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# Bangladesh Quarterly Development Update

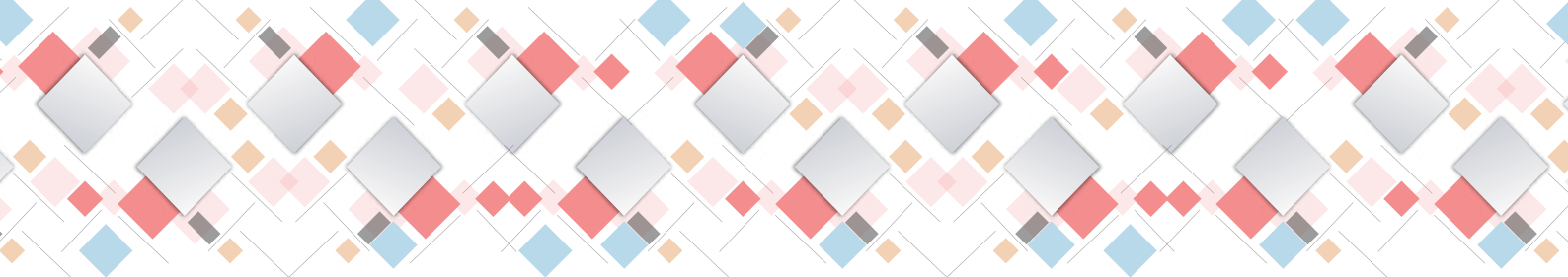
January - March  
2018



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## Bangladesh Quarterly Development Update

January - March, 2018



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## IV. UNDP's Contribution to Bangladesh's Development: Activating Village Courts for Taking Justice to the Rural People's Door Step

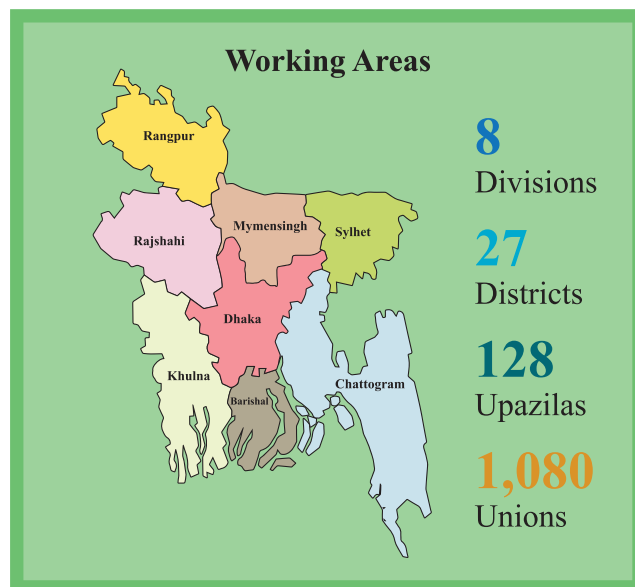
Latifa Begum of Mymensingh spent almost one year in attending the court hearings after filing a complaint to the police station against her son-in-law for damaging the outer gate of her house. Later, in 2017, the court referred the case to resolve at the village courts, hence, the respective union took the initiative to resolve the dispute through village court. The village court resolved that dispute within only seven days and ensured pay back of BDT 5,000 (US\$ 60) as compensation to Latifa.



“I am very happy with the services of the village court, as it helped to settle my dispute in its first hearing. If the village court operates in this way, poor people like me do not need to go to Police Station or the district courts to resolve petty disputes” expressed Latifa Begum.

Like, Latifa Begum approximately 40,000 rural people including 28% women were benefitted through the services of village courts over the period of July 2017 to February 2018 in the working areas of Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II (AVCB II) Project.

With financial & technical supports from European Union (EU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Bangladesh AVCB II Project facilitates local authorities in making village courts functional at 1,080 unions. The Local Government Division (LGD) of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) is implementing this project for creating wider access to dispute resolutions services for the rural people particularly the poor and vulnerable.



Following successful implementation of a Pilot Phase (2009 – 2015), AVCB II Project has been scaled up to 1,080 unions of 128 upazilas under 27 districts of eight divisions, offering dispute resolution services to 21 million rural people.



The overarching objective of the AVCB II Project is to contribute to improve the access to justice for disadvantaged and marginalized groups of people in Bangladesh.

**The specific objectives of the project are:**

- To make local authorities more responsive to local justice needs and offer appropriate legal services in the form of well-functioning village courts.
- To empower local people, especially women, the poor and vulnerable groups to seek remedies for injustices and to resolve their disputes at the local level in an expeditious, transparent and affordable manner. Major accomplishments through program intervention (as of February 2018):

*Role of village courts in justice system of Bangladesh* “Dispute resolution through Village Courts (VCs) is more restorative in nature and the objective of introducing Village Courts is to restore peace in the community by reducing grievances among the parties” remarked honorable Senior District and Sessions Judge of Bhola Mr. Ferdous Ahmed during a consultation meeting in February organized by AVCB II Project.

*Given the context of over 3.2 million cases are pending before the formal courts, effective functioning village courts could decrease case pressures on formal courts and lessen peoples’ suffering in accessing justice. In order to reduce the burden on the higher courts, as well as to increase access to justice for the wider population specially poor and women, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) passed the Village Courts Act in 2006, which was amended in 2013, empowering Union Parishads (UPs) to resolve disputes that fall under jurisdiction of village courts. A VC is formed by the UP chair and 4 nominated members (2 nominated by the plaintiff and 2 by the defendant) which can deal with petty nature of civil and criminal matters with a financial value up to TK 75,000 (US\$ 914)*

## **Role of AVCB II Project in facilitating local justice**

### **Improve capacity of Union Parishads (UPs) to provide judicial services through VCs**

The project has provided VC’s forms-registers, ejlas (court bench), Village Courts Assistants (VCAs) and capacity building training to the service providers of 1,078 UPs. Capacity building training has provided to 12,491 VC’s service providers. Among the service providers 1,028 (Women:12) were UP Chair, 1,119 (Women: 93) Panel Chair, 1,035 (Women:37) UP Secretaries and 1,078 (Women:544) Village Courts Assistants (VCAs) and 8,221 (Women: 2187) UP members.

Members of Districts Training Pools (DTP) sensitized and capacitated by the project got engaged in capacity building training of VC’s service providers. The Deputy Director, Local Government (DDLG) of the respective district was responsible for organizing the training as Course Coordinator, with the assistance of the District Facilitators (DFs), NGO’s District Coordinators and Upazila Coordinator.

### **Revise Legal and Policy Framework for effective village courts**

Effective functioning of Village Courts could decrease pressure of case backlogs on formal judiciary and lessen peoples’ suffering in accessing justice. In this context, AVCB II Project engages in

advocacy and sensitization activities with the judiciary and police for possible early case screening as well as increasing case referrals from District Courts to Village Courts. To enhance cooperation and coordination among Village Courts, judiciary and police, the project organizes consultation meetings with district level judiciary and police to make Village Courts more effective and functional.

Relentless advocacy and coordination with district level judiciary and police resulted 2,200 cases referred from district courts to village courts during July 2017 to February 2018. It shows, village courts are gradually embedding in the justice system of Bangladesh, which is saving both time and money for resolving petty disputes of rural people.

### **Enable community people to access their services from village courts**



A signboard of village courts attracts visitors who come to receive regular services from union parishad

To increase awareness as well as service seeking behavior among rural people particularly women, the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized groups, the project organizes court yard meetings, video shows, community sharing meetings, workshops with youths, rallies etc. at community level. For these, project uses various communications and behavior change materials like, signboard, leaflet, flip charts, poster, public service announcement (PSA) along with billboards and citizen charter boards in some selected areas. In addition to, regular awareness and outreach related interventions the project also works with local level government departments and likeminded non-government organizations (NGOs) to maximize awareness at community level. Through these activities, 36,79,383 community people (50% women) are aware of the major services of village courts. As a result, a total of 29,500 community members sought remedies through Village Courts between July’17 to February 2018.

## M&E and Knowledge Management Impact Study of AVCB phase II project

The project has commissioned a high-quality impact evaluation of AVCB Phase II project in Dhaka and Chittagong divisions through Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) method in coordination with Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA), Yale University, USA, and 3ie (International Initiative for Impact Evaluation). Baseline report of impact study is available now.

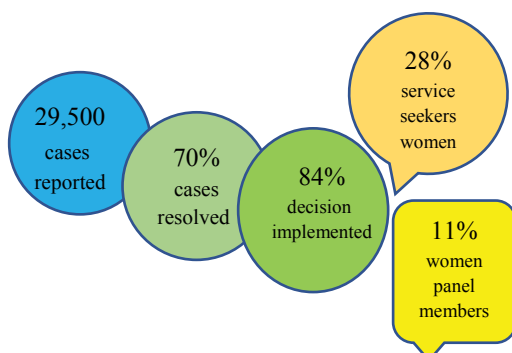
### Baseline Study of AVCB II Project:

Baseline study of AVCB II project has been completed through Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA). According to the study the VCs are not well functioning and rarely used at present as a Dispute Resolution Mechanism (DRM) mostly due to lack of awareness of the people and UP officials and representatives and lack of material support to manage VC activities. Wherever used, the VCs do not follow the law and administrative procedures. The study also shows, increasing awareness of the people, improving expertise of UP officials and representatives to conduct VC, and providing some critical material services are key to making VCs functional.

### GoB involvement in monitoring Village Courts performance

Local administration (most notably district and upazila administrations) have become involved in monitoring the performance of village courts through the Village Courts Management Committee (VCMC). In total twenty-seven (27) District level VCMCs and one hundred twenty-eight (128) Upazila level VCMC have been formed in 27 districts and 128 upazila respectively by the end of 2017. In project areas 50% District and 60% Upazila VCMCs are meeting in accordance with the Government Order (GO) issued in 2012 to monitor village courts performance.

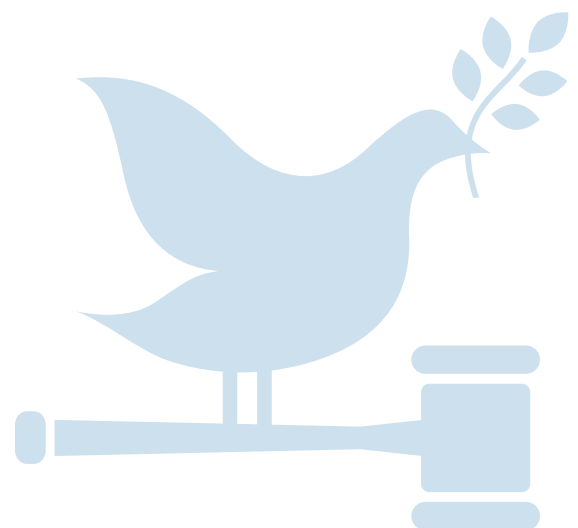
### At a glance: dispute resolutions through village courts



### Key Achievements as of February 2018:

- Village Courts Rules enacted in February 2016
- A cumulative total of 29,500 cases have been reported, of which 20,500 have been resolved. Of the resolved cases, 17,400 decisions have been implemented.
- A total of 59,000 people, particularly those from vulnerable communities have been extended direct access to localized justice through village courts.
- 2,200 cases have been transferred from district courts to village courts
- A total of, 8,400 women sought remedies through village courts

Comprehensive interventions of the AVCB II Project and government have been increasing access to local justice among rural people including women within 1,080 unions. Rural people's awareness and ability have also been improving to resolve petty disputes locally through functional village courts within short time and nominal costs. In addition to, an effective and regular mechanism for referring cases to village courts from District Courts is generating scopes to reduce case backlogs in formal courts to some extents.





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