

Dated: 28.09.2021

Call for Expressions of Interest-
To undertake a study on
Trade Union Organizing in the RMG Sector:
A Comparative Analysis between non-COVID and COVID times in
The RMG dense areas of Ashulia and Tongi

The Workers Resource Centre (WRC) is seeking expressions of interest from qualified individual/firm to undertake a study on “Trade Union Organizing in the RMG Sector: A Comparative Analysis between non-COVID and COVID times in the RMG dense areas of Ashulia and Tongi.”

For further details about the research, please see the attached Terms of Reference.

Required Information for Submission an Expression of Interest

Candidates intending to submit an expression of interest must supply the followings:

- Interested researcher/s (individual/organisation) shall respond to the Terms of Reference (ToR) and demonstrate that they are qualified to perform the services;
- Individual Researcher/s shall submit technical and financial proposal along with a CV/s.
- An Institutional profile should be attached with the EoI for the Research Institute.
- A list of previous research with access links to reports that are relevant to the context and subject matter of this assignment.
- A statement confirming their availability to conduct this assignment and the professional fee expressed in BDT for the whole assignment.
- A copy of the candidate’s curriculum vitae (which must include information about the qualifications held by the candidate).
- The names of two referees who can be contacted.

The deadline to submit expressions of interest for the evaluation is by 5.00 pm (Dhaka time) on 10 October 2021. Please send an e-mail with the subject header “Research on Trade Union Organizing in the RMG Sector for WRC” at hq.dhaka@wrcbd.org with cc to The Chairman (chairman.wrc2021@gmail.com), Vice Chairman (vicechairman.wrc2021@gmail.com) & Manager (khandokersalam@gmail.com), WRC.(House # 2, Road # 7, Sector # 4, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka-1230.)

With Regards



Chowdhury Ashiqul Alam
Chairman, WRC

Terms of Reference

To undertake a study on Trade Union Organizing in the RMG Sector: A Comparative Analysis between non-COVID and COVID times in the RMG dense areas of Ashulia and Tongi

1. Background

About the WRC

The [Workers Resource Centre \(WRC\)](#), a joint platform of the National Coordination Committee for Workers Education (NCCWE) and the Industrial Bangladesh Council (IBC), was founded in 2017 and launched in 2018.

The WRC serves as a one-stop Support Centre for workers requiring information, education, training, research, and assistance on labour-related grievances while supporting and promoting social dialogue and non-litigious dispute prevention and resolution.

The WRC also aims to build the capacity of trade unions to operate more efficiently and to provide better services to its members and workers alike.

RMG Sector

The Readymade Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh has grown rapidly since the 1980s. The RMG sector is one of the main contributors to economic growth and is the country's main export industry (81.68 per cent of total export revenue). Currently, the sector employs no less than about 4 million workers directly; about 60-65% of these workers are women. A huge number of workers are either illiterate or semi-literate coming from economically weak backgrounds with extremely low bargaining power. As the largest export-earning sector in Bangladesh, more attention should be given to the sector in the labour law, to ensure decent work and better protection of worker rights in the RMG sector.

Trade Union Organizing

Freedom of association is a human right that is at the core of ILO values. It is enshrined in the [ILO Constitution](#), the [ILO Declaration of Philadelphia](#) and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998); and it is proclaimed in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87): Is one of the fundamental conventions of the ILO that sets forth the right for workers and employers to establish and join organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization. Workers and employers' organizations shall organize freely and not be liable to be dissolved or suspended by administrative authority, and they shall have the right to establish and join federations and

confederations, which may in turn affiliate with international organizations of workers and employers.¹

The apparel industry of Bangladesh started its journey in the 1980s however, the number of trade unions organized in RMG industries substantially increased only after the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013. Before 2013, a total 132 trade unions existed in the RMG sector. A total 773 trade unions have since been formed from 2013 to August 2020.² A report published on Prothom Alo on May 01, 2021 the number of registered Trade Union in RMG sector is 1033³ as per BGMEA data and 895 of them got registration after the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013. The highest number of trade union registration has been observed in 2014. In that year, 182 trade unions were registered. The majority number of trade unions has been formed in small garment factories, not in medium and large factories that have 3,000-20,000 workers.

However, it also promising that the strategic decision of some trade union federations to organize larger factories, which is more difficult and takes longer to achieve, but will ultimately benefit a larger number of workers. Despite these setbacks, today trade unions represent the rights and interests of workers in hundreds of factories and are collectively negotiating better wages and working conditions for hundreds of thousands of garment workers.⁴

COVID-19 Pandemic

The world of work has profoundly been affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the threat to public health, the economic and social disruption threatens the long-term livelihoods and well-being of millions of people. In its third wave from March 2021, the pandemic continues to fuel socio-economic hardships in Bangladesh.

In April 2020, at the commencement of the pandemic in Bangladesh, the RMG sector slipped into an unprecedented humanitarian and business crises. To flatten the coronavirus spread curve, the Government of Bangladesh declared nation-wide holidays up to 25 April 2020 and business and industrial activities came to a halt except emergency services. According to CNBC, “many international buyers cancelled or postponed confirmed procurement orders as their retail outlets closed in Europe, North America, Asia and elsewhere.”⁵ In this period, most international buyers either cancelled or suspended orders involving several factories and affecting millions of workers. Workers in the sector stared at joblessness as new orders dried up given the collapse in global demand for apparels. Reportedly, 1 million workers had been fired or furloughed.⁶ According to a survey conducted by the BRAC University, 47% RMG workers reported not receiving their wages and felt uncertain about their job status with their respective employers.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the vulnerability of workers in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. The pandemic situation posed several new challenges to trade union movements and employment rights in general. These challenges mostly relate to dealing with labour relations, working conditions and OSH standards at the workplace for safe operations.

¹ Source : <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/freedom-of-association/lang--en/index.htm>

² Mapping Social Dialogue in Apparel: Bangladesh, Page 23.

³ Prothom Alo, May 01, 2021 – link – News available in Bangla.

⁴ Bangladesh Union Registration Information December 2020 – Solidarity Center.

⁵ CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/world/?region=world>

⁶ Lauren Frayer. 3 April 2020. 1 million Bangladeshi Garment Workers Lose Jobs Amid COVID-19 Economic Fallout. NPR

⁷ The Daily Star. 19 April 2020. Brac Rapid Survey: 47pc garment workers yet to be paid. Dhaka

RMG Dense areas

RMG Industry has been expanded from Dhaka and Gazipur area to Narayanganj and Chattogram.

RMG dense areas in Bangladesh includes Dhaka (including Ashulia, Savar), Gazipur, Narayanganj, Chattogram. As per latest data⁸ Mapped in Bangladesh the Export-Oriented RMG Digital Map there is [401](#) factories in Ashulia and [1058](#) in Gazipur.

To better understand and build knowledge of the current circumstances above the WRC desires to undertake a study on Trade Union Organizing in the RMG Sector: A Comparative Analysis between non-COVID and COVID times in the RMG dense areas of Ashulia and Tongi. The study will also develop some policy recommendations, which will be the advocacy instruments in securing rights as well as the decent work environment of the worker in this sector.

2. Research Objectives

The objective of the research is broken down into (i) general objectives and (ii) specific objectives.

General objectives

The general objective of the study is to be better understand:

- (i) The present situation of TU organizing of workers in the RMG dense areas of Ashulia and Tongi, i.e., in the times of COVID-19, and,
- (ii) The situation of TU organizing in non- COVID-19 times.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study are drawn from interpreting trade union organizing, fundamentally, workers have the right to form and join organizations of their own choosing, i.e., organize as trade unions. Such organizing for the formation of trade unions is embedded in the principle of Freedom of Association (FoA). The specific objectives of the study are the following:

- To review the status of FoA (Trade Unions' Organizing activities) in selected areas both pre COVID and during COVID period.
- To identify Scope of freedom of association to protect the rights of workers and the role of Govt. bodies (DIFE, DoL).
- To identify the challenges of implementing the principles of freedom of associations in RMG sector during COVID period in these selected areas.
- To formulate a set of policy recommendations as future advocacy instruments including more in-depth studies.

3. Structure of the study

The study output would consist of an edited detailed report including the following:

- An approximate diagnosis (literature review combined with FGDs and KIIs findings) of the present TU organizing condition of the RMG workers.

⁸ Searched on July 15, 2021 in [Mapped in Bangladesh](#).

- Analyses of the gaps & scope for FoA, TUs, Political Parties and NGOs, labour inspection and other programme that contribute to enable decent work environment for the workers in RMG sectors.
- Role of Political Parties to establish Trade Union Rights for the RMG Workers.
- Policy recommendations for ensuring FoA to protect their rights.
- Advocacy agendas where TU should be more focused and consider for further actions.

4. Scope of work

- The research team/consultant is required to prepare a detail research plan. The research plan will include details of the following activities:
 1. literature review including,
 - Different local and international best practices on organizing in the RMG Sector, for example, China, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam
 - National policy instruments
 - (i) Bangladesh National Labour Policy 2012,
 - (ii) Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, (amended 2018),
 - (iii) Bangladesh Labour Rules (2015)
 - International Policy Instruments
 - (i) Related ILO Conventions
 - (ii) International Labour Standards
 - (iii) ILO Recommendations
 2. Data collection methods including FGD and KII details.
 - There will be 10 FGDs with workers and Trade Union Leaders/Activists.
 - There will be 06 KIIs with different Govt. Officials, CSOs, NGOs, NCCWE & IBC.

5. Research questions

The study shall answer the following research questions:

- What are the strength and weakness of TU organizing activities during COVID in RMG workers in Bangladesh?
- Is the freedom of association being applicable and working in this sector during COVID? What are the constraints/challenges and what can be done to overcome them.
- What are the differences of TU organizing practices during COVID and Non COVID period?
- Are there any role & initiatives from Buyers groups to ensure FoA?
- What Govt. can do to create an environment to enjoy FoA for the workers of this sector?
- What Political Parties can do to establish Trade Union Rights for the RMG Workers (inclusion of FoA in their manifestos)?
- What should be the advocacy agenda for RMG sector workers to establish FoA.

6. Issues to be considered

- Research team/Consultant should consider the following issues through the total research work:
 - Coverage of labour law.
 - Aspects of FoA in the RMG sectors.

- Roles of the stakeholders.
 - Trade Union & other rights.
 - Policy/Laws regarding this sector.
 - ILO conventions related to FoA.
- Research Team/consultant needs to break these further and to develop a full list of issues, which he/she must submit to the WRC well before the awarding of this consultancy.

7. Research methodology

In line with the purpose of the study, a qualitative approach would be followed to answer the research questions. It will consist of a literature review followed by 10 FGD and 06 KIIs in the selected areas. The study should follow different scholar's reports, journals, workshop reports and seminar papers as well as the previous study report as secondary source.

Please note that, this is only an indicative study methodology. External consultant needs to develop/design an independent methodology in accordance with this TOR, which he/she must submit to the WRC well before the awarding of this consultancy.

8. Key Sources and people to be consulted

Primary sources:

Trade Union leaders working directly at enterprise level, Policy Experts, Academics, TU leaders of NCCWE & IBC, NGO/CSO Actors, DoL, DIFE and related Govt. officials.

Secondary Sources:

Relevant policy instruments itself, website/Internet of different institutions/organizations are involved on labour rights promotion, newspaper, Available literature on the topic.

9. Audience of research report

- Related Government Institutes
- Trade Unions
- Different National and International NGOs/CSOs
- Policy experts/academics
- Journalists
- Like-minded Organisations/Institutions.
- ILO

10. Timeline

Starting from 15th October 2021, the duration for entire research work including finalisation of end report, shall be 3 months particularly up to 15 December 2021.

11. Research cost and payment procedures

The payment shall be made in three (3) installments as per following plan;

Installments	Amount	Conditionality
1 st Installment	40% 1 st installment	Agreement & Outline Submission
2 nd Installment	30% 2 nd installment	After Submitting the draft report
3 rd Installment	30% of final installment	On receipt of final report

12. Style and length of report

The external consultant/team need to prepare and submit both electronic and signed hard copy versions of the final study. The document should be very precise, must answer each specific objectives and research questions. The main body of the report shall be plus/minus a 35-40 pagers document including a 3-4 pagers executive summary. The executive summary is expected to develop in the form of a briefing paper for the purpose of dissemination immediately among the audiences, which may also be convertible to the power point. Necessary supplementary information like data analysis, transcripts of consultations and interviews and references are to be attached as annexes.

13. Ethics and Risks

The study must avoid any kind of plagiarism and provide due acknowledge to the sources. Objectiveness is the key to mitigate the risks where researchers have to be strategic and analytic in arguments but not biased

14. Documentation

- Checklists, interview notes should be submitted, signed and dated by the Consultant or other interviewer.
- Final report must provide endnote references for all facts and statistics used. The report(s) must also include a bibliography of the major references used.
- Primary sources must be used wherever possible over secondary sources. For example, the Consultant should reference a statistic to its original report, not where it is cited second hand by a newspaper or website.

15. General Terms & Conditions

- Any document, information or data entrusted to or produced by in connection with this assignment, shall be strictly confidential. After completion of this assignment, only WRC & ILO shall be eligible to use them. However, in case of any emerging need to use it or any part of it by any academics or other users, prior informing and written endorsement from WRC is mandatory. The copyright of the final product will be endowed with the WRC.
- In the event of any emerging priorities and needs, concerned authority at WRC shall enjoy all authority to reschedule operational framework of this research assignment.

- WRC's Finance section shall enjoy flexibility to deduct VAT & Tax at source while processing payment during different installments.

16. Termination of the contract:

- The contract shall be terminated automatically at the expiry of the deadlines mentioned in this ToR. Before the expiry, either party may terminate the contract by giving 7 days' prior notice in writing to the other party on reasonable grounds.
- In the event that the service delivered is unsatisfactory or fails to confirm to the conditions set out above, WRC reserves the right, if seems necessary, to terminate the contract with a written notice within 7 days before expiration date of contract.

Both the parties have agreed to the above-mentioned terms and conditions and have signed with full consent and understanding.

Chairman, WRC

Consultant