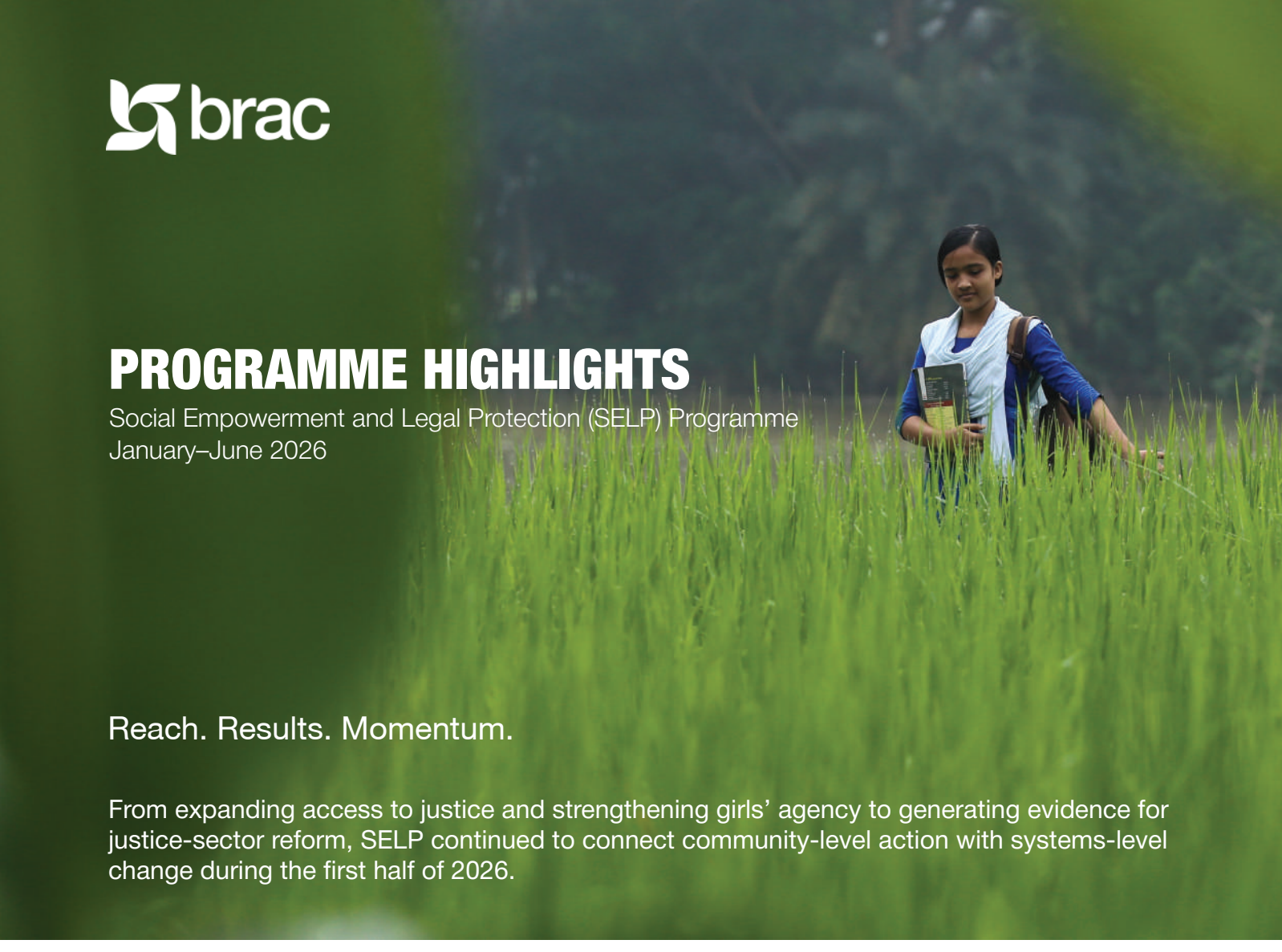


PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme
January–June 2026

Reach. Results. Momentum.

From expanding access to justice and strengthening girls' agency to generating evidence for justice-sector reform, SELP continued to connect community-level action with systems-level change during the first half of 2026.

OUR **FOOTPRINT**

Taking Support Closer to Communities

33 Districts

268 Upazilas

268 Legal Aid Clinics

THE SWAPNOSAROTHI **JOURNEY**

Advancing Dreams. Strengthening Agency. Preventing Child Marriage.

Through its continued efforts to strengthen girls' agency, promote life skills and prevent child marriage, Swapnosarothi reached significant milestones. A total of 63,000 adolescent girls received life skills sessions, while 11,319 girls graduated after crossing the age of 18 without marriage. Additionally, 242 child marriages were prevented, reflecting the programme's continued commitment to empowering adolescent girls and protecting their rights.

TURNING OPPORTUNITIES **INTO ACTION**

Dream Plan Innovation: Turning Aspirations into Action

To strengthen economic empowerment and create sustainable livelihood opportunities, 160,000 ducklings and chicks were distributed among approximately 8,000 adolescent girls. Additionally, 200 adolescent girls received sewing machines and essential tailoring tools to support their income-generating activities. The initiative was implemented with support from the BRAC Microfinance Programme.

Furthermore, 5,600 adolescent girls received a total of BDT 4.18 crore in one-time financial assistance from SELP to support their continued education, particularly those facing greater financial barriers.

Learning Beyond the Sessions

Swapnosarothir Swapnojoy, an engaging educational comic book, was developed to reinforce key life skills and messages on gender equality, child marriage prevention, menstrual health, safety, leadership and girls' rights.

In June 2026, 60,000 Swapnosarothi girls received a copy of the comic book, helping sustain and reinforce their learning beyond the regular sessions and after graduation.

Inspiring journey of Jim - one of the Swapnosarothi Members

Seventeen-year-old Israt Jahan Jim has already overcome challenges that many adults would struggle to face. Growing up in the remote village of Fuldah in Jamalpur, Jim's childhood was marked by family separation, poverty and uncertainty. When she was only six years old, her father left the family. Following the divorce, her mother, Bithi Akter, was forced to leave Jim with her grandparents and move to Dhaka to work in a garment factory.

Separated from her only daughter while struggling to survive, Bithi gradually developed severe mental health problems. Although her family later brought her back to Jamalpur for treatment, she never fully recovered. Now, Jim lives with her mother, grandparents and uncle, whose income from farming barely covers the family's daily expenses. Yet despite these hardships, Jim never stopped believing that education could change her life.

In 2026, she completed her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination in the Science group from Baroipotol High School. Her dream is simple but ambitious:



Photo: Swapnosarothi member Jim

In June 2023, Jim enrolled in Swapnosarothi, BRAC's adolescent girls' platform under the Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme. Before joining the programme, Jim was quiet and lacked confidence. Speaking in front of others made her nervous, and her family's financial situation often made her question whether she would be able to continue her education. Through interactive sessions on self-development, leadership, rights and protection, gender equality, mental well-being, financial literacy, life skills and career planning, Jim gradually began to see herself differently. Among all the sessions, three had the greatest impact on her: Learning to Say "No", Dreaming Beyond Boundaries and Financial Literacy and Planning for the Future.

> **"These sessions changed the way I think about myself. They taught me that my dreams matter and that I have the right to make decisions about my own future."**
>
> **-Jim**

> **"Since joining BRAC, Jim has become much more confident. She makes her own decisions about her education, is learning computer skills and plans for her future. Seeing this change gives me hope."**
>
> **-Jim's mother**

In 2026, Jim received BDT 7,000 in cash support through BRAC's SELP Programme. For many young people, BDT 7,000 may seem modest. For Jim, it became an investment in her future. She used BDT 2,500 to enroll in a computer training course and saved the remaining amount to pay for her Higher Secondary (HSC) admission fees, books and educational supplies.

Jim studies with determination, believing that every lesson brings her one step closer to becoming a doctor.

The programme also connected her with additional training opportunities, helping her build practical skills alongside academic learning. Like many adolescent girls in rural Bangladesh, Jim has received several marriage proposals. But unlike many girls facing similar circumstances, she had the confidence and knowledge to say no.

The confidence she gained through Swapnosarothi—and the support of her family—enabled her to reject every proposal and continue her education.



Photo: Jim holds the Swapnosarothi comic book open to her favourite session, Learning to Say No.

Travelling to school was not always easy. Jim frequently experienced street harassment on her way to class. Instead of remaining silent, she reported the incidents to her teachers and BRAC staff, who helped ensure appropriate support. The experience taught her an important lesson: Speaking up is a form of strength.

Jim shares these lessons with her friends and encourages other girls to stay in school, understand their rights and harmful effects of child marriage. Watching her daughter grow into a confident young woman has transformed Bithi Akter's (35) outlook on life.

Across 33 districts, 176,185 adolescent girls participating in the Swapnosarothi initiative are building confidence, strengthening life skills, preventing child marriage and creating pathways towards education, employment and leadership.

Theatre That Travels, Messages That Matter

Popular Theatre is one of BRAC SELP's community engagement approaches, bringing critical social messages closer to communities through accessible, engaging and locally relevant performances. Rooted in everyday experiences, these performances create opportunities to raise awareness, encourage community dialogue and challenge harmful social norms.



Photo: Community-led awareness raising performance by Popular Theatre team.

During January–June 2026, a total of 1,562 Popular Theatre shows reached 459,877 people with awareness-raising messages, strengthening SELP's community-level awareness efforts.

BRAC's Popular Theatre approach uses community-led performances, local dialects and real-life stories to communicate messages on gender equality, social justice, violence against women and child marriage. This participatory form of communication helps make complex social issues more relatable and accessible to diverse communities.

JUSTICE WITHIN **REACH**

Expanding Access to Justice and Strengthening Legal Protection

Through its continued commitment to expanding access to justice and strengthening legal protection, SELP received 12,656 complaints, of which 9,570 were resolved through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Additionally, 447 civil and criminal court cases were resolved, while 65 survivors were referred to the District Legal Aid Committee. Through these efforts, a total of BDT 201.2 million was recovered in dower, maintenance and inheritance, contributing to the protection of legal rights and improved access to justice.

TAKING LEGAL COUNSELLING **CLOSER**

Ain Bondhu for BRAC Staff

Around 50 BRAC Head Office staff received legal counselling through online sessions provided by SELP Ain Bondhu in the past 6 months.



A MILESTONE OF **NATIONAL RECOGNITION**

BRAC Receives "Special Recognition Award for Legal Aid Services 2026"

BRAC has been providing legal aid to vulnerable people in Bangladesh since 1986 and has supported millions of people through its legal aid services over the decades.

In recognition of this longstanding contribution, the BRAC Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme received the 'Special Recognition Award for Legal Aid Services 2026' on the occasion of National Legal Aid Day on 28 April 2026.

The award was presented by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Mr Tarique Rahman, to BRAC Executive Director Mr Asif Saleh at a ceremony organised by the Directorate of Bangladesh Legal Aid (DBLA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.



Akhi's Journey to Realising Her Dower and Maintenance

Mst. Akhi Khatun, from Joynagar village under Ishwardi Upazila in Pabna district, grew up in an extremely poor family. Her father is a mason, and Akhi, the second of three siblings, was married while studying in Class 8.

Her marriage took place on 23 December 2024 with Md. Soyat Ehesan Simanto from Pabna Sadar Upazila.

Although their conjugal life was normal during the first month, Akhi later faced pressure from her husband and in-laws for dowry. Her husband demanded a motorcycle, which her family could not afford. The conflict escalated into abuse and mental pressure, and Akhi was restricted from interacting with neighbours and maintaining contact with her parental home.

On 10 April 2025, her husband left her at her father's home. A divorce notice followed on 17 April.

Attempts to resolve the issue within the family and locally were unsuccessful. A complaint was also filed with the Union Parishad, but no effective action was taken due to the influential position of the opposing party.

With assistance from her relative Rehena Begum, Akhi approached the Dashuria BRAC Legal Aid Center on 20 April 2025. After receiving the complaint, the BRAC office sent a notice to the opposing party and contacted them by phone. The opposing party subsequently appeared with a lawyer and agreed to participate in ADR.

On 27 April 2025, both parties participated in the ADR session. Their statements were heard and the relevant legal aspects explained. Through mutual agreement, Akhi received BDT 175,000 in dower and maintenance.

> **Because BRAC's Social Empowerment and Legal Protection Programme stood by me, I have been able to realize my dower and maintenance today.**
>
> **— Mst. Akhi Khatun**

Her parents reflected:

> **We did not find any solution even after going to the Union Parishad. Without BRAC's support, we would not have received justice.**

Follow-up showed that Akhi was doing well after receiving her rightful entitlements.

PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION & **COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY**

SELP–DBLA Joint Research on Alternative Dispute Resolution

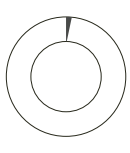
In partnership with DBLA, SELP conducted a joint research study titled **"Uniform and Standard Alternative Dispute Resolution in Bangladesh."** The study examines challenges and best practices of mediation in Bangladesh and proposes a roadmap for developing a uniform ADR framework.

The proposed framework aims to strengthen access to justice, particularly for women and other marginalized groups, by promoting consistent, effective and rights-based mediation practices nation-wide.

Turning Evidence into Dialogue: Justice for Women and Children

On 2 May 2026, SELP organised a national consultation at BRAC Centre, Dhaka, to present findings from joint research conducted by the Bangladesh Supreme Court and BRAC. The study analysed 4,040 disposed cases from 42 Nari-o-Shishu Nirjaton Daman Tribunals across 32 districts.

The findings revealed:



3% conviction rate



Around 70% of cases ended in acquittal*

1,370 days

average disposal time, **despite the 180-day legal mandate**

Approximately 22

hearings per case

The consultation brought together senior government officials, judicial representatives, development partners and civil society organisations to discuss the findings and identify reforms to strengthen access to justice and improve justice-system efficiency.

Coordinated Initiatives in Legal Aid: Responsibilities and Implementation Strategies

A high-level consultation meeting titled **"Coordinated Initiatives in Legal Aid: Responsibilities and Implementation Strategies"** was held on **23 May 2026** at BRAC Centre, Mohakhali, Dhaka. The meeting aimed to make access to justice more more effective, inclusive and accessible, effective and inclusive for marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

It was jointly organised by the **Directorate of Bangladesh Legal Aid and BRAC SELP.**
The **Honourable Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Mr. Md. Asaduzzaman, MP,** attended as Chief Guest.

Mr Md. Khadem Ul Kayes, Secretary (Routine Responsibility), Law and Justice Division, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, attended as Special Guest. The session was chaired by **Mr Md. Monjurul Hossain**, Director General of the Directorate of Bangladesh Legal Aid.

Strengthening District Legal Aid Officers and Special Mediators

SELP, in collaboration with DBLA, organised a **two-day capacity-building training for District Legal Aid Officers and Special Mediators on 18–19 June 2026 at BRAC CDM, Savar.**

Collective Advocacy

i. Citizens' Initiative Against Domestic Violence (CIDV)

In May 2025, BRAC's Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme assumed the Secretariat of the Citizens' Initiative Against Domestic Violence (CIDV) from BLAST for a two-year term. Established in 2007 by human rights organisations, networks and activists, CIDV is a coalition committed to preventing domestic violence against women in Bangladesh and advancing women's rights through legal and policy reform. During the reporting period, BRAC, through SELP, worked with CIDV members to strengthen the coalition's coordination and advocacy. Key achievements included updating the membership, forming an Executive Committee and Working Committee, developing a one-year action plan, and convening two general meetings. CIDV also submitted proposed amendments to the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Ordinance/Act to the relevant authorities, advocating for stronger legal protection and more effective measures to prevent and address domestic violence against women. Through these efforts, CIDV continues to promote the recognition of domestic violence as a human rights and civil rights violation and a punishable offence, while strengthening collective advocacy for a safer, more just and equitable society for women in Bangladesh.

ii. Rape Law Reform Coalition

As a member of the Rape Law Reform Coalition (RLRC), BRAC contributed to collective advocacy for survivor-centred rape law reforms. The coalition engaged in policy dialogue, coordinated advocacy efforts and advanced legal reforms to strengthen survivors' access to justice.

iii. Girls Not Brides

As an advisory member of the Girls Not Brides (GNB) platform, BRAC contributed strategic guidance, knowledge sharing and collective advocacy to prevent child marriage and advance girls' rights and empowerment.

Partnership with **Public Universities**

Strengthening Legal Education to Develop Gender-Sensitive Legal Professionals

A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on 3 February 2026 at BRAC Centre between the Directorate of Bangladesh Legal Aid (DBLA), BRAC SELP and the Department of Law at the University of Rajshahi to strengthen legal education and expand access to justice.

The partnership aims to bridge academic learning and practical legal experience by creating structured internship opportunities for law students. Through direct engagement with legal aid clinics, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and case management processes, students will gain firsthand experience of grassroots justice needs, gender dynamics and the challenges faced by women seeking legal support. The initiative ultimately seeks to nurture a new generation of gender-aware, community-focused legal professionals committed to advancing access to justice.

The partnership aims to strengthen legal aid and legal education through enhanced academic collaboration while creating internship and experiential learning opportunities for law students to gain practical experience in legal aid service delivery.



Photo: MoU signing between BRAC SELP, DBLA, and Department of Law, University of Rajshahi

Bridging Academia and Grassroots Practice

BRAC's Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme has strengthened its partnership and collaboration with the University of Dhaka and Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with their respective Departments of Theatre and Performance Studies. The partnerships aim to bridge academic knowledge with grassroots experience by facilitating field-based learning, research, skills exchange, joint training, theatre productions and knowledge sharing. SELP will provide access to its community-based Popular Theatre activities and field sites, facilitate field visits and local coordination, engage performers, provide production and technical support, and share relevant scripts, songs and learning resources. The universities will contribute academic expertise, student and faculty engagement, visit planning and documentation, while participating in post-performance discussions, joint workshops and other mutually agreed activities. Together, these collaborations seek to strengthen development theatre practice, foster innovation and learning, and contribute to sustainable social change.



Photo: MoU signing with Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University



Photo: MoU signing with Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Dhaka

RESEARCH, EVIDENCE & **LEGAL INNOVATION**

1. Ensuring Quick Justice in Family Courts: Addressing Procedural Bottlenecks

A study conducted by SELP examined procedural barriers affecting the timely disposal of family court cases in Bangladesh, identifying critical challenges, including delays in case processing, frequent adjournments, procedural inefficiencies and weak case management. To address these challenges, the study recommends streamlining court procedures, strengthening judicial capacity, improving case management systems and introducing necessary legal and administrative reforms to ensure faster, more efficient and equitable access to justice.

2. Identifying Procedural Bottlenecks in Nari-o-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Tribunals



Photo: National consultation presenting findings from joint research by the Bangladesh Supreme Court and BRAC, 2 May 2026.

A joint research study by the Bangladesh Supreme Court and BRAC analysed 4,040 disposed cases from 42 Nari-o-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Tribunals across 32 districts, revealing critical challenges in justice delivery. Key findings included a 3% conviction rate, approximately 70% acquittal rate and an average case disposal time of 1,370 days, significantly exceeding the legally mandated 180 days, with approximately 22 hearings per case. These findings informed policy dialogue among government, judicial and development stakeholders to identify necessary reforms aimed at establishing a more efficient, timely and survivor-centred justice system.

ABHOY **PROJECT**

Creating Safe and Nurturing Environments

ABHOY is a five-year BRAC initiative jointly implemented by the Education Programme (BEP) and Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme in underserved urban settlements of Narayanganj and Gazipur, funded by The Light Foundation (TLF).

The project aims to promote Early Childhood Development (ECD) and prevent Gender-Based Violence (GBV) by creating safe, nurturing environments for children and strengthening support systems for women and families.

Key Activities:

- Community awareness and engagement through tea stall meetings, Popular Theatre and Legal Awareness Sessions.
- Free legal aid and protection services, including legal counselling, ADR and court case support.
- Daycare and Play Lab services for young children to promote safe care and early learning.
- Positive parenting and caregiver capacity building to strengthen nurturing care and child development.
- SBCC campaigns and community mobilisation to promote gender equality, prevent GBV and increase awareness of available services.

Laying the Foundation for Effective ABHOY Implementation

Before implementation, project staff participated in a four-day Capacity Strengthening Workshop, followed by field attachments with SELP to gain practical insights into legal aid, ADR and community mobilisation.



Photo: Internal Kick-off Meeting of the Staff of The Light Foundation (TLF) funded Project

Building on these learning opportunities, an Internal Kick-off and Implementation Planning Workshop brought together colleagues from BEP and SELP, along with senior management, to establish a shared understanding of project objectives, implementation strategies, operational priorities and coordination mechanisms.

The process clarified roles and responsibilities, strengthened collaboration between the two programmes and equipped the project team with the knowledge, confidence and guidance required for implementation.

Looking Ahead: Sustaining Progress **Through Collective Action**

During the first half of 2026, SELP continued its efforts to strengthen girls' agency, expand access to justice, promote community engagement and contribute to evidence-based legal and policy reform. Through programme interventions, research, partnerships and collective advocacy, SELP continued to connect community-level initiatives with broader systems-level efforts. Building on these activities, the programme remains committed to strengthening collaboration, supporting inclusive approaches and advancing its ongoing efforts towards social empowerment and legal protection.