

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR COLLABORATION WITH ACADEMIA FOR DEVELOPING AND PROMOTING ESG AND SUSTAINABILITY PROFESSIONALS UNDER PROGRESS PROJECT



SWISS
FOUNDATION
FOR TECHNICAL
COOPERATION

We create opportunities

We are a leading organisation for the implementation of international development projects. We promote inclusive economic, social, and ecological development to make an effective contribution towards sustainable and widespread prosperity in developing and emerging economies.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABOUT SWISSCONTACT

Swisscontact, Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation, is headquartered in Zurich and was founded in 1959 by leading figures from the Swiss private sector and Swiss universities. It is exclusively involved in international cooperation and, since 1961, has carried out its own and mandated projects. A part of the organisation, Swisscontact Bangladesh, is registered as an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) under The GO Affairs Bureau, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, carrying out diverse projects across sectors such as ready-made garments (RMG), agriculture, health, water and sanitation, light engineering, and financial inclusion.

1.2 ABOUT PROGRESS

The Promoting Green Growth in the Ready-Made Garments Sector through Skills (PROGRESS) is a four-year (2022–26) project funded by the Embassy of Sweden and the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh and implemented by Swisscontact. The project supports RMG factories to advance in green transition by building their resilience and competitiveness.

The PROGRESS project drives sustainable growth in the RMG sector through a market-driven approach. The project has two major components. **The first component: Skills & Productivity**, aims at improving the technical skills and productivity of RMG workers. Under this component with support from the project, the Consultancy Service Providers (CSPs)¹ develop the skills of the workers in areas like low performance, zero defect, women leadership, etc., which make them more

¹ Consultancy service providers (CSPs) are reputed national/international commercial consultancy firms that have certain expertise to implement interventions in partner factories for PROGRESS. They have legal, technical and

financially binding contracts with the project. Beyond project, then are expected to provide similar services to the factories in exchange of service fees.

competent and productive. Besides, the project supports the factories in developing an in-house training system to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives. **The second component: Environment & Social Compliance**, supports factories in their journey of decarbonisation. The CSPs, with support from the project, assess the factories' status of carbon emissions at baseline and help them develop tailored pathways to reach net-zero emissions, while also promoting sustainability reporting. PROGRESS facilitates partnership between CSPs and factories to deliver commercially viable solutions. **The third component: Local Technical Consultancy Providers (LTCP)**, strengthens the local service market, enabling factories to access affordable solutions. LTCPs are Bangladeshi commercial consultancy firms that have expertise to implement interventions in partner factories for PROGRESS. They have legal, technical, and financially binding contracts with the project. Beyond the project, then are expected to provide similar services to the factories in exchange of service fees. Additionally, by leveraging collaborations with international brands, PROGRESS ensures solutions are aligned with industry demand. The ultimate objective of the project is to increase the job competitiveness of the low-skilled industrial workers (including women), especially in the RMG supply chain.

1.3 BACKGROUND FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Bangladesh's export-oriented sectors, particularly Ready-Made Garments (RMG), are under growing scrutiny from global buyers, investors, and regulatory bodies to demonstrate improved environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance. With international frameworks such as the GRI, ESRS, and CSRD gaining traction, brands are increasingly requiring sustainability reporting, climate disclosures, and decarbonisation pathways as prerequisites for continued business engagement.

However, the domestic ESG ecosystem faces significant capacity constraints on both the demand and supply sides.

On the demand side, most factories, particularly beyond advanced factories, lack the internal capability to assess, articulate, or operationalise ESG requirements. ESG is still widely perceived as a peripheral or donor-driven agenda, rather than a core

business function. Factory managers and compliance staff are often unaware of what ESG services entail, what expertise they require, or how such services could benefit their long-term competitiveness.

On the supply side, the availability of trained ESG and sustainability professionals remains extremely limited. While Bangladesh has a small but growing number of certified energy auditors (primarily focused on energy efficiency and industrial assessments), there are far fewer professionals with formal ESG training and applied industry experience. ESG remains largely absent from university curricula and professional development frameworks. In practice, only a handful of Dhaka- and Chattogram-based firms offer ESG-linked consulting, and their services are often inaccessible to small and mid-sized factories due to cost, technical complexity, or lack of contextual relevance.

This constraint analysis reveals four systemic challenges:

Curricular Gaps: ESG and sustainability are not embedded in academic programmes, resulting in graduates ill-equipped for roles in compliance, sustainability reporting, or decarbonisation planning.

Fragmented Training Ecosystem: Bangladesh lacks a nationally recognised learning pathway to become an ESG specialist, particularly for industrial and factory-level applications.

Low Technical Readiness of Local Service Providers: Most local consultancy firms lack the technical depth or buyer-aligned expertise needed to deliver ESG-linked factory interventions.

Gendered Barriers in Talent Pipeline: Women remain underrepresented in ESG, compliance, and sustainability leadership roles, further constraining the national talent pool.

Taken together, these constraints significantly limit Bangladesh's ability to internalise ESG transformation across its export sectors and respond to buyer-driven sustainability mandates. There is an urgent need to institutionalise ESG education and create a structured talent pipeline through partnerships between academia and industry.

In this context, Swisscontact’s PROGRESS project seeks to initiate a strategic collaboration with academic institutions to co-create industry-aligned learning programmes. This initiative will serve both as a talent development pipeline for ESG professionals and a knowledge translation mechanism that empowers factories to better understand, demand, and benefit from ESG services, ultimately enabling more inclusive and future-ready growth across the RMG sector and beyond.

2. Objective of the assignment

The objective of this assignment is to establish a strategic partnership with leading academic institutions (e.g., Universities, Training Institutions) to co-create a structured, modular educational offering on ESG and sustainability tailored for the RMG sector. The initiative aims to address the current capability gap in ESG knowledge and facilitate systemic transformation across the RMG supply chain and other export-oriented sectors.

The initiative will target a broad group of professionals. These include factory professionals working in compliance, HR, and sustainability functions. It will also be open to graduates/undergraduates seeking ESG-focused careers, development professionals working on social or environmental impact, and staff from global brands and buying houses. Industry associations and institutions engaged in sustainability advocacy may also benefit.

By engaging both current professionals and new entrants, the initiative will strengthen the national ESG ecosystem. It will help position Bangladesh to meet global compliance expectations while creating long-term value for its industrial workforce and institutions.

3. Scope of the assignment

The selected academic institution(s) will:

- Design and deliver a undergraduate program or course/ postgraduate diploma/ modular certificate/ executive education program focused on sustainability, energy audit, carbon accounting, energy economics, energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, and discharge management.
- Co-develop scalable learning content with input from industry, buyers, and compliance experts.

- Integrate real-world case studies, diagnostics data, and compliance scenarios into the curriculum.
- Host learning platforms (digital or blended), ensuring accessibility for RMG professionals.
- Support national-level policy dialogue, research dissemination, and industry-academia convenings.

The table below elaborates on some key deliverables of the assignment.

Table 1: Summary table

Activities	Deliverables
ESG Learning Needs Mapping	Diagnostic framework and summary of skill gaps
Curriculum Development	Course outline, modules, and industry-aligned learning objectives
Content Co-creation	Co-branded training materials, toolkits, and assessments
Pilot Delivery	At least one batch of learners trained under the new model
Stakeholder Engagement	Industry roundtables, consultation workshops
Knowledge Dissemination	Academic papers, case studies, and ESG seminar contributions

4. Duration of the Assignment

The duration of the assignment will be from **August 2025 to November 2026**, as agreed between both parties.

5. Documents Required for Submission

Interested academic institutions are requested to submit:

- Concept note/proposal (max 5 pages) outlining the collaboration model, course vision, delivery modality, and institutional strengths.
- Brief institutional profile with relevant experience.
- List of proposed faculty or advisors (with credentials).
- Budget estimate and resource requirements.
- Proposed implementation timeline.

6. SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM GOALS

This collaboration is envisioned as a first step toward building a long-term, institutionally embedded ESG education ecosystem in Bangladesh. Over time, the developed modules may be integrated into university curricula, allowing students in business, engineering, environmental science, and related fields to gain foundational ESG knowledge.

The initiative also aims to support the creation of faculty-led knowledge hubs that promote applied research, industry dialogue, and continuous content development. In the long run, the programme will help build a domestic pool of ESG professionals and contribute to a sustainable service market that meets growing compliance demands across export-oriented sectors.

7. SELECTION CRITERIA

The following selection criteria are generally applicable for the evaluation of the potential academic partner:

Table 2: Selection Criteria

Criteria
Relevance and innovation of the proposal
Institutional experience in ESG/sustainability education
Industry linkages and delivery capacity
Academic credentials and faculty expertise
Cost-effectiveness and scalability

8. REPORTING

The institution will report directly to the PROGRESS Team Leader and collaborate closely with the

PROGRESS KCM team, providing regular updates. Additionally, is expected to maintain seamless communication with team members to ensure timely execution of project tasks and adherence to strategic objectives.

9. SUBMISSION OF LEGAL DOCUMENTS

It is mandatory for the bidding Institution to submit documentary evidence demonstrating their legal, taxation and financial status. This includes:

1. Updated Tax Identification Number (TIN) Certificate.
2. VAT Registration Certificate.
3. Business Identification Number (BIN)
4. Certificate of Incorporation
5. Trade License
6. Joint Stock Registration Certificate
7. PSR (proof of submission return)

10. SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Table 3: Submission Guidelines

SL.	Submission Guidelines
1.	<p>For the Soft Copy: The concept note and financial proposal must be submitted as two separate soft copy files to the email address: bd.progress@swisscontact.org.</p> <p>For Hard copy: The concept note and financial proposal must be submitted as two separate envelop to the Manager-Business Administration, PROGRESS Project, House-20, Road-68, Gulshan-2, Dhaka-1212.</p> <p>Please mention in the email subject line and top of the envelop: "Concept Note and Financial Proposal for Academic Collaboration on ESG and Sustainability Education in the RMG Sector."</p>
2.	Proposals will be reviewed and selected on a rolling basis. Interested academic institutions are encouraged to submit at their earliest convenience.
3.	Only selected academic institutions (single/multiple) will be contacted rolling basis for a presentation prior to final selection.
4.	Swisscontact reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals without assigning any reason.