



Ashshash: For Men and Women Who Have Escaped Trafficking

Terms of Reference

For Engaging a consultant to Conduct Research on the Trends of Cyber-trafficking in Bangladesh

The bidding process will be open for local and international consultants with relevant experience in conducting research of this scope

Solicitation Number: Ashshash Phase II - ToR-016/2024

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Background

The problem of human trafficking, or Trafficking-in-Persons (TIP), in Bangladesh, takes three main forms: Internal, Cross-Border, and Transnational. Many Bangladeshis face vulnerability due to poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, early marriages, and displacement from climate change and natural disasters. Traffickers exploit the country's porous borders shared with India. Bangladesh is also a major migrant-sending country, with men comprising the majority of migrant workers in construction, textiles, manufacturing, and agriculture, while women increasingly travel for domestic and textile-related work. Over 12.5 million Bangladeshi migrant workers are engaged in employment opportunities in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. Traffickers also exploit Bangladeshi women and girls in forced labor and sex trafficking abroad. They recruit and coerce people through online platforms, making it difficult to identify and prosecute them due to the anonymity of these criminal networks and the use of fake online identities.

Overview of Ashshash

Winrock International, in collaboration with local partners and governmental agencies, is implementing the Ashshash project (phase II) to protect the survivors of human trafficking and prevent trafficking across at-risk communities. This project is funded by the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh and comprises two key outcomes:

Outcome 1: *Men and women who have escaped trafficking will improve their physical, social, and economic wellbeing through psychological support and other reintegration services.*

Outcome 2: *Institutions are made more accountable and effective in provisioning services beneficial to men and women who have escaped trafficking.*

The project will be implemented in ten of the most trafficking-prone districts across Bangladesh. They are *Dhaka, Manikganj, Narshingdhi, Faridpur, Shariatpur, Jashore, Satkhira, Khulna, Jhenaidah, and Cox's Bazar.*

The four-year-long second phase of Ashshash aims to provide social and economic services to human trafficking victims for their sustainable reintegration. The project also focuses on raising awareness on trafficking and capacitating stakeholders and at-risk communities on prevention.

Contextual Analysis

Bangladesh's increasing use of digital platforms due to smartphone accessibility has made it easier for illicit activities to thrive. In the context of human trafficking, 'Fronts' refer to gateways to illicit activities used by traffickers and criminal networks, making women, especially younger ones, vulnerable to these dangers.

In Bangladesh, 68% of women use mobile phones, but only 24% have direct access to mobile data. Out of 52.7 million social media users in Bangladesh, about 33% are female. Social media is used for recruiting unskilled labor and unemployed youth. Traffickers are increasingly using social media to lure potential victims, particularly targeting young women and girls for sex and labor trafficking. Traffickers in Southeast Asia are using fake job offers to recruit victims, including educated individuals. They use social media and job websites to deceive and recruit their victims. Many young girls and women from bordering regions are increasingly falling victim to online traps set to lure, extort, and exploit them. Roaming traffickers on social and entertainment apps have established networks linked to the sex industry, drug smuggling, and illicit activities. Once ensnared, it's difficult to break free. One such high-profile case extensively covered by prominent media outlets shed light on a youth gang that extorted and blackmailed countless young girls under the pretense of making them "Online Influencers" or "E-Celebrities". The girls were coerced to partake in objectionable video content and subsequently

blackmailed into various traps. Then, they were trapped in a far more elaborate network of traffickers and profiteers, who lured them to India with false promises of fame and earning handfuls of money as content creators. This criminal network regularly trafficked young girls to numerous brothels in India. Traffickers also exploit people from all regions using social media and chatrooms that act as gateways to the sex industry. Legal and illegal brothels, hotels, bars, and spas contribute to the demand for recreational sex. In Dhaka particularly, young girls and women are trafficked while pursuing education and employment, or through romantic relationships and peer influence. They are coerced to work in Dhaka's hotels and bars as "hosts" for wealthy patrons, in return for high payments known as "side income".

Rationale of the Assignment

Ashshash aims to understand the visible and invisible 'Fronts' that act as gateways to trafficking scenarios. Based on the findings, the project will create content and campaigns to raise awareness about these 'Fronts' and larger criminal networks associated with human trafficking. However, getting reliable data on trafficking issues from credible sources is difficult. Ashshash also plans to engage major media outlets in investigative journalism activities (based on the findings) to shed light on the issue of cyber-trafficking across Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Assignment

The objective of this research will be to comprehensively detail the nexus of how these illicit 'Fronts' across various social media applications, social platforms, IMSs, and chatrooms act as gateways to larger criminal networks associated with human trafficking, based on evidence, information, and data. The collected and collated findings of the research will be used by Ashshash to develop digital awareness content, devise on-platform counter-campaigns, and sensitize/capacitate the country's mass media outlets on the issues of cyber-trafficking.

Scope of Work

Ashshash will engage a reputable research organization and based on the above-detailed objective, the incumbent will propose the best possible avenues for conducting this research. However, evidence, information, and data collected and collated from the proposed research methodology must maintain synergy with the following requirements;

1. Conduct a comprehensive investigation into the trends, patterns, dynamics, and root causes of cyber-trafficking in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on areas where Ashshash operates, utilizing both secondary and primary data sources. Analyze case studies or specific incidents of cyber-trafficking in Bangladesh to illustrate the trends, and provide strategic recommendations on policy, legal frameworks, and capacity-building measures to curb cyber-trafficking.
2. Conduct a desk-based research segment comprising picture and data-based evidence (or an acceptable alternative methodology) that will comprehensively connect the dots of/from the various illicit 'Fronts' on digital platforms, with cases of human trafficking (more specifically, cyber-trafficking). This segment will also consider a desk-review portion of existing research papers, documents, or any other content previously developed on the issue or similar issues, in the context of Bangladesh.
3. Conduct in-depth interviews and consultations with survivors of human trafficking to analyze the roles and impacts of cyberspaces in fueling TIP, including the internet and social media platforms. This will involve examining how these platforms and channels are used to recruit potential victims, and to understand the broader contextual influences they have on TIP survivors.
4. Focus-Group Discussions (FGDs) or workshops with demographics across urban metros and grassroots (at-risk) communities (from Ashshash's working districts) alike, comprising young men and women at-risk of cyber-trafficking.
5. Conduct In-depth Interviews with local actors including representatives from Union Digital Centers (UDCs), Technical Training Centers (TTC), and District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO)

to investigate the emerging trends and dynamics in which digital platforms and channels are influencing migration patterns, particularly among young people, and how these trends may fuel the risk of human trafficking.

6. Conduct investigation on law enforcement responses and the legal framework related to cyber-trafficking in Bangladesh,
7. Key Informant Interview (KII) with public and/or private institutions and experts specifically providing support against cybercrimes and online harassment, and/or with institutions connected with the investigation of criminal or illicit activities through these 'Fronts', directly or indirectly. These institutions may include (but are not limited to) the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI), Metropolitan Police's online cells, Detective Branch (DB) cells, and/or the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) cells, academia and sector-experts.
8. Develop recommendations for creating digital awareness content, designing in-platform counter-campaigns, and sensitizing or building the capacity of mass media outlets in the country on the issue of cyber-trafficking. These recommendations will inform and enforce Ashshash's strategies for raising awareness and preventing cyber-trafficking.

Methodology

The firm/individual(s) is expected to apply qualitative and quantitative methodologies for the research; by undertaking in-depth desk reviews of existing analyses, and by conducting primary data-collection through interviews of key informants, focus group discussions, etc. The firm/individual(s) is expected to elaborate research planning and methodologies in the technical proposal and propose methodologically as well as statistically viable sampling frames; engaging all potential stakeholders who are major actors on the subject matter.

Key Deliverables

1. Submission of an inception report within 10 days of signing the contract detailing the comprehensive methodology, data collection instruments, final schedule, and research protocol.
2. Development and delivery of final qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments.
3. Provision of a thorough and investigative research report based on secondary literature and primary research findings, including specific recommendations as outlined in the scope of work.
4. Delivery of all cleaned quantitative datasets and qualitative transcripts, including interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), consultations, and review logs.
5. Preparation and submission of a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the methodology, key research findings, and actionable recommendations.
6. Presentation of research findings at a national-level event, engaging relevant stakeholders.

Duration, Work Experience, and Payment Conditions

1. Required Skills and Experience(s):

- Advanced degree in criminology, law, social sciences, or a related field; with a minimum of 5 years of experience in research related to human trafficking, cybercrime, or online exploitation in the local and global spheres.
- Strong knowledge of the legal and policy framework on human trafficking and cybercrime in Bangladesh; and experience in working with vulnerable groups and handling sensitive information.

- Extensive experience with conducting desk and field-based research on crosscutting issues (to TIP) or human trafficking subject matters using both qualitative and quantitative methods.
- Extensive experience with the production of analytical, quantitative, and qualitative research documents on crosscutting issues (to TIP) or human trafficking subject matters, in multiple formats including social as well as ICT technical aspects.
- Extensive experience in conducting field-based in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and open discussions with grassroots communities.
- Extensive experience with the development of Keynote Research Papers of international standards.
- Excellent command of both English and Bengali (written and verbal communications).

2. Reporting Line

The incumbent researcher will directly report to the *Program Officer – Communications and Awareness* and maintain regular correspondence in preparation for and during the research phase with *Senior Manager – MERL*, of Winrock International – Ashshash.

3. General Terms and Conditions:

Winrock International reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal and to monitor the quality and progress of the work conducted by the incumbent during the research-phase.

4. Payment:

The total payment will be disbursed upon achieving the listed milestones (Deliverables). The total payment amount will be based on an agreed-upon budget that will be submitted by the incumbent.

5. Mode of Payment:

Winrock International will pay by an 'Account Payee' cheque / via Online Transfer to the respective service provider. For Bangladeshi consultants, VAT & Tax will be deducted at source, as per the Government of Bangladesh policy.

For international consultants, payment will be made from Winrock HQ based in the United States of America, in USD. Taxes will be deducted as per the laws of USA.

Submission Deadline

Proposals must be received no later than **5:00 PM** Bangladesh time on **10 November 2024**. Late submissions will not be accepted. Telephone requests will not be honored. Winrock International may request additional documentation after the bid deadline.

Submission Delivery (soft copy)

The soft copy proposal is requested to be submitted in the following email id.

Email: wi.ashshash@winrock.org