsoft TEAMS and a conference presentation for eNSPIRED
- **Steering committee:** Soetkin Bauwens, Jef Peeraer, Inge Vandevyvere, and Sofie Cabus

Important Notification: Interested service providers are invited to inform VVOB (contact person: sofie.cabus@vvo.org) the latest on 5 March 2021 that they intend to submit a proposal. This is also the deadline to send questions about the ToR to VVOB. All answers will be sent to anyone who has expressed interest by 12 March 2021. Full proposals should be submitted no later than 29 March 2021.

1. General Provisions

1.1. Contracting Authority / Tendering Organization

This call is issued by VVOB Belgium, represented by its Director-General Sven Rooms.

VVOB vzw
Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A
B-1060 Brussel

The call will be followed up by Sofie Cabus, Research Lead at Head Office (Belgium, Brussels) and Soetkin Bauwens, coordinator of the eNSPIRED programme. All correspondence with regard to the content and procedure of this call should be sent to sofie.cabus@vvo.org.

1.2. Background on the organization

VVOB is a non-profit organisation with over 35 years of experience in improving the quality of education systems from a rights-based perspective. VVOB has currently long-term partnerships with education actors in 9 countries in the South (Cambodia, DR Congo, Ecuador, Rwanda, South Africa, Suriname, Vietnam, Zambia and Uganda) and in Belgium/Flanders.

VVOB's vision is to strive for a sustainable world based on equal opportunities through quality education. For VVOB **quality education** means: *"... one that provides all learners with capacities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual wellbeing."*

In pursuit of quality education, VVOB works on two components, **professional development of teachers** and **professional development of school leaders** in four subsectors with following goals:

- Teachers and school leaders in **early education** (and in the transition to primary education) provide an equal start to all learners to ensure their full development during their future education;
- Teachers and school leaders in **primary education** use appropriate pedagogical and didactic methodologies to improve literacy, numeracy and life skills in all learners;
- Teachers and school leaders in **general secondary education** (and in the transition to it) ensure all learners acquire the necessary 21st century skills;
- Teachers and school leaders in **technical and vocational education and training** prepare all learners to the needs of society and decent work

To realise these objectives, VVOB focuses on **capacity development** of its operational partners: ministries of education, teacher training institutions and organisations focusing on professional development. Partners range from national and regional governments to institutions, individual schools, school leaders, teachers and students.

This call for proposals from VVOB is issued from [eNSPIRED](#), the title of the VVOB-programme on equity in education. Since 2014, eNSPIRED has been organising workshops, seminars and learning weeks for teacher trainers and (future) teachers in Belgium, region of Flanders, with educational experts from VVOB's partner countries. Based on this international dialogue on equity in education, we fuel inspiration on how equity in education and dealing with diversity can be improved in Flemish education practices. In previous years for example, international dialogues on multilingualism, gender equality and vulnerable children were organized. A community of practice with teacher trainers and educational supervisors is also set up and works on embedding equity related learning experiences in and with the Global South in education practices in Flanders.

2. Technical Provisions

2.1. Context of the Consultancy

Professional learning communities (PLC)* receive increasing attention as a method for effective teacher or school leader professional development (PD) in the Global South. For example, VVOB programmes in South Africa include [PLC on climate change education](#) as a way to educate and train teachers and school leaders on this topic. There is also a technical brief (VVOB, 2017) on PLC in education and its association with SDG4 (which can be found [here](#)). It is a matter of fact that this form of adult learning may include criteria of effective PD in education, like content focus, ownership, and collaboration (Desimone, 2009; Merchie et al., 2018).

While empirical studies have shown the value added of PLC within the context of education in low- and middle-income countries (among others, Botha, 2012; Brodie, 2013; Sargent, 2015; März et al., 2018), to date no study exists that collects this body of evidence in a literature review. By launching this call for proposals, we wish to attract researcher(s) or consultant(s) that can conduct a systematic literature review on **PLC in low- and middle-income countries** initiated in adult education or training (e.g. among students or management staff from pre-service teacher education colleges), and among in-service teachers and school leaders.

Note (): Professional learning communities are also often referred to as professional learning networks, communities of practices, etc. The systematic literature review should encompass all these different terms.*

References

- Botha, E. M. (2012). Turning the tide: creating Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to improve teaching practice and learning in South African public schools. *Africa Education Review*, 9(2), 395-411.
- Brodie, K. (2013). The power of professional learning communities. *Education as change*, 17(1), 5-18.
- Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational researcher*, 38(3), 181-199.
- März, V., Lauwers, I., Moreno, O., Patiño, I., & Frenay, M. (2018). Evaluation of professional learning communities in TVET: Implications for leadership development and teacher motivation in Ecuador. In Comparative and International Education Society Annual Conference.
- Merchie, E., Tuytens, M., Devos, G., & Vanderlinde, R. (2018). Evaluating teachers' professional development initiatives: towards an extended evaluative framework. *Research papers in education*, 33(2), 143-168.
- Sargent, T. C. (2015). Professional learning communities and the diffusion of pedagogical innovation in the Chinese education system. *Comparative Education Review*, 59(1), 102-132.
- VVOB technical brief (2017), *Professional Learning Communities in education: putting SDG4 into practice*, DOI: <https://www.vvob.org/en/downloads/technical-brief-2-professional-learning-communities>

2.2. Objectives and scope of the consultancy

Using appropriate methods underlying a systematic literature review, we wish to answer the following questions regarding PLC initiated in adult education or training (e.g. among students or management staff from pre-service teacher education colleges), and among in-service teachers and school leaders in low- and middle-income countries:

1. How are PLC defined?
2. How and by whom are PLC initiated?
3. Are PLC effective as an instrument for PD of teachers and/or school leaders?
 - In which terms was effectiveness defined? (E.g. PLC as a way to increase teacher subject knowledge; PLC as a way to change attitudes or beliefs; etc.)
 - Under which conditions are PLC (not) effective as an instrument for PD of teachers and/or school leaders?
4. Are effective PLC sustainable?

5. Are PLC costly?
 - What factors influence the cost-effectiveness of PLC?
 - Considering cost-effectiveness, are there examples in the literature of upscaling PLC?
6. What advices to VVOB (as an implementor of PLC) and policymaking can we give for each of the above questions?

Additional questions can still be added upon discussion with the researcher(s) or consultant(s). The studies conducted by Stoll et al. (2006) and Dogan et al. (2016) can be consulted, then, beforehand as to give an idea of what kind of literature reviews were already done in this field, and what kind of questions were asked. Please notice that these studies did not put particular focus on education in low- and middle-income-countries.

Results of this systematic literature review will directly benefit the programmes established in VVOB's partner countries. Further, stakeholders in Flanders and beyond may learn from this study, and will be reached through a presentation by the researcher(s) or consultant(s) in October 2021 at an ENSPIRED conference.

References

- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of educational change*, 7(4), 221-258.
- Dogan, S., Pringle, R., & Mesa, J. (2016). The impacts of professional learning communities on science teachers' knowledge, practice and student learning: A review. *Professional development in education*, 42(4), 569-588.

2.3. Methodological requirements

As follows, **(D)** points to a deliverable.

We distinguish **three phases** in the systematic literature review. The **first phase** consists of the construction of a database **(D1)** of literature using an excel sheet with following column headers:

- First author
- Year of publication
- Geographical coverage (focus on low- and middle-income-countries)
- Abstract
- Markers for quantitative or qualitative research
- Method(s) applied in the research
- Data collection method
- Sample size
- Main findings

In a technical note **(D2)** the researcher(s) or consultant(s) should carefully describe the way they have done the systematic literature review.

- Using Boolean terms in multiple e-libraries (ERIC, ebscohost, Google Scholar,...) in combination with snowball methods;
 - E.g. ("professional learning communities" OR "communities of practices") AND ("effectiveness" OR intervention OR "evidence")
 - The focus is on PLC, however, we advise to elaborate on using the key word "communities of practices" or "professional learning networks". This can then be covered in the question on definitions of PLC (see section 2.2).
- Summarise number of abstracts/articles that the authors have read vs. retained in a flow chart.
- Carefully describe the criteria to retain abstract/articles:
 - Step1: Published in peer-review journals or reports between 2000-2020 + language is English (for reasons of understanding)
 - Step 2: Geographical coverage deals with low- and middle-income-countries
 - Step 3: Focus on effectiveness of PLC
 - Step 4: PLC initiated in adult education or training (e.g. pre-service teacher education colleges), or established among pre-service teachers and school leaders

- Step 5: When results Step 1 to Step 4 yield only few results, elaborate the Boolean terms (e.g. with communities of practices), add other Gray literature (books, dissertations), etc.

These and other selection criteria can be discussed in the start-up meeting with VVOB.

The **second phase** consists of writing of a working paper (**D3**) in VVOB format using the articles retained from phase 1. The working paper should contain:

- The flow chart
- One main table with key findings
- Discussion of the main findings from the literature retrieved (see research questions above)
- Discussion of methods applied in those articles (and, hereby, a discussion of the quality of the evidence retrieved)
- Conclusion and advice for VVOB and policymaking

The **third phase** is valorisation and dissemination of the working paper:

- We expect from the researcher(s) or consultant(s) that they present the working paper on a conference of eNSPIRED. To this end, a PowerPoint presentation (**D4**) will be made together with VVOB staff.
 - If intermediate results are available for dissemination, a blog post, or other popular ways to present findings to a target audience, would be appreciated and supported by the VVOB staff, however, only upon using a correct reference to the literature review. We consider these possible other dissemination channels as part of (**D4**).
- We also expect from the researcher(s) or consultant(s) that they work together with VVOB staff on a publication of the working paper in a peer-reviewed journal (**D5**). The publication can, of course, fall beyond the deadline of finalization of the working paper, but we expect a commitment from the researcher(s) or consultant(s) for publishing.

2.4. Deliverables and Timeframe

Deliverable	Description	Timeline
D1	Database of literature in Excel	14 June 2021
D2	Technical note	28 June 2021
D3	Working paper in VVOB format	20 September 2021
D4	a PowerPoint presentation at eNSPIRED conference; & possible other dissemination channels	30 September 2021; -
D5	Publication	-

2.5. Profile of the researcher(s) or consultant(s)

The researcher(s) or consultant(s) should have proven experiences with conducting systematic literature reviews. Please add max. 5 references to relevant examples in the proposal, preferably references to articles where you were the leading author.

The researcher(s) or consultant(s) should have proven knowledge of writing a working paper in English. Both written and oral skills in English should satisfy to be able to write a working paper, but also to present your work in English at the eNSPIRED conference. Please add max. 5 references to relevant examples in the proposal (e.g. conference or workshop presentations).

The researcher(s) or consultant(s) should have a clear affinity with research in education, preferably, but not necessarily, with professional learning communities, education in low- and middle-income-countries, adult learning, and/or professional development. This affinity can be proven with your list of references, your position and your relevant work experiences (CV).

Please add examples on all criteria stipulated above for each of the applicants in case of working with a team. Subcontracting is not allowed.

2.6. Location

The systematic literature review is a desk study. The researcher(s) or consultant(s) meet regularly with VVOB staff over Microsoft TEAMS (or other digital communication methods). The eNSPIRED conference most likely will take place online. If the conference would take place in Brussels, Belgium, then VVOB will foresee in travel costs.

2.7. Budget and Duration

The maximum budget to cover all deliverables is **30,000 euros**. The proposed budget should cover all possible expenses - including taxes (eg VAT) - attached to the delivery of the services/deliverables. Please clearly indicate in the proposal the number of days covered with the budget, and, if applicable, for each member of the team. The research starts preferably no later than 12 April 2021 and should end by 30 September 2021 in order to be able to present the work at the eNSPIRED conference (except for D5). See also section 2.4 for the suggested timeline.

2.8. Background documentation

VVOB will provide the consultant(s) or researcher(s) with documents available on studies and evaluations of VVOB-related or other interventions.

2.9. Ethical considerations

There are no specific ethical considerations as the systematic literature review relies on a desk study. Plagiarism of previous literature is of course not allowed.

2.10. Expectations regarding proposals

The applicants should deliver a proposal written in English that contain at least these sections.

- Technical proposal (+ specify deliverables)
- Financial proposal (number of days and price per day (if applicable, per member of the team), excl. and incl. overhead, VAT, and other specific costs)
- Gantt chart (timeline)
- Proven expertise
 - o The researcher(s) or consultant(s) biography, references (see section 2.5)
 - o Short CVs (max. 5 pages) should be given in annex, if applicable, for each of the members of the team

Proposals can be submitted in a digital format to sofie.cabus@vvoob.org no later than 29 March 2021 16:00h Brussels time zone. Please make sure that the digital format is just one PDF document, signed by a representative of your institution.

3. Administrative Provisions

3.1. Eligibility criteria

- Call is open to consultants who meet the required experience, expertise, skills etc. as specified higher
- Sub-contracting is not permitted.
- Compliance with all administrative requirements (such as travel documents, visa, residence permits, tax obligations, work permits...)
- Compliance with all legal obligations (withholding tax, fiscal obligations and social obligations...)

3.2. Awarding criteria and procedure

Proposals that meet the administrative requirements will be reviewed by an evaluation committee and ranked on the following criteria:

- Technical proposal (60 points)
- Proven expertise (30 points)
- Financial proposal (10 points)

Only proposals that have at least 70% of the maximum points on the technical part, will be considered for evaluation of the other parts.

VVOB will establish an internal committee to evaluate and rank the received proposals based on the above criteria. If deemed necessary or advisable, VVOB may decide to further negotiate the proposal with one or more service provider in one or more rounds. These negotiations may result in an adapted proposal by the consultant and subsequent modifications in evaluation and ranking of the proposals by the committee.

All qualified respondents will be notified about the final decision. The consultant with the winning proposal shall be offered a contract stipulating standard VVOB contract terms and the Terms of Reference.

VVOB reserves the right to re-advertise the Terms of Reference in case no suitable proposal was received.

3.3. Supervision and monitoring of the consultancy

The consultant shall report to Sofie Cabus who will be in charge of the supervision and monitoring of the consultancy services. This includes:

- Technical and administrative follow-up of the delivered services until completion
- Assessment and acceptance of the deliverables
- Review of payment claims and invoices

She will be assisted in these tasks by the steering committee set-up for this assignment and which comprises Soetkin Bauwens, Jef Peeraer, Inge Vandevyvere, and Sofie Cabus.



VVOB vzw

Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A

1060 Brussels

Belgium

T • +32 (0)2 209 07 99

E • info@vvob.org

 www.facebook.com/vvobvzw

 [@VVOBvzw](https://twitter.com/VVOBvzw)

 www.youtube.com/VVOBTube

 www.linkedin.com/company/vvob

www.vvob.be | www.vvob.org



Belgium
partner in development



Flanders
State of the art