



DALIT

Hope for Oppressed

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TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToR)

Individual Consultant

Youth Share-Net Project | Supported by RedOrange

Research Title:

“The Curse of Saltwater and the Struggle of Women: A Study on Health Risks, Womb Removal, and Social Challenges in Shyamnagar, Satkhira”

Issuing Organization	DALIT
Project	Youth Share-Net Project
Supported by	RedOrange
Assignment Type	Individual Consultancy (Research Consultant)
Location	Shyamnagar Upazila, Satkhira District, Bangladesh
Assignment Duration	Approximately 30 days from contract signing
Application Deadline	10 May 2026
Submission Email	career.dalit@gmail.com

1. About DALIT

DALIT is a non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit organization established in 1998 by a group of young Dalit people committed to the development of Dalit and other vulnerable and socially excluded communities. DALIT promotes human dignity for communities that are deprived of their fundamental basic rights as declared in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The organization received recognition from the NGO Affairs Bureau in 1999 and subsequently obtained registration from the Ministry of Social Welfare in 2010.

The word “DALIT” is a Bengali term meaning “someone trampled under the feet of someone else,” used to identify an outcast minority of oppressed, exploited and deprived people. Inspired by the autobiography of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, the founders of DALIT have built the organization into a widely respected civil society institution over more than two decades of dedicated service. DALIT operates across multiple districts of Bangladesh, with a particular focus on the coastal and south-western regions, implementing programmes in health, education, WASH, livelihood, women’s rights, climate resilience, and community empowerment.

DALIT has earned national and international recognition for its impactful work, including the BBC World Challenge Award (2006) for outstanding achievements in water and sanitation, the Energy Globe Award (2015) for its ASWASH project, the Nelson Mandela Award (2016) for social activism, the Mother Teresa Award (2017), and the Global Civic Championship Award (2024). DALIT’s advocacy work has extended to the international stage, including representation at the 16th UN

Session on Minority Issues in Geneva, Switzerland in 2023. Through its sister concerns – Dalit Hospital, Paragon Laboratories (Ayurvedic), and Bijoya (Handicraft) – DALIT integrates social development with sustainable enterprise, serving as a model of grassroots-led, community-centred development in Bangladesh.

2. Project Background and Research Rationale

2.1 Overview of the Youth Share-Net Project

DALIT is currently implementing the Youth Share-Net Project, supported by RedOrange, which aims to build knowledge platforms that amplify the voices of marginalized youth and communities in Bangladesh. A core component of this project involves commissioning evidence-based research that documents the lived realities of vulnerable populations particularly women in climate-affected coastal areas. This Terms of Reference (ToR) pertains to a targeted research study to be conducted in Shyamnagar Upazila, Satkhira District.

2.2 The Problem Context

Shyamnagar is one of the most climate-vulnerable sub-districts in Bangladesh, situated within the Sundarbans coastal belt. Decades of saline water intrusion, worsened dramatically by climate change, cyclones, and rising sea levels, have fundamentally transformed the ecological and social landscape of the area. Agricultural land has become unproductive, freshwater sources have become critically scarce, and communities – particularly women – face compounding health crises with little institutional support.

Women in Shyamnagar are disproportionately exposed to saline water in their daily domestic and livelihood activities. Working for hours in knee-deep saltwater has been linked to chronic dermatological conditions, darkening and damage of skin, which carries severe social stigma – affecting marriageability, community standing, and psychological wellbeing of young women. More alarmingly, the near-total absence of freshwater has created a reproductive health emergency: women are compelled to use saline pond water to wash menstrual cloths, leading to recurrent gynecological infections and uterine complications.

Field observations and preliminary reports indicate that a significant and growing number of women in the area are opting for hysterectomy (surgical removal of the uterus/womb) at a very young age – sometimes in their twenties and thirties – as a perceived solution to chronic pain and to maintain their productivity as household earners. This phenomenon, which DALIT considers a “silent epidemic,” is largely invisible in national health statistics and policy discourse. The lack of information, entrenched social shame, and inaccessibility of healthcare services drive many women to self-medicate with pharmaceutical agents to suppress menstruation entirely, without medical supervision, compounding the health risks.

This research responds to an urgent need to document, analyse, and present evidence on this multi-dimensional crisis, creating a knowledge base from which advocacy, policy engagement, and programmatic responses can be developed.

3. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to systematically document and analyse the health, social, and economic impacts of saline water exposure on women in Shyamnagar, Satkhira, with a specific focus on reproductive health, hysterectomy practices, and associated social vulnerabilities.

3.1 Specific Objectives

- To document and quantify the extent and pattern of saline water exposure among women in Shyamnagar and its direct and indirect health consequences, including dermatological and gynaecological conditions.
- To investigate the prevalence, drivers, and consequences of hysterectomy (womb removal) among women in the study area, including the socio-economic and medical factors influencing such decisions.
- To examine menstrual health practices, access to menstrual hygiene management (MHM) resources, and the specific challenges posed by saline water contamination on menstrual health.
- To assess the use of unsupervised pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., hormone-based medications to suppress menstruation) among women and document associated health risks.
- To explore the psycho-social dimensions of the crisis, including body image, self-perception, social stigma, marriage prospects, and mental health among affected women.
- To examine the availability, accessibility, and quality of reproductive and general healthcare services for women in Shyamnagar, including barriers to formal healthcare access.
- To capture the voices, agency, and coping mechanisms of women, including community-based networks of support and resilience.
- To generate actionable evidence-based recommendations for policy makers, healthcare providers, NGOs, and development actors to address the identified crisis.

4. Scope of Work and Key Deliverables

4.1 Geographic Scope

The research will be conducted in Shyamnagar Upazila, Satkhira District, Bangladesh. The consultant will, in consultation with DALIT, identify specific unions and villages within Shyamnagar that are most severely affected by saline water intrusion and where the described health phenomena are most prevalent. At minimum, the study should cover:

- At least 3 unions within Shyamnagar Upazila
- Communities with documented high rates of saline water dependency for domestic use
- Communities proximate to shrimp farms and tidal river systems where salinity is highest

4.2 Target Population

- Women of reproductive age (15-49 years), including adolescent girls, young women, and adult women
- Women who have undergone hysterectomy or are contemplating the procedure
- Female community health workers, traditional healers (kabiraj), and local midwives (dais)
- Healthcare service providers (doctors, nurses, paramedics) operating in Shyamnagar
- Local government officials (Union Parishad members, Upazila Health Officers)
- Community leaders and religious leaders with influence over women's health decisions
- Family members (husbands, mothers-in-law) as secondary informants

4.3 Research Methodology

The research will employ a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative enquiry to capture both the breadth and depth of the issue.

Quantitative Component:

- Household survey using a structured questionnaire administered to a statistically representative sample of women of reproductive age
- Survey instrument to cover: demographic profile, water use patterns, health history, menstrual health practices, history of gynaecological interventions including hysterectomy, medication use, access to healthcare, social and economic impacts
- Anthropometric and basic clinical assessment data collection where feasible and with informed consent

Qualitative Component:

- In-depth Interviews (IDIs): Minimum 5-8 IDIs with women who have undergone hysterectomy or are experiencing chronic gynaecological issues; healthcare providers; local NGO staff
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Minimum 4 FGDs with women of different age groups and socio-economic profiles, community leaders, and adolescent girls
- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): With Upazila Health and Family Planning Officers, local government officials, DALIT field staff, and other relevant stakeholders
- Case studies: Detailed life-history documentation of at least 3 individual women capturing the intersection of saltwater exposure, health consequences, and social impacts
- Participatory tools: Seasonal calendars, social mapping, body mapping exercises with women to document health experiences in culturally sensitive ways
- Community observation and field notes documenting environmental conditions, water sources, health infrastructure, and women's daily routines

Ethical Considerations:

- The research must adhere to the highest ethical standards, given the sensitive nature of the subject matter (reproductive health, body autonomy, surgical history)
- Written or verbal (recorded) informed consent must be obtained from all participants
- The research team must include female data collectors and interviewers to ensure women's comfort and safety
- Anonymisation and data confidentiality protocols must be strictly maintained
- Participants in distress must be provided with referral information to available health and psycho-social support services
- The research protocol must be reviewed and approved by DALIT and, if required, a relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics Committee

4.4 Key Deliverables

#	Deliverable	Format	Timeline
1	Inception Report including final research design, methodology, sampling framework, data collection tools (survey questionnaire, IDI and FGD guides, KII guides), ethical framework, and detailed work plan	Word document + annexures	Within 3 days of contract signing
2	Data Collection Tools (final versions) in both English and Bangla, pretested and validated	Word/PDF documents	Within 1 week of contract signing
3	Fieldwork Completion Report summarising data collection activities, response rates, challenges encountered, and mitigation measures	Word document	Within 2 weeks of contract signing
4	Draft Research Report including: executive summary, introduction, methodology, findings (quantitative and qualitative), analysis, case studies, discussion, and preliminary recommendations	Word document (minimum 60 pages)	Within 3 weeks of contract signing

5	Final Research Report incorporating DALIT and RedOrange feedback, with all annexures including raw data, consent forms, and bibliography	Word + PDF (print-ready)	Within 4 weeks of contract signing
8	Dataset: Clean, anonymised quantitative dataset and organised qualitative data files (transcripts, notes)	Excel + Word/PDF	Alongside final report

5. Required Qualifications and Experience

5.1 Academic Qualifications

- Master's degree (minimum) in Public Health, Social Sciences, Gender Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Development Studies, or a closely related field from a recognised university

5.2 Professional Experience

- Demonstrated experience (minimum 2–3 studies) in mixed-methods research design and implementation, including household surveys, qualitative data collection, and analysis
- Prior experience conducting research on women's health, reproductive health, menstrual health, or SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) is strongly preferred
- Experience working in coastal, climate-vulnerable, or Sundarban-adjacent communities is a significant advantage
- Demonstrated experience in gender-sensitive and participatory research methodologies
- Prior experience working with or for NGOs, research institutes, or development agencies in Bangladesh

5.3 Technical Competencies

- Strong proficiency in both quantitative and qualitative research methods
- Ability to design and validate survey instruments and qualitative data collection guides
- Proficiency in statistical analysis software (SPSS, STATA, or equivalent) for quantitative data
- Familiarity with qualitative data analysis software (NVivo, Atlas.ti, or equivalent) or demonstrated systematic manual qualitative analysis competency
- Strong report writing skills in English; ability to write in Bangla is an additional advantage
- Knowledge of health system landscape in Bangladesh and familiarity with national policies on reproductive health, WASH, and climate adaptation

5.4 Language and Communication

- Fluency in Bangla (spoken and written) is mandatory – data collection will be conducted in Bangla
- Strong English writing skills are required for report preparation
- Familiarity with local dialects of the south-western coastal regions is an advantage

5.5 Personal Competencies

- Strong commitment to gender equality, women's rights, and the dignity of marginalized communities
- Demonstrated sensitivity in handling sensitive, intimate, and potentially traumatic subject matter with research participants
- Ability to manage and supervise a small team of field researchers and data collectors
- Excellent organisational and time management skills; ability to deliver high-quality outputs within agreed timelines
- Willingness to travel to and spend substantial time in field locations in Shyamnagar

6. Team Composition and Management

The Individual Consultant (Principal Researcher) will serve as the lead and accountable person for this assignment. The consultant may assemble and supervise a small field team consisting of:

- 2-4 Female Research Associates / Data Collectors (preferably from the local region or with prior field experience in Shyamnagar / Satkhira)
- 1 Data Entry Operator (for quantitative data)
- 1 Transcriptionist (for qualitative interviews, preferably Bangla-proficient)

The cost of the field team must be included within the consultant's total financial proposal. All team members must be briefed on research ethics, confidentiality, and gender-sensitive data collection techniques prior to fieldwork. At least 70% of the field data collection team must be female.

DALIT will assign a designated Project Officer to serve as the primary focal point for the consultant, providing logistical support, community access, and coordination with local stakeholders. DALIT field staff in Shyamnagar will facilitate community entry and introductions. The consultant will report directly to DALIT's Programme Manager for the Youth Share-Net Project.

7. Indicative Work Plan and Timeline

#	Activity	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
1	Contract signing and project inception	✓			
2	Literature review and desk review				
3	Development and finalisation of data collection tools	✓			
4	Ethics approval and community entry preparation	✓			
5	Field team recruitment, training and piloting		✓		
6	Quantitative household survey implementation		✓		
7	Qualitative data collection (IDIs, FGDs, KIIs, case studies)		✓	✓	
8	Data entry, cleaning, and preliminary analysis			✓	
9	Qualitative data transcription and analysis			✓	
10	Draft report writing			✓	
11	Submission of draft report to DALIT			✓	
12	Incorporation of feedback; finalisation of report				✓
13	Preparation of policy brief and presentation deck				✓
14	Stakeholder presentation of findings				✓
15	Submission of all final deliverables				✓

8. Payment Schedule

The total consultancy fee will be agreed upon in the contract based on the consultant's financial proposal and DALIT's assessment. The indicative payment schedule is as follows:

Tranche	Milestone / Trigger	% of Total Fee	Indicative Timeline
1st	Contract signing and submission of approved Inception Report	30%	End of Week 1
3rd	Submission and acceptance of Draft Research Report	40%	End of Week 4

4th	Submission and acceptance of all Final Deliverables including final report, policy brief, dataset, and stakeholder presentation	30%	End of Week 14
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All payments are subject to submission and acceptance of deliverables by DALIT. DALIT reserves the right to withhold or adjust payment in cases of significant quality deficiencies or failure to meet agreed timelines.

9. Institutional Arrangements and Obligations

9.1 DALIT's Obligations

- Provide an official Appointment Letter and formal contract to the selected consultant
- Assign a dedicated Programme Officer as focal point and primary liaison
- Facilitate community entry, stakeholder introductions, and access to DALIT's field networks in Shyamnagar
- Share relevant background documents, existing data, and programme reports with the consultant
- Provide timely feedback on all submitted deliverables (within 5 working days of submission)
- Cover approved direct project costs (field travel, accommodation for field visits if mutually agreed upon in the budget)
- Facilitate the stakeholder presentation of findings

9.2 Consultant's Obligations

- Maintain strict confidentiality of all research data and organisational information
- Adhere to DALIT's code of conduct, safeguarding policies, and anti-harassment policies throughout the assignment
- Ensure that all research activities comply with relevant ethical standards and legal requirements in Bangladesh
- Submit all deliverables on or before the agreed deadlines
- Immediately notify DALIT of any significant risks, challenges, or delays encountered during the assignment
- Obtain prior written approval from DALIT before sharing any research data, findings, or communications with third parties
- Ensure the intellectual property of all research outputs rests with DALIT and RedOrange
- Declare any conflict of interest at the time of application and during the assignment

9.3 Intellectual Property and Confidentiality

All data, reports, and materials produced under this consultancy are the sole property of DALIT and RedOrange. The consultant shall not publish, present, or publicly share any findings without prior written authorisation from DALIT. Any publication or presentation co-authored or attributed to the consultant must be cleared by DALIT in advance. Raw data, transcripts, and all digital files must be transferred to DALIT in full upon assignment completion.

10. Application Process

10.1 Required Application Documents

Interested and qualified individual consultants are invited to submit a comprehensive application package comprising the following:

1. Technical Proposal (maximum 5 pages, excluding annexures) including: - Understanding of the research context and problem statement - Proposed research approach, methodology, and sampling strategy - Data collection and analysis plan - Ethical considerations and

- safeguarding framework - Proposed work plan with timeline - Risk identification and mitigation measures
2. Financial Proposal (separate document) including: - Detailed budget breakdown covering: consultant’s professional fee (daily or lump-sum), field team costs, travel and accommodation, data collection costs, report production costs, and all other anticipated expenses - Currency: Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) - The financial proposal must be realistic, justified, and comprehensive
 3. Updated Curriculum Vitae (CV) clearly highlighting: - Academic qualifications - Relevant professional experience - Research studies conducted (with titles, organisations, and years) - Publications, if any - References from at least two previous clients or supervisors
 4. Declaration of Absence of Conflict of Interest signed by the applicant

10.2 Submission Instructions

Submission Method	Email only
Email Address	career.dalit@gmail.com
Email Subject Line	Application: Research Consultant – Shyamnagar Women’s Health Study Youth Share-Net
Application Deadline	10 May 2026 by 5:00 PM (Bangladesh Standard Time)
Language	English (Technical and Financial Proposals, CV, Cover Letter)
File Format	PDF (preferred) or Word document; all documents combined into a single email or clearly labelled attachments
Queries	Queries may be directed to pmsntdalit@gmail.com with subject line: “Query – Shyamnagar Research ToR”
Incomplete Applications	Incomplete applications or those received after the deadline will not be considered

11. Safeguarding and Child Protection

DALIT is committed to safeguarding the rights and dignity of all individuals, including research participants, children, and vulnerable adults. The selected consultant and all members of the research team are required to:

- Read, understand, and sign DALIT’s Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct prior to commencing work
- Undergo a safeguarding briefing facilitated by DALIT prior to fieldwork
- Report any safeguarding concerns or incidents immediately to the DALIT Programme Manager
- Ensure that research activities do not expose participants to any form of harm, exploitation, or distress
- Uphold principles of ‘do no harm’ in all research interactions

Any substantiated safeguarding breach may result in immediate termination of the contract without payment of outstanding fees.

12. Important Notes and Disclaimers

- This ToR does not constitute a contract or commitment by DALIT to engage a consultant.
- DALIT reserves the right to modify, suspend, or cancel this consultancy process at any stage without incurring any liability.
- Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted. DALIT will not be able to provide individual feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

- The consultant will be engaged as an independent contractor, not as an employee of DALIT or RedOrange. The consultant is responsible for their own taxes, insurance, and social security contributions.
- DALIT encourages applications from women, persons with disabilities, and individuals from marginalised communities.
- DALIT is an equal opportunity organisation and does not discriminate on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or political affiliation.

13. Contact Information

Organisation	DALIT
Head Office	37/1 Kedarnath Road, Moheshwarpasha, Daulatpur, Khulna-9203, Bangladesh
Liaison Office	Kadir Vila, Holding# 1/10, Aziz Moholla, Madrasa Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207
Mobile	+88 01915 968357
Application Email	career.dalit@gmail.com
General Email	pmsntdalit@gmail.com
Website	www.dalitbd.org
Project	Youth Share-Net Supported by RedOrange

DALIT invites passionate and skilled researchers to contribute to amplifying the voices of women whose suffering has for too long remained invisible. We believe that rigorous, ethical, and empathetic research is an act of solidarity and justice.

“Innovation for Empowering Quality of Life”

DALIT – www.dalitbd.org