



A Glimpse of Journey to Facilitate Local Justice for the Poor



Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Project

Local Government Division
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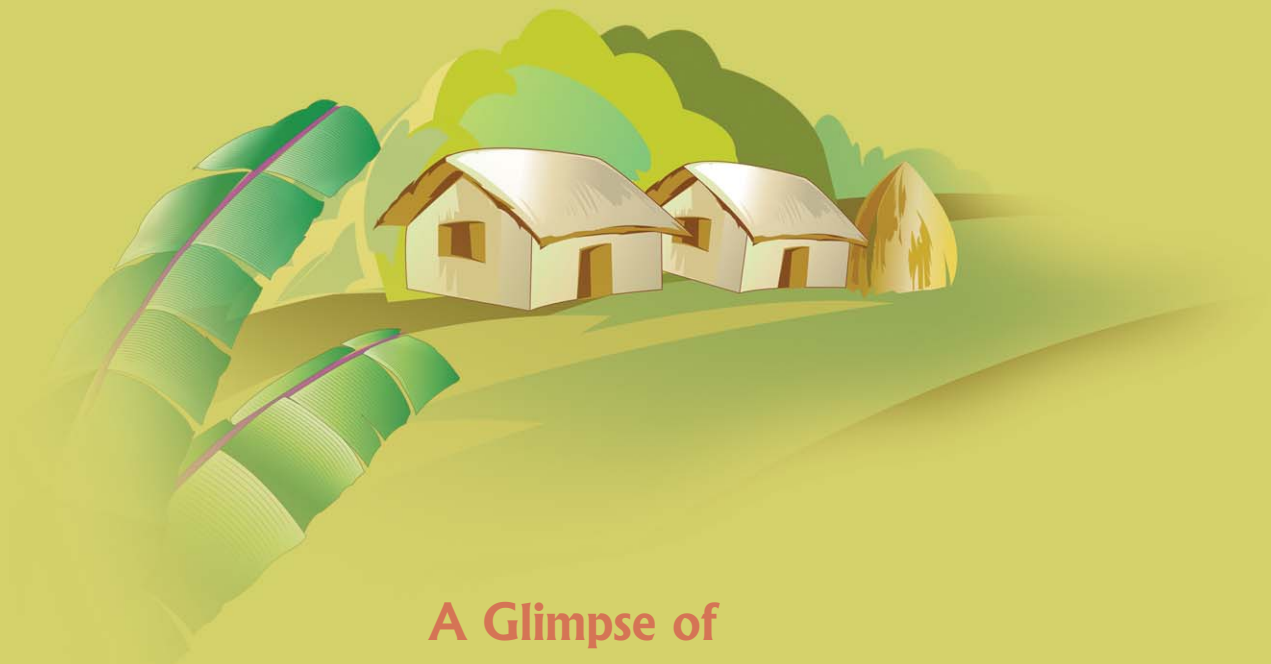
A Glimpse of Journey to Facilitate Justice for the Poor

Prepared by

Local Government Division
Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
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European Union



Bangladesh

A brief about the project

Activating Village Courts Project in Bangladesh

Background

In line with ensuring good governance, efficient and stable justice sector is indeed inevitable. In this context, Bangladesh is under tremendous pressure with much workload and inadequate number of officials and staff to dispose the cases. As a result, the case backlogs add up to the existing pending cases and at present it stands on about half a million cases. It creates a negative impact for the rural poor and vulnerable group of people who cannot afford the expenses of cases and do not have clear understanding of how to get access to justice in the upper courts on some issues that could be easily resolved at the local level. Considering this, Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoGRDC) has initiated a project titled 'Activating Village Courts Project in Bangladesh' with the partnership of UNDP and European Commission (EC) Bangladesh.

The project will support in strengthening the justice system through activating Village Courts in 500 selected Union Parishads (UP) in the country. It also intends to develop capacity of the Village Courts (VC) members, elected representatives and other relevant officials in a bid to run the VCs smoothly. It will also carry out comprehensive advocacy activities to involve the community and other key stakeholders actively in efforts to activating the Village Courts through enhancing their awareness on legal rights and overall justice system.

Objectives

(i) Overall

The project aims at strengthening a system of alternative dispute resolution in 500 Union Parishads (UP) through the establishment of village courts. It intends to improve access to justice for disadvantaged and marginalized groups and enhance human rights systems and processes in Bangladesh.

(ii) Specific

" To empower women, the poor and disadvantaged groups to seek remedies for injustices, and to enable justice institutions to be responsive to claims

" To promote and protect human rights security through a human rights-based approach to development in programming and delivery

" To empower citizens to resolve their disputes at the local level in an expeditious, transparent and affordable manner

" To strengthen local government institutions to be responsive to local needs and offer approach legal service through well functioning Village Courts

Project Activities

Review of Legal Framework:

The project reviews the existing legal framework of Village Courts in depth and submit the analytical and pragmatic recommendations to government for ensuring functional and effective village courts..

It supports to enhance the capacity of the local representatives (especially UPs), village police and staff of village courts, judges through training, workshops, etc at national and international level.

It conducts a comprehensive awareness program in community at local and national level on legal rights i.e. services of village courts with right based approach. Using all the potential communication tools, the advocacy and communication activities are being carried out to sensitize all the actors in a bid to activating the Village Courts for ensuring the justice for the marginalized.

In strengthening monitoring process and activities in emanating best practices of local government institutions especially UP in perspectives of running Village Courts effectively, the project supports to LGD, MoLGRD&C through initiating comprehensive interventions.

- " 500 selected UPs are strengthened for activating village courts;
- " Village courts legal framework reviewed;
- " Capacity of UP Chairman, UP staff and village police on village courts developed;
- " Awareness on village courts raised and involvement of community people and other key stakeholders in activating village courts enhanced;
- " Monitoring and supervision function within MoLGRD&C enhanced;





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Progress at a glance

- ◆ All selected 500 UP Chairmen are aware and oriented about the Village Courts project and Village Courts functions;
- ◆ Supports are extended to 224 UPs for setting up village courts and making community aware of seeking local justice services at their doorsteps;
- ◆ Two NGOs (Madaripur Legal Aid Association-MLAA and Eco-Social development Organization-ESDO), hired for Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions covering 224 UPs, have started CBO formation, community mobilization, capacity building, providing Court Assistants and Field Workers to assist UPs for running VC functions;
- ◆ In addition, 12 UPs (model VCs) started delivering justice services to the rural poor;
- ◆ Published Baseline Survey Report attracted mass attention about the village courts status in Bangladesh and the project itself;
- ◆ M & E Framework is prepared including measurable indicators, monitoring tools, techniques and reporting guidelines;
- ◆ Draft training manual is field tested and finalization by the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) is underway;
- ◆ 16 UPs covered by on the job training for providing firsthand knowledge on how to use and fill up the VC-related forms, formats and necessary documentation;
- ◆ On the spot orientation to VC officials in 64 UPs have enhanced their confidence to run VC and resolve local disputes methodically while in total 105 UPs are visited by the Project;
- ◆ Various GOB trainings institutions are adequately sensitized about VCs and establishment of institutional partnership is underway with BPATC, Police Academy, NILG and BCS Admin Academy in order to incorporate VC functions, roles and responsibilities of field level officials to activate VC into the training course curricula;
- ◆ Partnership established with the Ministry of Law; the Judiciary obtained the High Court's concurrence to obtain series of orientation on VC functions;
- ◆ Communication and visibility plan is adopted and being followed while developing various IEC materials and communication interventions;
- ◆ Communication and Advocacy Strategy for the project is developed aligned with the UNDP-EC communication and visibility plan;
- ◆ Increased awareness enabled peoples to have access to local justice services through wider dissemination of various IEC materials (brochures, stickers, posters, festoons, flip charts, etc.);
- ◆ Illiterate/low literate peoples are brought under access to local justice supports through using flip charts in ward-level courtyard meetings;
- ◆ Interactive and informative website pulled huge curiosity among various stakeholders including media and development partners about VC functions and its judicial process;

- ◆ After installation of 500 signboards with the name of 'Village Courts' peoples now easily can locate it at their doorstep for seeking justice services;
- ◆ Installation of 17 billboards at project-districts are helping peoples to learn about the jurisdiction of VCs while very often unknowingly they approach to district courts;
- ◆ The short video documentary on village courts grabbed much attentions and paved enhancing knowledge among the stakeholders through disseminating the documentary in different events;
- ◆ Boosted ownership among the relevant government machineries in the efforts of activating VCs at local level through planned national and local level different advocacy and communication initiatives;
- ◆ People's access to justice services are further facilitated through sensitizing judicial officers about village courts; VC triable cases are now referred back to village courts from formal courts;
- ◆ Necessary documentation supports (i.e. 11 prescribed forms as per the Village Courts Rules 1976, 13 additional non-prescribed forms) are ensuring quality case management, proper data collection, better adjudication in the VC as well as strengthening performance monitoring of VCs;
- ◆ Set of compiled recommendations for necessary reforms in the VC Act 2006 is drafted for framing updated VC Rules and necessary amendment in the Act; Around 164 judicial officers are consulted in 5 districts;
- ◆ Peoples confidence and knowledge level is further heightened through the VC booklet titled "Gram Adalate Bichar: Sangslisto Ain O Bidhimala";
- ◆ The on-going Review of social barriers and limitations of Village Courts is exploring the socio-anthropo-legal aspect of village courts and its potentials;
- ◆ Survey to determine UP capacity to use IT for enhancing quality of justice delivery is under way for introducing ICT based reporting and quality assurance;

Model Village Courts

The Government selected 12 unions for establishing model village courts as a laboratory for the rest unions to bring out the best outputs from the VCs. These 12 unions reveal 7 in Bhandaria (under Barisal division) and 5 in South Surma (Sylhet division).

The on-going activities in these areas include upazila level workshops, union dissemination workshops, formation of CBOs (Community Based Organizations), CBO workshop, on job training, street drama, rallies and finally making the village courts functional. The concerned district and upazila administration is taking active part in this model building initiative.

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Villagers towards to village courts for justice



Village Court trial is going on

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Conduction of oath taking by Gram Police



Smiles of having justice

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Awareness raising workshop on village courts



Awareness & involvement of stakeholders' workshop on village courts

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Courtyard meeting



Village Court Billboard for boosting awareness

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National Roundtable Discussion on Baseline Survey on Village Courts in Bangladesh



Group work in awareness workshop

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A view of National Roundtable Discussion on Baseline Survey on Village Courts in Bangladesh



Awareness raising workshop on village courts

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Awareness raising workshop on village courts



Inauguration of setting Ejlas for village courts by Dr. Shadhin Malik

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On the job training on village courts



Street drama on village courts

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CBO formation



Awareness workshop on village courts

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Awareness & involvement of stakeholders' workshop on village courts



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Simulation session on Village Court



Awareness workshop on village courts

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Divisional workshop at Chittagong



Rally on village courts

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Awareness & involvement workshop on village courts



Monitoring workshop on village courts

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On the job training on village courts



Workshop with judicial officers on village courts

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A part of trial of village courts



Inauguration of setting Ejlas for village courts by Deputy Commissioner, Faridpur

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Stock taking visit and opinion sharing meeting regarding model VC at Bhairab, Kishorganj



Participants are engaged in group work at VC workshop

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A view of orientation workshop on village courts with UP Chairmen



Inauguration of setting Ejlal for village courts by Deputy Commissioner, Rajbari

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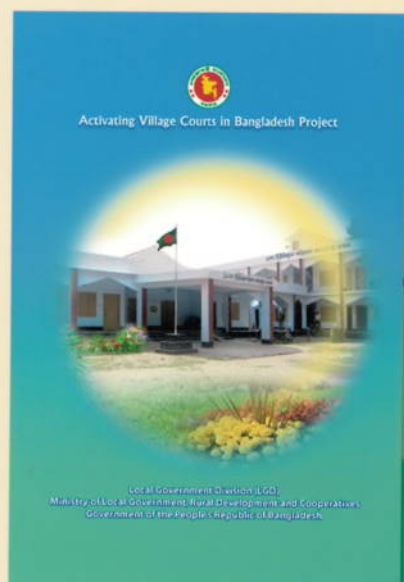
Orientation workshop on village courts with UP Chairmen



PIC meeting of Village Courts Project

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