



HUMAN RIGHTS AND LEGAL SERVICES BANGLADESH

Four out of five adults in Bangladesh faced one or more legal problems in the past four years. This is more than 31 million people experiencing a legal problem every year.

Approximately 15 million people every year do not take any form of action when faced with a legal dispute. Out of the people who do seek legal information, six out of ten do not find a solution to their problem. There is a 3.3 million case backlog in courts.

Women face a multitude of additional societal barriers. When faced with a legal problem, particularly related to violence against women, they are often afraid to speak up or persuaded to drop their cases.

There are systemic, social and structural barriers for the most vulnerable to have access to justice, which prevent them from living a life with dignity and coming out of situations of poverty. We work towards addressing **immediate legal service needs and strengthening systems** to ensure equal rights and prevent direct and indirect endemic cases of basic human rights violation against women, children and marginalised communities. We also work towards understanding **deeper structural barriers for ensuring equal rights for all** and work as a facilitator, creating a platform for constructive dialogue to ensure access to justice through alternative dispute resolution. When needed, we **challenge legal systems** to ensure the rights of the most vulnerable and excluded are protected and create an enabling environment for them to come out of situations of poverty and live a life with dignity.

Now in our 33rd year of operation, we are the largest NGO-led legal aid programme in the world.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE



5M

people, majority women, reached through our services



4.2M

women completed human rights and legal education classes



66,825

clients received legal information



\$31.2M

recovered in favour of female clients

PROFILE:

453

Legal aid clinics in 61 out of 64 districts

417

Staff on the ground

387

Panel lawyers

CONTACT:

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Legal Aid Clinics: Our clinics assist vulnerable groups, particularly women facing violence, to seek and receive solutions to legal challenges, primarily through promoting the informal mechanism of Alternative Dispute Resolutions (ADR). We also have a large pool of panel lawyers working under the formal mechanism of filing cases in court, and conduct human rights and legal education classes and workshops with the local community and community leaders to raise awareness on legal rights around domestic violence, family law and inheritance.

In 2019, these centres will also provide a new range of services, including:

Service delivery to improve access

- Legal services in the area of counter-trafficking, and migration
- ADR services on family disputes and recouping of monies on behalf of migrant/trafficked person
- Human Rights Violation Incidents are reviewed and support provided through legal aid, filing of cases or referral
- Fact finding as a due diligence of all services

Structural changes to ensure everyone is reached, with tailored services

- Strengthening partnerships, particularly for referrals, with the National Legal Aid Services Organization and District Legal Aid Committees, and other community-level, state, non-state actors and NGOs

Transformative changes

- Preventive services through legal awareness on family issues, trafficking, migration and gender based violence through existing classes and workshops

Access to land rights: 1 in every 7 households in Bangladesh suffer from land disputes. Our six land services offices offer a wide range of affordable, timely and transparent land-related services that give people with an alternative to relying on middlemen. To date, we have measured 69 million decimals of land.

Legal rights in urban areas, particularly for workers in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector: We provide services such as legal awareness, advice, mitigation and litigation to workers through four urban service centres.

Improvement of the real situation of overcrowding in prisons in Bangladesh justice/prison reform for promoting human rights and preventing corruption in Bangladesh: Implemented in partnership with Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and funded by GIZ, this project began in 2008 and is now in its second phase. Operating in six districts, the project is alleviating the problem of overcrowding in prisons through a paralegal service model. The project recruited and trained eighteen paralegals who provide free legal aid to prisoners and their families while also assisting lawyers, the police, and the courts. The project is also strengthening partnership and collaboration with National Legal Aid Services Organization, District Legal Aid Committee (DLAC), Prison Directorate, Probation Officers and other relevant actors to enhance proactive legal aid services for the marginalised groups. The project also identifies and collects evidence as well as advocates for policy reform following top down and bottom up approach.

Response in humanitarian crisis situations: Providing a comprehensive response to the forcibly displaced Rohingya women and girls in the camps and host communities in Cox's Bazar to prevent gender based violence. The response is based on a comprehensive protection strategy with three components; sexual and gender-based violence protection, community-based protection and legal protection. In 2019 a new component will be added; protection monitoring. We will build the capacity of the legal protection team through training in alternative dispute resolution and mediation training, and use panel lawyers for prosecutions.

BRAC is a global leader in developing cost-effective, evidence-based programmes, and has been ranked the #1 NGO in the world for the last four years consecutively by NGO Advisor.

BRAC's vision is a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential. Founded in Bangladesh in 1972, BRAC acts as a catalyst, creating opportunities for people to transform their lives.

BRAC uses an integrated model to change systems of inequity, through social development programmes, humanitarian response, social enterprises, socially responsible investments and a university. The organisation has an annual expenditure of more than USD 1.1 billion, with the majority self-financed from its enterprises, and operates in conflict-prone and post-disaster settings in 12 countries across Asia and Africa.



BRAC provides critical support for paralegal advisory services, which train young people to support vulnerable justice seekers in prisons as well as a range of institutions of the justice system.



—Promita Sengupta
Head of Programme
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