



## Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project

# SMILE

Newsletter | Issue 1 & 2 | January - December 2017

### Scaling up of AVCB II to 1,080 unions



On 9 April 2017, Local Government Division with the assistance of Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project (AVCB II) celebrated the Scaling up of Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Project. The aim of the event was to acknowledge the achievements treasured in the pilot phase (2009-2015), share reflections, experience and learning of the AVCB project with a view to encouraging all relevant stakeholders in making the AVCB II successful.

The celebration was graced by the participation of Mr. Abdul Malek, Secretary, LGD as the Chief Guest while Mr. Mario Ronconi, Minister-Counsellor, Head of Cooperation, Head of Unit, European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, and Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Country Director, UNDP Bangladesh as Special Guests. Mr. Iqramul Haque, Additional Secretary, Local Government Division and National Project Director, AVCB II Project chaired the event. Around 180 participants from relevant government and non-government stakeholders of AVCB Pilot and AVCB II areas, government officials from central, division and district

administration, representatives from local government institution - mostly UPs, NGO Officials, media professionals and the community people who were directly benefited by village courts steered by AVCB Project were present in the event.

Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Country Director, UNDP Bangladesh in his speech said, Bangladesh Government has brought several reforms in the justice system which reduces time, cost and number of visits to the court which are also reflected in the Village Courts system and eventually ensures access to justice.

European Union has a higher expectation to implement the AVCB II project which will be established in line with the mainstream justice system and eventually it will be sustainable, said Mr. Mario Ronconi, Minister-Counsellor, Head of Unit and Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Bangladesh.

Chief Guest of the event Mr. Abdul Malek, Secretary, LGD said, AVCB II is adopted based on the Village Courts Act 2006. Cumulatively, through Pilot and Second Phase 1,431 unions of Bangladesh is being supported, which is only one-third of the total number of unions. Therefore, the government has taken initiatives to establish *ejlash*, distribution of VC forms and registers throughout the country.

Mr. Iqramul Haque, Chair of the session, Additional Secretary, LGD and National Project Director, AVCB II Project suggested to coordinate with and motivate local NGOs in the monthly NGO coordination meeting at district and upazila level and requested the local administration to cooperate in the monitoring of Village Courts performance.

#### WHAT'S INSIDE

Infographics; Publications corner [Page 2](#)

Capacity building training; Youth workshop [Page 3](#)

Photo feature [Page 4 & 5](#)

Consultation with district judiciary and police [Page 6](#)

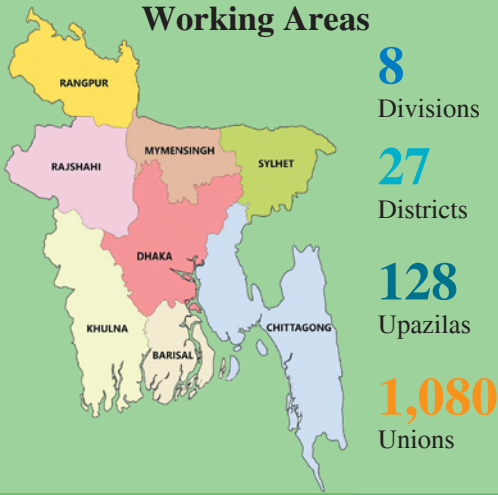
Workshops on gender [Page 6](#)

Media coverage [Page 7](#)

Half yearly coordination meeting; Planning and review workshop [Page 8](#)

# Infographics

January - December 2017



Developed capacity of  
**11,960**  
service providers

**21,367**  
Cases  
Reported

**Village Courts**  
dispute  
resolutions

**14,427**  
Cases  
Resolved

**11,988**  
Decisions  
Implemented



**20 million**  
people will  
receive services

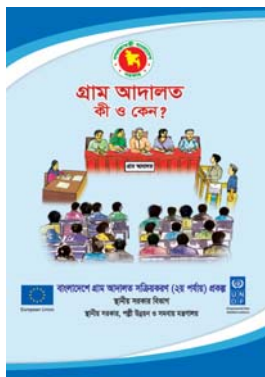
## Publications corner



AVCB II Project and District Training Pool (DTP) members use this training manual for capacity development of village courts service providers. This manual was endorsed by NILG.



For raising mass awareness the leaflet on 'Village Courts: Let's resolve local disputes locally' promotes basic information by narrating services of village courts

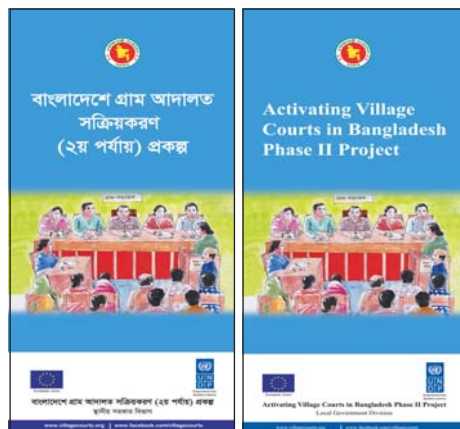


'Village Courts: What and Why?' a pocket card describes legal provisions and procedures of village courts which will guide relevant stakeholders effectively

'Village Court' a poster consisting key messages of village courts including fees etc. generates mass awareness among community people



1,080 Village Courts Assistants (VCA) conduct courtyard meetings regularly with community people for raising their awareness following the courtyard meeting flipchart.



AVCB II Project published its brochure for disseminating information on its major objectives and activities among various stakeholders



## Capacity development of village court stakeholders

In 2017, AVCB II Project provided trainings to 11,960 service providers of village courts at upazila and district level to enhance their capacity. Participants of these trainings mainly learnt about Village Court Act 2006, Village Court Rule 2016, VC procedures and steps, VC documentation, etc. For conducting these trainings effectively, as a technical partner National Institute of Local Government (NILG) formed a team of Master Trainers of village court at central level and 27 District Training Pools (DTP) in 27 districts with the assistance of Local Government Division (LGD). Later on, DTP members conducted trainings in respective districts and upazilas. As the Training Course Director respective DDLGs provided guidance and technical assistance to the DTP members as well as the project for conducting these training. Details of the trainings are as follows:

### Established a team of Master Trainers

NILG formed a team of Master Trainers comprising of 16



## Engaging youths for promoting village courts

In November 2017, AVCB II Project organized 1,080 workshops with youths at its enlisted unions for raising awareness as well as sensitizing them for spreading messages of village courts' services among rural people. Major objective of the workshops was to recognize importance as well as engaging youths on promoting messages of village courts to uphold justice and human rights at local levels. Approximately 45,797 youths including college and university students, representatives of youth cooperatives, clubs, member of cultural organizations, farmers, day laborers, workers, businessmen and village doctor etc. participated in these workshops.

In these workshops, participants developed work plans and committed that they would promote village courts among their peers, neighbors, youth clubs and others. Participants learnt



members from LGD, NILG, Project Management Unit (PMU) and individual experts and provided a three days Training of Trainers (ToT) on village court in February 2017.

### Developed 27 District Training Pools (DTPs)

A total of 315 DTP members received ToT with the partnership of NILG for providing trainings to the UP representatives, Village Courts Assistants and Village Police. Each DTP is comprised of 12 members: National Legal Aid Services Organization - District Legal Aid Officer, Bangladesh Police - Additional Superintendent of Police, Department of Social Services - Deputy Director, Department of Youth Development - Deputy Director, Department of Women Affairs - District Women Affairs Officer, Respective Partner NGOs (BLAST/ESDO/MLAA/Wave Foundation) and AVCB II Project.

### Training provided to UP stakeholders

With leadership of the Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO) the members of DTP provided capacity building trainings to 1,028 UP Chairmen, 1,119 Panel Chairmen, 1,035 UP secretaries and 7,703 UP members. In addition, 1,075 Village Courts Assistants were trained on village courts.

benefits of village courts and its process and how they can contribute to raise awareness among rural people from the workshops. In addition, UP chairmen and other key community stakeholders highly recognized contribution of youths in raising awareness on village courts.







Village Court Assistant (VCA) facilitates courtyard session for raising awareness on village courts among community people particularly women, poor and disadvantaged groups. In 2017, 1,838,726 people (1,250,604 women) were reached by 108,868 courtyard meetings



A community participant of a village courts rally, like her, 383,755 people participated (121,545 women) in 1,906 rallies at 1,080 unions

Union Parishad members and community people participate in a rally for raising mass awareness on village courts services at union level



Participants of a community sharing meeting at union level express their interest and commitments to make village courts functional with their active involvement at various levels



Activities of Mass Awareness



A signboard of village court at the Union Parishad premise attracts service seekers of the community to learn more about its services



A Village Courts Assistant provides counselling services to community people regarding cheap, easy and effective dispute resolution services of village courts



Community people watch an enter-education drama video to learn about process and services of village courts for resolving their petty disputes





Representatives of Local Government Division, European Union and UNDP sign the Project Document for Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II on 30 December 2015. The project follows this document in undertaking all relevant interventions to contribute in improving access to local justice for disadvantaged and marginalized groups in Bangladesh



Mr. Abdul Malek, Secretary, LGD addresses to the guests at the project's scaling up celebration event in Dhaka



Participants of the Project Steering Committee share their recommendations to push the AVCB II Project forward with policy guidance and facilitating inter-ministerial coordination



For developing massive awareness on village courts local representatives of various government institutions and non-government organizations share their suggestions during an outreach workshop. A total of, 200 outreach workshops were organized in the project working areas



Participants, of a consultation meeting on possible expansion of AVCB II Project in Chittagong Hill Tracts, share their opinions and recommendations



Project Implementation Committee (PIC) meeting puts day-to-day operational guidance to project with action plan monitoring and budget utilization tracking



Delegates of European Union interact with community people of Balaganj Upazila, Sylhet on village courts services



## Consultation with judiciary and police at district level on effective functioning of village courts

During October to November 2017, AVCB II Project organized six consultation meetings with district level judiciary and police in Gopalganj, Madaripur, Noakhali, Jamalpur, Sylhet and Naogaon districts. The major objectives of these meetings were to give an overview of Village Courts, share challenges and learnings from AVCB Project's pilot phase and seek recommendations from the participants to increase early screening and case referral as well as to enhance cooperation and coordination.



Engagement and role of Judiciary and Police Officials in relation to effective functioning of VCs is significant as appeals from VCs go to assistant judge for civil disputes and judicial magistrate for criminal matters as well as many petty disputes can also be resolved at VCs without going to police stations. In one consultation meeting Honourable Senior District and Sessions Judge of Noakhali Mr. Akbar Hossain Mridha remarked, "If Village Court (VC) is functional it will reduce peoples' sufferings, court burdens as well as case backlogs, the critical area is to build trust and confidence on VC among the community people."

During the consultation meetings, participants recognized the importance to make the Judiciary and Police aware on the VC activities as well as how VC works and how the procedures can be simplified for case transfer/refer from District Courts to VCs. It was also shared, police can play a pivotal role in reducing people's sufferings through promoting village courts information and message among justice seekers as well as a formal strategy/process could be devised for case referral from Police Stations.

## Consultation meetings on gender awareness raising strategy development

In order to get insights on the challenges for gender-equal access to village courts and gather recommendations on the appropriate awareness raising interventions, during September to October 2017, AVCB II organized four consultation meetings in Sylhet, Rangpur, Chittagong and Khulna. A total of 143 participants (58 women) including UP Chairmen, UP members, Women Development Forum representatives, representatives from women's rights organizations, local NGOs and government officials from local administration were present in the meetings.

The participants shared that getting women's representation in VC decision-making process is one of the major challenges for women and other disadvantaged groups in getting equal access to village courts. They also shared, ignorance of the parties about the relevant provision of law, lack of confidence of the parties on women panel members, and reluctance of the parties to nominate women as panel members and others are major challenges to promote women's representation in decision making process of the village courts.

To combat the above challenges participants recommended for massive awareness raising and behavioral change activities targeting both women and men at community level. In addition, engaging youths, religious leaders, vested interest groups in these awareness activities is important for creating better access to village courts by women as both panel members and service seekers.





# Media corner

More than One thousand news of Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project has been published/broadcasted in print and electronic media in 2017. These reports mainly covered trainings on village courts, rallies, workshops, planning and progress review meetings with various stakeholders. This media coverages also highlighted services of village courts particularly how the rural poor and marginalized people of the country are getting legal services within low cost and short period of time. Apart from this, for mass awareness raising on village courts a Television Commercial (TVC) was aired on four private TV channels (Channel I, NTV, RTV & Somoy TV) in December 2017.

The Daily Star

## To make village courts effective



**Modernized Tribunal**  
In rural Bangladesh, conflict management has been a part of the lives of the people. The Village Courts Act of 1976, which replaced and updated the Village Courts Act of 1976, provides for the establishment of a court in every Union. Village Courts are comprised of a panel of five: the Union Council's chairman, two other Union Council members, one of whom is chosen by each party in the dispute, and then two additional citizens by the parties respectively. The Courts have jurisdiction over civil disputes valued up to BDT 75,000. They also have jurisdiction over some crimes, including assault and theft, though they do not have the power to fine or imprison; rather they can grant simple injunctions and award compensation up to BDT 75,000. Administratively, the nodal department in charge of Union Courts is the Local Government Division (LGD) within the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Village Courts and Adarshon Councils are also under the supervision of LGD, rather than the Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs. This placement reflects the distinctiveness of the Village Courts and Adarshon Councils from the rest of the judicial system as Village Courts and Adarshon Councils are more local and less legal.  
Village Courts are largely ad-hoc and Union Council members have little knowledge of the Village Courts Act. The conflict management system in Bangladesh is still rudimentary, often favouring those parties with better financial means (or with close contact to institutions). Poor and marginalized groups are clearly disadvantaged. Negotiation and compromise hinder smooth conflict resolution processes. Traditional conflict management and resolution procedures (mediation of clan/village, tribal and kinship networks) are also under the supervision of Union Council, which is not well suited for small-scale conflicts. Nevertheless, their efficacy is severely limited in most local ownership-related conflicts.  
Meanwhile, development partners (DFP and ED) extending their technical support to the Ministry of Local Government Division for transformation of the local justice system on the basis of equity and inclusion within the context of broader local governance reform in Bangladesh. Village Courts can help to bridge between Bangladesh's informal and formal justice institutions by providing a fair arbitration process leading to delivering justice and human security. With a view to enhancing the fairness of Village Courts, policy makers can deem limiting the authority of the Union Council chairman, inclusion of rural ribs, requirements of public announcement of the sessions, and the right of parties to exclude a panelist. Ensuring that Village Courts apply the general body of substantive formal law may be amenable and important, but fairness may be served by specifying a core set of fundamental rights with which Village Court decisions would be required to comply.

Dhaka Tribune

## PM gives 23-point directives to DCs | Dhaka Tri PM gives 23-point directives to DCs



### Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Tribune File Photo Three-day DCs Conference-2017 began on Tuesday

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given 23-point directives to the deputy commissioners (DCs). She gave the directives while inaugurating the three-day DCs Conference-2017 at the Prime Minister's Office in Dhaka on Tuesday, reports the BSS.

#### Following are the directives:-

- Remain alert so that people don't become victims of harassment and deprivation in receiving government services.
- Work together with public representatives in establishing good governance at the grassroots level.
- Create new employments by strengthening rural economy so that the people don't become town-bound. Take steps so that the pressure of population on the towns is not increased.
- Take a motto for development of rural infrastructure and flourishing potential small and medium scale industries as well as alleviating poverty through generating employment.
- For minimising disparity between the rich and poor, take development programmes in such a way so that the highest number of people can get benefit from it. Ensure a balanced distribution of resources in building a disparity-less society.

# সমকাল

সোমবার ১০ এপ্রিল ২০১৭

## গ্রাম আদালতে ৭০ লাখ মানুষ বিচার পেয়েছে

**সমকাল প্রতিবেদক**  
গ্রাম আদালতের মাধ্যমে গত বছরে ৭০ লাখেরও বেশি মানুষ বিচার পেয়েছে। এই সংখ্যা ৩৯ লাখের ২০০টি অধিক। আদালত থেকে বিচার পেয়েছে ছয় হাজার মামলা গ্রাম আদালতের সার্বভৌমত্ব রয়েছে। হাজারেকটি মামলা নিষ্পত্তিতে সর্বোচ্চ ২৯ দিন সময় লাগে।  
পাতকাল থেকেই গ্রাম আদালত সক্রিয়ভাবে কাজ-চালাচ্ছে। প্রতিটি সপ্তাহে এক-একটি গ্রাম আদালতের বিচার পরিচালনা করে আসছে।  
ইউএনডিপি-র মাধ্যমে সার্বভৌমত্বের আওতাধীন গ্রাম আদালতের বিচার পরিচালনা করে আসছে।  
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ইউএনডিপি-র মাধ্যমে সার্বভৌমত্বের আওতাধীন গ্রাম আদালতের বিচার পরিচালনা করে আসছে।





## Half yearly coordination meeting on progress review and planning at district level

For reviewing progress, way to overcome challenges as well as developing effective workplans for 2018 AVCB II Project organized half yearly coordination meetings in 27 districts in November 2017. The meetings were mostly inaugurated by Deputy Commissioners of concern districts and Divisional Commissioners while Chief Judicial Magistrates, Police Supers, Assistant Deputy Commissioners, Upazila Chairmen were present as special guests. Deputy Directors Local Government (DDLGs) from the project areas chaired the meeting and UP Chairmen/Panel Chairmen, representatives from Districts Training Pools (DTPs), UNOs, media and others took part.



Major discussion points of these meetings were regularizing meetings of Village Courts Management Committees (VCMCs), quantity and quality of case register process, creating mass awareness, women leadership as panel members of village courts etc. These meetings resulted an action plan and commitments from the participants to ensure proper guidance and decisions whenever required from their end to make village courts better functional.

## Annual review and planning workshop with key ministries' and undp representatives

AVCB II Project in collaboration with the Local Government Division (LGD) organized an Annual Review and Planning Workshop from 30 November to 2 December 2017 in Habiganj, Sylhet. The event was inaugurated by Mr. Iqramul Haque, Additional Secretary, LGD & National Project Director, AVCB II Project while Mr. Emdad Ulla Mian, Joint Secretary (UP), LGD was present as special guest.



The workshop accommodated thematic discussions, target versus achievements and scope of areas of getting support from various ministries to achieve these targets. At the end of the workshop, a multi-year plan from 2018 to 2019 was developed. Mr. AHM Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Abdur Rashid, Joint Director, NILG, Mr. Mashud Ahmed, Joint Secretary, Mr. Liakot Ali, Joint Chief, Mr. Saifur Rahman, Assistant Chief, Dr. Syeda Naushin Parnini, Senior Assistant Secretary, Mr. Golam Md. Baten, Assistant Chief (Planning), LGD, Mr. Saiful Islam, Deputy Director, IMED, Mohammad Habib Ullah, Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Finance and 27 Deputy Directors Local Government from project areas, representatives from UNDP and AVCB II project team took part in the event.

Mr. Iqramul Haque, National Project Director (NPD) welcomed all the participants from government, UNDP Bangladesh, district staff and Project Management Unit (PMU). He mentioned that during the Pilot phase, AVCB Project covered 351 unions while AVCB II works in 1,080 unions for activating village courts and we should plan further to ensure VC services and facilities across the country.

Ms. Shaila Khan, Advisor, Business Development, and Assistant Country Director of UNDP Bangladesh emphasized on coordinated Management Information System (MIS). She remarked that UNDP should build coordination and cooperation among the projects, government and other stakeholders for MIS. She also reiterated on organizing divisional quarterly meetings with DLGs and other stakeholders for reviewing progress regularly.

### For more information

**Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project**  
Local Government Division  
IDB Bhaban (12th Floor), Sher-e-Bangla Nagar,  
Agargaon, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh  
Phone: +88 02 9183466-8