I-Toil
India To Overcome Immoral Labour

domestic workers deserve rights
I-TOIL

sign the petition
pass the law
help our women

A proposal for the United Nations Development Programme by the 2014 Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change
INTRODUCTION

I-Toil is an online game used to raise awareness among students about the unethical treatment of domestic workers in India, using the city of Guwahati as a case study and launch pad. Players will be encouraged to share the game, sign an online petition and push for the implementation of a law to extend the rights of domestic workers.

PART I: FRAMING THE PROBLEM

Country: India

Issue: Rights for domestic workers

Rationale:
India has been experiencing a period of economic growth but there is a large section of society that has not benefited from this growth to the same extent as others. India has also recently seen a prominent women’s movement, in response to several high profile rape cases. It was a large element in this year’s general elections, which saw all major parties pledge - in one way or another - to improve safety for women. A major issue of concern is the treatment of domestic workers. To illustrate this point, we will focus our work on exposing this unethical treatment in the north-eastern city of Guwahati, a growing city in the state of Assam.

There are 40,000 domestic workers in Guwahati (1), 95% of whom are women (2). There are also 9,500 employers seeking domestic workers, illustrating the level of demand (3). As many as 35% of houses employ domestic workers in the city (4). There is a general fear over lack of safety at work, and working times of up to 18 hours. The pay is also significantly less than that of their male counterparts. The culture against women is one of aggression. In one case, Guwahati City set up a female-only bus system in order to address the huge issue of sexual harassment in the city.

While the focus of our campaign is on the domestic workers themselves, the employers would also benefit from a professionalised service, better welfare conditions (and therefore health) of the workers, and creating an environment where more women are willing to enter the workforce because they feel safer.

There is also an opportunity here. The National Commission for Women drafted the Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act (DWWSSA) in 2010. The bill highlights and seeks to decrease exploitation of domestic workers, improving their conditions in areas such as pay, time off and contracts - but it is yet to be passed.

Our target audience is primarily young university students who are more likely to be politically active and engage with social media. India has a population of 1.2 billion and 10% (around 120
million people) are online, and this is increasing rapidly (5). 100 million of those users are on Facebook and 90% are under the age of 36 (6). For these reasons, we decided to target students who are more likely to be politically engaged and using Facebook as a platform to share their political views. Guwahati is a hub of education in the north-east of India and would serve as a great case study to start the “viral spread” of our online game and allow it to flourish there and then spread nationally in order to effect the national change necessary to implement the law.

PART II: THE SOLUTION

Our solution:
I-Toil is an online game, shareable on social media, where users can experience a day in the life of a domestic worker in Guwahati; including a video testimonial at the end so you can ground the game in reality. The game also includes a link to the petition for participants to sign as a call for action to encourage the passing of the Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act 2010. Users will be urged to share the game, and their score, on Facebook and elsewhere, and to spread the story of the domestic workers in Guwahati.

The media has reported on this issue and the growing demand for a law, however it has gained little traction beyond those who are already aware and fighting for the issue. The media can help solve the problem simply through awareness, engagement, and education and the sharability of the game allows for swift and immediate action by the user in order to reach a more national and general audience.

Implementation:

The user will feel a sense of engagement with the material through the interactive nature of the game and the personal level of interaction. The user will also feel an empathetic sense of motivation through the personal experience of interacting with the game and the video testimonials. They will immediately feel that they need to share the game and sign the petition.

Costs are relatively low for designing a game like this, and designers we have contacted suggest that it would take around a week to make due to its simplicity. This would cost between 250-750 euros per day at common freelancing rates. However, it may also be possible to tie this in with a university department in Guwahati, such as the Department of Design at IIT Guwahati. This would have several benefits: it would keep costs down, provide valuable experience to students; raise some awareness of our cause among students; provide a potential route of entry for the game into student circles on social media; and allow for people living in Guwahati to have some input into the design to ensure cultural values are appropriate, i.e. not dictated by people without first-hand local knowledge.

If further funding were needed, the obvious channel would be the National Commission for
Women, which drafted the DWWSSA and has the ability to provide funding. Other potential partners include the International Labour Organisation and International Federation of Trade Unions. In order to test the game, peers of the students in Guwahati would be encouraged by them to play it and then offer feedback. Overall evaluation would be based on the number of plays, likes, shares and petition signatures. The ultimate goal would of course be the passing of the law.

**Visualisation:**

The game will be very simple. It begins with the opportunity to choose between three female domestic workers. The game will be a single screen, featuring different tasks the character has to walk between to accomplish before the time runs out. These tasks could be: cooking, cleaning, attending to a crying child, laundry. There is also a bed, which the character can go to in order to increase the time limit. Each task will have a time limit, and if one is missed the game is over. There is no way to win the game. Before long, the time will run out. This is to make the point that there is a cycle of despair for many domestic workers, and why they need wider support.

When it’s “game over”, a 20-second video testimonial from a real-life domestic worker will bring the game into reality. After this, a screen comes up with four options: Sign the petition (links to Change.org petition); Try Again; Share my score; More information (see storyboard below). A single game would not last more than around two minutes, although this could be decided after testing.

---

**Patrick Ward - UK**

**Emma Bennett - UK**

**Kate Rosenzweig - USA**

**Nayla Mobsout - Lebanon**

**Matthew Bringuer - USA**

**Yan Xu – Chin**
STORYBOARD

1: Start screen

domestic workers deserve rights

I-TOIL

sign the petition
pass the law
help our women

2

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER...

WOMAN A  WOMAN B  WOMAN C

(USER CLICKS/TAPS ON THE DOMESTIC WOMAN THEY WANT TO RIN)
GAME OVER

YOU DIDN'T COMPLETE THE TASK...
Domestic workers in places like Guwahati are some of the worst treated workers in the country.

Without contracts, holidays or basic rights, they face abuse, exhaustion and isolation.

But there is hope... and you can help.

Call on the government to pass the Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act 2010.

Sign our petition to get this law passed.
APPENDICES

1. In-depth country profile

India as a whole has experienced a prolonged period of economic growth over recent years and increased industrialisation and movement to the cities. While the issues and solutions suggested in this report are applicable to urban regions across India, we have focused on Guwahati City as it has experienced significant growth, has a growing middle class, and has a significant gap between employment rates for men and women - all of which shall be discussed below.

Guwahati is the largest city in the state of Assam in north-east India, and the economic centre of the north-eastern region. It has an urban population of 968,549 of which 505,542 are males and 463,007 are females (7). Assam is the economic hub of the region, accounting for about 69% of the regional population and about 65% of the regional output (8). Guwahati became a major economic hub in the region after the establishment of Guwahati refinery in 1962, which marked the beginning of industrialisation in the city. The shifting of the capital from Shillong to
Guwahati in 1972 swiftly made it one of the most important cities in the north-east region. The economy of this city continues to develop with a growing number of employment opportunities available.

The major economic activities of Guwahati include trade, commerce, tourism and recreation, and transportation. People living in rural areas of Assam often migrate to Guwahati in search of better employment prospects. This has resulted in unplanned urbanisation across the city with over 10% of the population now living in slums. 14.1% of the state’s population was living in urban areas in 2011, an increase from 12.9% in 2001 (9).

In 2011-2012, urban Assam had a work participation rate of 32.9%, with a very low work participation rate for women in urban areas (9.0%) (10). This highlights an inequality for men and women that continues to exist across India, and is the basis for why we have focused our campaign on female domestic workers in Guwahati.

Urban employment in Assam is dominated by the tertiary sector, which includes tourism, transport and distribution. In 2011-2012 there were 72.9% of male workers and 80% of female workers who were employed in this sector (11).

Across informal settlements in Guwahati, that consisted of varying income groups, the predominant employment among females is as domestic workers (25% of the female labour force) (12). 15% of working women are in construction, followed by 14% in waste collection and 12% in public services and administration (13). For males in the workforce the predominant employment is petty trade (24%), followed by 21% working in construction, 18% in transport and 11.2% in waste collection (14).

The average literacy rate of Guwahati city is 91.11% of which male and female literacy is 92.89% and 89.16% respectively (15). This high literacy rate for both men and women continues to highlight the inequalities between them. The informal sector of work across India suffers from high illiteracy which means it is challenging to engage with them through media.

The culture against women in Guwahati is one of aggression and they are often seen and treated as second-class citizens. The rate of crime against women in Assam was the second highest in the country reflecting how harassment against women continues to be prominent in Indian society.

According to the National Crimes Bureau, crime against women in Assam was 89.5% in 2012, which was double the national average of around 41.7% (16). Women across Assam are victim to violence and sexual abuse not only in private but also in public spaces.
After the widespread coverage of the sexual abuse of a young girl by 15-20 men in public view outside a bar in Guwahati, a survey evaluated the experiences of safety in the city by 1,000 women. The survey found that 70% had experienced sexual harassment/violence in a public space (17). A list of why these women felt unsafe included poor lighting, lack of proper signage, poor maintenance of public areas, crowded transport, lack of clean and safe public toilets, lack of effective/visible policemen, dealing or taking alcohol/drugs, and lack of respect for women from men.

2. Media landscape

India has a population of 1.2 billion and 10% are online, which equates to 120 million users and this is rapidly increasing (18). 100 million of those users are on Facebook and 90% are under the age of 36 (19). University students are the largest users of the Internet in India, followed by young men. These statistics assisted us when considering who our target audience should be for our campaign. With the majority of internet users being university students this is the ideal age-group to target to spread the message of our campaign. This politically active audience will enjoy the elements of engagement in our online game. Facebook is the ideal platform to host our game as in a click of a button users can share the video to their friends.

Domestic workers across India lack access to all forms of media and are therefore difficult to communicate with. To carry our campaign to the domestic workers would be very challenging, and that aspect to the campaign over this issue would be best served by advocacy groups and trade unions rooted in the communities using word of mouth. This is why we have chosen to target university students who are the most active online in India and engage with the media the most. There are high literacy rates across Guwahati, the average literacy rate of Guwahati city is 91.11% of which male and female literacy is 92.89% and 89.16% respectively (20). However among domestic workers this is not the case. A large proportion of domestic workers are illiterate, not being able even to spell their own name. To use written media to communicate with these workers would be close to impossible.

72% of the population in Assam listen to the radio so it was a possibility that the campaign could have been carried to domestic workers through this medium (21).

The prime terrestrial channel in India, DD National, reaches 92% of the 1.2 billion population. This highlights that those that can access digital technologies include the 300 million who remain below the poverty line (22).

Youtube has a unique user base of 40 million, and 40% of the Indian population access the site from their mobile phones or tablet, 60% through their smartphones (23).

3. Background research on issue
There are 40,000 domestic workers in Guwahati city and 95% of these workers are women (24) (25). Many of these workers suffer from unethical working conditions. Issues include low wages, sexual abuse, no legislative protection, long working hours and the absence of job security. They are essentially modern day slaves who may work up to 18 hour days. These women work in an unorganised sector that is not safeguarded under labour laws that are protecting formal workers across India. Domestic workers lack access to media and there is no established network in place to connect and communicate with this workforce. Some 35% of households across Guwahati City employ domestic help, with 9,500 employers seeking help, which highlights the demand for workers in this sector (26) (27).

The National Commission for Women drafted the ‘Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act’ in 2010 but it has not been passed. This bill highlights the exploitation of domestic workers, addressing the conditions, salary and including their registration. With very little awareness across India of the conditions of these modern-day slaves it is not surprising that action has yet to be taken. There are also social structures in place that do not want domestic workers to be recognised as a formal sector. With a growing workforce and developing economy, domestic workers continue to suffer abuse without a law to guide their employers. ‘The Domestic Workers Security Act’ will also benefit the employers by creating a professionalised service, with better conditions for staff and therefore healthier workers. With a framework in place domestic work will be less fearful and opportunities to work in this sector will be more appealing. Awareness needs to be raised, not only on the conditions of the workers, but to show that their is a law already drafted that will improve these conditions. This law can be passed through awareness, education and engagement.

The culture against women in India is one of aggression. Trafficking is a prominent problem across Assam and about 2,740 women have been kidnapped in the state since January 2013 (28). In many aspects of life women are unequal to men in India. Women are five times more likely to be unemployed than men and even when they do find work they make significantly less than their male counterparts.

For women in Guwahati there is a feeling of unease and fear in both public and private spaces. A young girl was sexually abused by 15-20 men outside a bar in Guwahati in public. This story attracted a lot of media coverage and a survey was carried out that found that 70% of women in Guwahati feel unsafe (29). One key reason why these women do not feel safe in Guwahati is because there is a lack of a visible police force. This case is one extreme example of the sexual abuse that seems to be a common issue across Guwahati, and India. Yet, there is little to no coverage to show the suffering and abuse that domestic workers encounter everyday.
Guwahati has set up a female-only bus system in order to address the issue of sexual abuse in the city. Although women will be protected on their way to work they are not safe from abuse at home, on the streets and at their place of work.

Rani is a real life case study, as a live-in domestic worker she experienced intense, slave-like conditions. She was not paid for an entire year, was rarely permitted to leave her home, and suffered from frequent abuse (30). This is not a singular case and only reinforces that these women are in need of help but are difficult to reach through media. The most effective way to change the law and improve conditions for women like Rani is to increase public awareness about their conditions and about the law that can help improve their lives. This can be achieved through putting pressure on the government to pass a law to regularise domestic workers into the labour force -- through awareness, education, and engagement. In order for this to penetrate the national political sphere those three pillars of social consciousness must be achieved.

4. Related or similar initiatives, successes/challenges

A key example of a game that is similar to I-Toil is the “Iain Duncan Smith Realistic Unemployment Simulator”. This simple game reflects how the changes by the British Government to the benefits system could make life more difficult for the unemployed. It is an impossible game that cannot be won so highlights the extent of the problem. The I-Toil game that we have designed reflects this idea of an impossible game and emphasises the struggles of domestic workers in Guwahati, India. The Realistic Unemployment Simulator is a one screen game which ensures it is easy to follow.

The simplicity of this game makes it engaging and takes you to the call for action quickly. When the game ends you are given the choice of sharing your result on Twitter or on Facebook, making it easy to share the message further. We aim to replicate this form of sharing on social media in our game as it is an effective way to make our campaign go viral. We will be improving on this game structure by providing a testimonial of a domestic worker at the end to really represent their suffering and so the game can be related to a real woman. One main challenge is ensuring the game does not lighten up a difficult subject.

Another game focusing on social issues is Spent which looks at experiences of poverty in the US. This game too is an impossible game and uses this technique to show the issues of poverty that are present in the US. This game is slightly more complex than the game we have created for our campaign as players are presented with endless multiple choice questions until running out of money.

5. Detailed elements of proposal
If a team of professional, paid-for designers is commissioned to create the game, it will take around a week to complete. During this time, a film crew could also record the testimonies of (at least) three women. The game should then be play-tested and feedback given by a selected group of students in Guwahati. This whole aspect could take around a month.

If possible, however, it would be good to have students directly involved in the production of the game for the reasons cited in Part II.2. If this were the case, the project may take slightly longer and would need to fit student availability, but it would mean the creation and testing phases would be to some extent integrated, and students would be able to test the game as it was made. This would also potentially provide a solid base of social media contacts from which the students and university could launch the project to the wider audience.

6. List of resources


20) http://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/191-guwahati.html

22) http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/mapping-digital-media-india


