

Terms of Reference (ToR)

Consultancy to lead research on

Violence against Women in relation to land in Bangladesh

A. ABOUT ALRD

The Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) is a national, rights-based, single-focused advocacy and networking organization established in January 1991. It aims to promote and strengthen land rights and agrarian reform in Bangladesh for the poor and marginalized communities. ALRD was formally registered with the Joint Stock Company under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, and also with the NGO Affairs Bureau in 1991. Since its formation, ALRD has played a pivotal role in mobilizing grassroots actors and promoting advocacy and networking to advance the rights of poor and marginalized communities, including women, over land and natural resources. At present, its network spans more than 200 NGOs across the entire country. The main focus of its activities is policy advocacy on the land rights of poor people to natural resources to effect appropriate agrarian and land reforms in Bangladesh, as well as capacity-building for partners and stakeholders.

B. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In Bangladesh, discriminatory inheritance laws, entrenched patriarchal norms, and widespread land disputes continue to fuel violence against women in relation to land rights. This circumstance is especially acute for widows, divorced women, single mothers, and indigenous women, who remain among the most vulnerable to coercion, exploitation, and exclusion from land ownership.

In the southern and northern regions of Bangladesh, large stretches of land are located in char (riverine) areas, where land grabbing by powerful actors is widespread. The same pattern is evident in haor areas, where influential groups often control beel and monsoon paddy (boro) fields. When the water recedes, these individuals usually fence off cultivable land or block access to khas land, leaving poor farming families unable to reclaim land they have cultivated for generations. Across these regions, there have been reports of attacks on women trying to protect family land during harvest times, including attacks by hired thugs, intimidation, and collective violence. When families try to resist illegal encroachment, women are often the primary targets of sexual harassment, physical assault, and serious abuse.

Women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh remain weak, with laws poorly enforced and claims often resisted. When women assert their rights to family property or agricultural khas land, they face discrimination, intimidation, forged documents, and, in rural areas, even physical and sexual violence. Widowed or single women are frequently denied khas land, and those who challenge local power structures encounter organized harassment and retaliatory attacks. As a result, women continue to face systemic barriers and violence in securing land through inheritance, marriage, or independent ownership in Khas land.

Land grabbing targeting indigenous women is one of the most severe manifestations of such violence. Given the high population density and intense competition over land, land has become a deeply contested resource, and women are often positioned at the centre of these conflicts. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)—a heavily militarized region—indigenous women face heightened risks. Sexual violence, including rape, has been documented as a deliberate tool used by non-indigenous settlers and sometimes military

actors to intimidate communities, assert territorial control, and facilitate land grabbing. Similar patterns are observed among indigenous women living in the plains.

While broader violence against women remains extremely high — for example, a 2024 national survey found 76% of women experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime and 49% in the past year.¹ — Data specifically linking violence to land rights remains far more limited. However, available evidence indicates that structural land inequalities exacerbate vulnerability: women own only 2-4 % of rural land; land-grabbing and investment-displacement contexts (especially in coastal, char, and indigenous regions) create high-risk environments for women. Indigenous women face documented incidents of sexual and physical violence as part of land-resource conflicts; the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) recorded **61 violent incidents** against indigenous women and girls in 2020, many connected to land grabbing and territorial disputes—**36 cases in the plains and 25 in the CHT** (IWGIA, 2020) and land-related disputes form a large share of pending court cases, underlining systemic governance failures. These factors reinforce that violence against women in relation to land is both under-documented and deeply embedded in broader structural injustice. More broadly, around **3.2 million land-related cases** are pending before Bangladesh's courts, and **up to 80% of criminal offences** in the country stem from land disputes.²

A culture of silence and impunity, combined with social stigma and fear of retaliation, discourages survivors from seeking justice. Weaknesses in law enforcement and judicial processes mean that even reported cases often remain unresolved. This circumstance creates an urgent need for systematic research to document and analyze land-related violence against women, identify its drivers, and develop evidence-based policy and programmatic responses.

C. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To generate evidence on the forms, causes, drivers and consequences of land-related violence against women in Bangladesh. It will also document the scale of such incidents, including the number of cases reported or pending in courts, better to understand the prevalence and patterns of land-related violence. The findings will inform policy, legal, and programmatic interventions to prevent such violence, protect survivors, and ensure access to justice and social support.

Objectives

1. **Document and map land-related violence against women:** Identify the types, prevalence, and socio-geographic patterns of violence, including inheritance denial (access to public/khas land, private/inheritance, and community land), forced eviction, land grabbing, coerced land sales, and related court cases. The documentation will capture intersections of caste, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and geographic location.
2. **Analyze drivers and enabling factors:** Examine legal, institutional, social, economic, and cultural factors that lead to land-related violence against women.
3. **Understand women's experiences and coping strategies:** Explore how women navigate land-related conflicts, including access to justice, social support, and redress mechanisms.
4. **Examine legal, institutional, and customary roles:** Assess the influence of land administration, local government, and customary practices in either exacerbating or preventing violence.

¹ BBS & UNFPA (2024). Violence Against Women Survey 2024. Retrieved from <https://bangladesh.unfpa.org>

² <https://bdlawdigest.org/drawbacks-of-land-administration-system-in-bangladesh-and-some-feasible-solutions.html>

5. **Develop actionable recommendations:** Provide evidence-based guidance for government, civil society, donors, and communities to strengthen prevention, protection, legal reform, and service delivery.

D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary research question:

- How and why does violence against women occur in relation to land rights, access, and control in Bangladesh, and what are the impacts on women's livelihoods, safety, and agency?

Secondary questions:

- What types of land-related violence are most prevalent and in which socio-geographic contexts (e.g., rural, urban, haor areas, coastal areas, indigenous communities of CHT and plainland)?
- How many incidents of land-related conflict have occurred—including reported cases and those pending in court—and what observable patterns emerge from these cases? Additionally, what proportion of violence against women (VAW) is linked to land rights disputes?
- How do formal laws, customary practices, and informal power structures interact to produce, ignore, or redress land-related violence?
- What barriers do women face in claiming land rights and seeking protection or justice (legal, social, economic, and political)?
- How do intersecting identities such as age, ethnicity, religion, disability, poverty, marital status, and indigenous identities influence the risk of and experience with land-related violence?
- Which successful local practices, CSO interventions, or policy mechanisms exist to prevent or respond to land-related violence against women?

E. SCOPE AND GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

The study will focus on a carefully chosen selection of districts that represent diverse contexts. These include:

- Chittagong Hill Tracts (areas inhabited by indigenous people)
- Northern agricultural districts with indigenous populations
- Charland areas
- Coastal regions or areas affected by displacement
- The Haor region, among others

The final selection of sites will be made jointly by ALRD and the research team, taking into account factors such as feasibility, safety, budget, and relevance.

F. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach is required to capture prevalence, drivers and lived experiences.

i. Desk review

- Review existing laws, policies, case law, and administrative procedures related to land, inheritance, gender, and VAW in Bangladesh.

- Synthesize relevant academic literature, NGO reports, media investigations, and donor studies.

ii. Quantitative component (where feasible)

- Cross-sectional household survey in selected sites to estimate the prevalence of land-related rights denial and self-reported land-related violence. The survey instrument should be short and ethically designed with VAW-safe protocols.
- Secondary data analysis of national datasets (e.g., BBS census) and administrative records to identify patterns related to land ownership/registration and gender-disaggregated indicators.

iii. Qualitative component

- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders: government land officers, union/municipal representatives, law enforcement, paralegals, CSO actors, religious/community leaders.
- In-depth Interviews (IDIs) with women affected by land-related violence (survivors), including diverse groups (widows, divorced women, indigenous women, disabled women, adolescent girls, where safe and appropriate.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members, male household members, and women's groups to understand social norms and community responses.
- Case studies and narrative documentation of representative incidents with informed consent.

iv. Sampling and Sample Size

- Qualitative: Aim for approximately 10 or 10+ IDIs across sites; 10 or 10+ KIIs; 8–12 FGDs (each with 6–10 participants), adapted to context and situation.
- Quantitative (if included): A small sample (e.g., 300–200 households across sites) designed for descriptive estimates. Final sample size to be decided by the research team during inception.

v. Ethical Considerations and Safety Protocols

Research on VAW requires strict ethical safeguards:

- Develop and follow a detailed VAW research safety protocol, including respondent confidentiality, informed consent, referral pathways to support services, and data protection measures.
- Use female enumerators/interviewers where appropriate and ensure interview locations are private and safe.
- Do not interview survivors in the presence of perpetrators. Avoid any actions that could increase risk to participants.
- Include psychosocial support referral mechanisms for participants and debriefing/ mental health support for enumerators.
- Ensure data storage is secure (encrypted files and password-protected devices) and that data is anonymized in reports.

vi. Data Analysis and Quality Assurance

- Qualitative data should be transcribed (and translated where necessary) and coded using a thematic analysis framework.
- Quantitative data should be analyzed using statistical software (e.g., Stata, SPSS, R) for descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations.
- Triangulate findings across sources and methods.
- Ensure quality through enumerator training, tool piloting, regular field supervision, spot checks, and data validation workshops.

G. EXPECTED DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE:

The study will be carried out from 4th week of December 2025 to 1st week of March 2026, for approximately. 2.5 months. All deliverables will be in English and submitted to ALRD. At least the following points will be covered in the study documents (not limited to and may be revised after receiving the findings from the 1st draft.

- a) Inception report (within two weeks of contract start) including detailed methodology, final sampling, data collection tools, ethical clearance plan, and revised timeline.
- b) Draft technical report (including executive summary, methodology, findings, case studies, recommendations, and annexes) submitted for review.
- c) Submission of the Final research report (max 40–60 pages, plus annexes) incorporating feedback. Final report, containing the following, among other narratives and illustrations
 - Executive summary
 - Description of the key findings
 - Recommendations
 - Case story
 - References

d) Policy brief (2–4 pages) summarizing key findings and recommendations for policymakers.

The table below provides an indicative timeframe, including due dates for deliverables.

Major Tasks/Activities	Deliverables	Notes	Due Date
1. Literature Review and Drafting DCTs			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-depth literature/documents review; Web navigation ● Drafting Data Collection Tools (DCTs) 	Data Collection Tools (DCTs)	May change marginally after field intervention	Week 1-2
2. Research & Data Collection Phase			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Primary data and information collection through FGDs, KIIs & IDIs 		ALRD will shoulder the communications and organize the stakeholders' consultation, like FGD, KIIs & IDIs	Week 3-7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transcription & Process of collected primary data & information 			
3. Draft Report			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Presentation by researcher on preliminary findings, main recommendations, challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned. 	Discussion/ PowerPoint presentation		Week 8

Major Tasks/Activities	Deliverables	Notes	Due Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submits the first draft of the research report 	First draft of the study	ALRD team will review the findings and provide feedback.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation on the second draft of the research through a validation workshop (summarizing key findings, challenges, opportunities, and recommendations) 	PowerPoint		Week 9
4. Final Report			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submission of the Final research report and policy brief 	Final research report		Week 10

H. PROFILE OF THE CONSULTANT(S):

Team Composition and Qualifications

- Team leader / Principal Investigator (PI) — Senior researcher with at least 10 years' experience in gender, land rights, and VAW research in Bangladesh/ South Asia. Strong publication record and experience managing mixed-methods studies.
- Gender and Ethics Specialist — Expert on VAW research ethics, safety protocols, and survivor-centered approaches.
- Quantitative Specialist — Experience in household survey design and statistical analysis.
- Qualitative Researchers / Field Coordinators (2–4) — Fluent in local dialects, experienced in conducting interviews on sensitive topics.
- Data Analyst / Transcriptionist — Skilled in qualitative coding and quantitative analysis.
- Admin / Logistics — For field arrangements and coordination.

I. SUPPORT FROM ALRD

- ALRD will provide necessary support for organizing local and national events (such as FGDs, KII, and workshops) and for communicating with local organizations and stakeholders.
- The consultant(s) will be assisted in arranging tour and travel, lodging, and food during their field visit.

J. TENTATIVE BUDGET:

TK. XXXX (XXX only) will be paid by A/C payee cheque. Income Tax will be deducted at source in accordance with the law of the country. However, Necessary VAT will be borne by ALRD. The first installment (30%) will be made upon signing the contract; the second installment (30%) will be paid after fieldwork; and the final installment (40%) will be made upon submission and acceptance of the final report.

General terms and conditions:

- ALRD reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal without providing verbal and/or written rationale.
- All reports and documents prepared during the assignment will be treated as the property of ALRD;

- The reports/documents or any part, therefore, cannot be sold, used, or reproduced in any manner without prior written approval of ALRD;
- ALRD reserves the right to monitor the quality and progress of the work during the assignment.

Submission of Proposal:

Interested consultant firms/Individuals are requested to submit a technical proposal and a financial proposal addressing to the Executive Director, Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), house-6/6, Block-F, Lalmatia, Dhaka-1207, Email: alrd@agni.com and Cc to: mong@alrd.org

The deadline of proposal submission is on or before 20 December 2025

Shamsul Huda
Executive Director
Dated: 9 December 2025