swisscontact

Technology for Responsible Accountability in Corporate ESG (TRACE)

Terms of Reference

Engagement of Specialised Firm/Consultants for Technical Assistance on Venture Building

1. About Swisscontact

Swisscontact was established in 1959 as an independent foundation by notable figures from the worlds of commerce and science in Switzerland. It is exclusively involved in international development cooperation and has carried out its own and mandated projects since 1961. Swisscontact's working principles include inclusive systems development, learning culture, evidence based adaptive management, and engaging in private sector. In addition, the organisation's sustainable criteria comprise gender equality and social inclusion, financial capability, environmental responsibility, and good governance.

2. Introduction

Swisscontact implements the Promoting Green Growth in the Ready-Made Garments Sector through Skills (PROGRESS) project with funding from the Embassy of Sweden and the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh. This project empowers Ready-Made Garments (RMG) factories to navigate the green transition, enhancing both their environmental resilience and global competitiveness.

Based on the learning of the PROGRESS project, Technology for Responsible Accountability in Corporate ESG (TRACE) has been introduced which supports the development and operationalisation of a commercially viable digital platform for better clarity, coordination, and harmonisation of ESG reporting among the key RMG stakeholders. The platform is designed to help factories and other supply chain actors streamline ESG data management, reporting, and compliance processes in response to increasingly stringent international requirements, including the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), emerging carbon pricing mechanisms, etc. The platform also has potential to support other sectors concerned with environmental sustainability, social inclusion, governance compliance, and responsible business practices, empowering them to stay competitive in a global market that now demands strict ESG accountability.

To date, Swisscontact has undertaken a comprehensive feasibility assessment that has validated the market need for the ESG digital platform and informed its commercialisation strategy. To ensure long-term sustainability and commercial viability, Swisscontact intends to engage an experienced Venture Building firm/consultants to support the design, validation, establishment, and deployment of an independent venture capable of operating, scaling, and attracting strategic partners and investment. The selected firm/consultants will provide technical advisory and backstopping support to validate and refine the ownership structure, governance mechanism, existing business model, investment mobilization strategy, support ownership transition planning, and contribute in the discovery phase of the suitable owners.

3. Background

Bangladesh's export-oriented industries are increasingly exposed to evolving Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) requirements driven by international buyers, investors, financial institutions, and regulatory frameworks. Access to major export markets is becoming increasingly contingent upon demonstrable performance in areas such as greenhouse gas emissions measurement and reduction, supply chain transparency and traceability, labour rights and workplace safety, responsible sourcing, and compliance with internationally recognised sustainability reporting standards. As a result, ESG performance is no longer merely a voluntary or reputational consideration; it has become a strategic business imperative for maintaining competitiveness, securing market access, and ensuring long-term participation in global value chains.

Despite this growing demand, Bangladesh's ESG ecosystem remains fragmented and complex. Export-oriented sectors, particularly the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry, are required to comply with multiple and often overlapping frameworks, including GRI, ESRS, Higg, SLCP, and ZDHC. This creates significant challenges for businesses, including repetitive reporting requirements, audit fatigue, inconsistent data collection practices, and increased compliance costs. At the same time, ESG-related services—such as reporting support, verification, capacity development, decarbonisation advisory, and sustainability consulting—are dispersed across multiple providers, limiting efficiency and creating barriers to coordinated ESG management.

A significant market gap therefore exists for a unified, technology-enabled ESG solution capable of consolidating ESG data management, streamlining reporting requirements, facilitating measurement and performance tracking, and connecting businesses with relevant ESG service providers through a single platform. While various digital tools and service providers operate in the market, there is currently no commercially sustainable and widely adopted ESG infrastructure capable of serving Bangladesh's export sectors at scale while responding to rapidly evolving international market requirements.

Global experience also demonstrates that technical functionality alone is insufficient to ensure the long-term success of ESG platforms. Many platforms struggle to achieve sustained user adoption, convert users into paying customers, and establish commercially viable operating models. Consequently, they often remain dependent on grant funding, donor support, or freemium models that generate initial engagement but fail to create sufficient revenue to sustain operations, continuous innovation, and market expansion.

To address these challenges and realise its long-term vision, TRACE aims to facilitate the development of an independent and commercially viable venture that will provide a unified ESG service in the country and beyond. Achieving this ambition will require validation of the business case, refinement of the commercial model, establishment of an appropriate governance and ownership structure, identification of founding and strategic partners, mobilisation of investment, and development of a scalable market deployment strategy capable of driving long-term adoption and impact.

4. Objectives of the Assignment

The objective of this assignment is to provide backstopping support to Swisscontact's TRACE project team in transforming the ESG platform concept into an investable and scalable venture through a structured venture building process. The selected firm/consultants shall work alongside the project team to transfer practical venture-building knowledge, provide methodologies and tools, coach the team through implementation, critically review key assumptions and outputs, and provide independent expert recommendations at critical decision points.

5. Scope of Work

The selected firm/consultants shall provide structured capacity building, hands-on coaching and mentoring, and expert backstopping support to the Swisscontact team throughout the venture-building process. The assignment is intended to strengthen TRACE's internal capability to lead the development, validation, establishment, and transition of the ESG venture rather than outsource the venture-building function to an external service provider.

The TRACE project team will remain responsible for leading the venture-building process, undertaking the required analysis and stakeholder engagement, developing key venture outputs, managing prospective owner and investor relationships, and making decisions in accordance with Swisscontact's governance and approval processes. The scope of work includes:

5.1 Team's Capacity Building

The selected firm/consultants shall capacitate the selected staff of Swisscontact on venture building model through practical engagement, coaching, and knowledge transfer.

Activities may include:

- Deliver targeted practical training and working sessions on relevant venture-building methodologies, tools, decision-making approaches, venture governance, commercialisation, growth management, and investment readiness pathways for different venture building arrangements including Go-No-Go stages, pipeline development, timing etc.
- Equip the project team with appropriate tools, templates, frameworks, evaluation methodologies, and decision-support instruments that can be applied throughout the venture-building process.
- Support institutional learning by documenting relevant methodologies, lessons, and practical tools.
- Coach the team in testing the value proposition, competitive positioning, customer segmentation, market positioning, and customer adoption pathways.

The following scopes are mainly for backstopping support to the team in the key steps of Venture building process.

5.2 Commercial Venture Model Validation

The selected firm/consultants shall review and refine planned commercial venture model, drawing on the substantial body of market intelligence, feasibility assessments, stakeholder consultations, and commercialisation planning work already undertaken by TRACE.

Activities include:

- Assessing and refine the robustness of the current value proposition, competitive solution, customer segmentation, market positioning, and adoption pathways.
- Evaluating the viability of proposed revenue streams, monetisation mechanisms, pricing approaches, and financial sustainability pathways including investment to the platform.

- Reviewing assumptions related to customer acquisition, user uptake, willingness-to-pay, market penetration, and growth projections and align with venture building strategy.
- Recommending key commercial risks, market constraints, competitive considerations, and scalability challenges that may affect the venture's long-term success.

5.3 Ownership, Governance Model and Discovery

The selected firm/consultants shall support TRACE in assessing and refining its future ownership and governance model to ensure effective stewardship, accountability, sustainable growth of the ESG digital platform.

Activities may include:

- Reviewing and providing rationale of the ownership model, governance mechanism, transition concepts developed and provide strategic inputs to shape according to the most suitable venture creation.
- Recommending conditions, selection criteria, and assessment methodologies, etc. to identify and evaluate potential owners of the platform capable of driving the platform as a commercially viable venture based on factors such as technical capacity, market access, investment appetite, market reputation, and willingness to assume long-term ownership and stewardship responsibilities.
- Recommending share of the budget in each revenue stream expected to contribute the platform, equity-sharing scenarios for owners and investors and collaboration models involving the different owners.
- Prepare governance documents, decision frameworks, and operational guidelines.
- Recommending team’s capacity in defining and facilitating due diligence and onboarding processes with selected prospective owners and strategic partners.

5.4 Investment Readiness Support

The selected firm/consultants shall support the project team in strengthening its investment portfolio readiness for the platform.

Activities may include:

- Assessing capital requirements and recommending financing roadmap for venture establishment and growth (year-wise assumption).
- Developing an investment strategy and support investor engagement.
- Identifying potential investors, strategic financiers, impact investors, development finance institutions, and relevant funding mechanisms. Establish network with at least 20 investors through joint meetings/webinars/dialogue, 10 engaged and 5 serious discussions held.
- Preparing contents for investment materials such as, presentations, materials etc.

6. Deliverables

Sl.	Deliverables	Tentative Timeline
1	Inception report on commercially viable venture model including, gap analysis highlighting critical commercial, validation of current business model, refined value proposition, customer segmentation, pricing strategy, revenue model, unit economics, customer acquisition strategy, commercial risk assessment, commercial risk assessment, commercialization roadmap, ownership structure and transition plan, enterprise set-up plan, shares of the budget is each revenue stream expected to contribute, revenue streams etc. with appropriate supporting documentation	31 October 2026
2	Training curriculum, training presentation, toolkit, templates, handover package, baseline and post training assessment reports, feedback generating participants capacity improvement on venture building model	31 October 2026
3	Report validating and recommending governance framework, board composition, decision-making framework, equity scenarios, transition roadmap, draft governance documents, check points while setting up and roadmap of the governance mechanism.	30 November 2026
4	Report on selection criteria, partner assessment framework, evaluation scorecards, shortlist of prospective owners/operators after validation with comparative analysis through lens such as capacity, investment assessment, scaling factor etc.	31 December 2026
5	Launch-ready operational and commercialisation plan including milestones, timeline, decision gates, responsibilities, operational transition, commercialization milestones, investment milestones	31 January 2027
6	An investor-ready roadmap including identification of investor, list of prospective investors pipelines with specific to features/ESG framework, investment mobilisation strategy and pitch deck, financial model, funding roadmap, investment memorandum, due diligence and equity-based investment packages.	30 April 2027

7. Required Qualifications

- Firms/Consultants demonstrate at least 10 years of experience in venture building, startup incubation/acceleration, commercialization of digital platforms, corporate innovation, ownership or governance structuring, business model design/validation, scaling, transition, investment readiness of commercially viable ventures, investment readiness, digital platforms, technology-enabled businesses and digital ecosystem development.

- Legally registered consulting firm, venture studio, accelerator, innovation advisory firm, or equivalent.
- Experience supporting startup scaling, spin-offs, venture governance design, institutional structuring, or establishment of independent operating entities.
- Experience supporting fundraising, investment readiness, capital mobilisation, investor engagement, or transaction advisory processes.
- Experience in Asia esp. in Bangladesh will be an advantage.
- Experience working in emerging markets and private-sector development contexts.
- Experience in ESG, sustainability, climate-related services, responsible business practices, or export-oriented industries will be considered a strong advantage.

8. Proposal Submission

Interested firms/consultants are requested to submit:

- Technical proposal outlining in detail understanding of assignment, proposed methodology and workplan, venture-building experience, digital platform commercialization experience, team composition, and knowledge transfer approach.
- The financial proposal must indicate the daily rate for working in this assignment based on 8 working hours per day. Swisscontact will assign the required number of days for each task through mutual agreement. Accommodation and transportation, if required, will be paid locally at actual costs and should not be included in the daily rate or financial proposal. At this stage, Swisscontact expects a VAT-inclusive (VAT should be indicated separately in financial proposal) daily rate from firms/consultants.
- Annexes demonstrating relevant organizational/individual experience, including descriptions of similar assignments undertaken, references, etc.
- Curriculum Vitae (CVs) of all proposed key personnel, clearly outlining their qualifications, professional experience, areas of expertise, and roles under the assignment.
- It is mandatory for the bidding organisations/individual to submit documentary evidence demonstrating their legal, taxation, and financial status. The following documents should be submitted, or equivalent documentation applicable in the bidder's country of registration:
    - A certificate of incorporation (for individual companies, a trade license) or other equivalent legal registration
    - Where applicable, registration certificates issued by relevant government authorities, regulatory bodies, or sector-specific oversight agencies
    - Tax Identification Number (TIN) or other equivalent tax registration documentation issued by a competent authority
    - Business Identification Number (BIN) or other equivalent documentation issued by a competent authority
    - Latest PSR (Proof of Submission of Return) or other equivalent documentation issued by a competent authority

9. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation will be conducted in three stages, with a total score of 100. Stage 1 will carry 70 marks, Stage 2 will carry 20 marks, and Stage 3 will carry 10 marks. The minimum qualifying score for Stage 1 will be 35. Applicants who score less than 35 in Stage 1 will not be considered for the subsequent stages. Detailed information is provided below.

Criteria	Maximum Score
Stage 1: Technical Proposal Evaluation	
Proposed methodology and implementation approach	30
Relevant experience and qualification	20
Team composition with relevant expertise	20
Total: Stage 1	**70**
Stage 2: Financial proposal Evaluation	
Financial proposal	20
Stage 3: Presentation	
Presentation	10
Total Score	**100**

10. Ethical Considerations

The firm/consultants must ensure:

- Confidentiality of data and documentation sharing
- Ethical data collection practices
- Informed consent from participants
- Compliance with Swisscontact standards

11. Duration of Assignment

The assignment will be implemented over a period of 12 months, starting from the contract signing date.

12. Reporting

The selected firm/consultants will collaborate closely with the TRACE team, providing regular updates and reporting directly to the Team Leader. Additionally, the selected firm/consultants is expected to maintain seamless communication with team members to ensure timely execution of project tasks and adherence to strategic objectives.

13. Submission Details

Interested applicants must submit their technical and financial proposals including the supporting documents via email to **bgd.trace@swisscontact.org** by **10th August 2026**. The email subject line must state: **"Engagement of Specialised Firm/Consultants for Technical Assistance on Venture Building".**

Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered. Swisscontact reserves the right to accept or reject any application, in part or full, or cancel the entire procurement process without assigning any reason whatsoever. Submission of an application does not guarantee the award of the contract.