

Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project

Interim Report

(August 2018 – December 2019)

DCI-ASIE/2015/372-228



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



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

AACO	Account Assistant Cum Computer Operator
ADM	Additional District Magistrate
AVCB	Activating Village Court in Bangladesh
BCSAA	Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy
BIAM	Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHTDF	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility
CJM	Chief Judicial Magistrate
CLS	Community Legal Services
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DDLG	Deputy Director Local Government
DLAC	District Legal Aid Committee
DLAO	District Legal Aid Officer
DTP	District Training Pool
ESDO	Eco-Social Development Organization
EU	European Union
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
ICT	Information & Communication Technology
IPA	Innovations for Poverty Action
JATI	Judicial Administration Training Institute
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LGSP-III	Local Government Support Project (LGSP III)
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
LGD	Local Government Division
MLAA	Madaripur Legal Aid Association
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MIE	Monitoring, Inspection and Evaluation
MoCHTA	Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MoLGRD&C	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives
MoLJPA	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
MOPA	Ministry of Public Administration
MT	Master Trainer
MTR	Mid Term Review
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations

NLASO	National Legal Aid Services Organization
NPD	National Project Director
NILG	National Institution of local Government
PAGODA	Pillar Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreement
PIC	Project Implementation Committee
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RC	Regional Council
RFI	Request for Information
RTPP	Revised Technical Project Proposal
TOR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training-of-Trainers
TPP	Technical Project Proposal
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
VC	Village Court
VCA	Village Court Assistant
VCMC	Village Courts Management Committee
VCMIS	VC Management Information System

1. Summary and context of the action

1.1 Description

- i. Name of the beneficiaries of grant contract: The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
- ii. Name and title of the contact person for the Project: Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh
- iii. Name of partners in the action: Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C)
- iv. Title of the Action: Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II
- v. Contract number: DCI-ASIE/2015/372-22831
- vi. Start date and end date of the reporting period: 01 August 2018 - 31 December 2019
- vii. Target country(ies) or region(s): Bangladesh
- viii. Final beneficiaries/or target groups (including numbers of women and men):

Target group(s):

15,120 locally-elected representatives and officials, and 10,800 village police in 1,080 Union Parishads, 27 Deputy Directors of the local government and 128 Upazila Nirbahi Officers.

Final Beneficiaries: The final beneficiaries will be the people of 1,080 unions of plain land and people of 121 UPs of three CHT districts of Bangladesh. They will directly benefit from an easily accessible, efficient, speedy, and accountable justice delivery system at the local level.

1.2 Background and area of the project intervention

1.2.1 Brief description of context in which the action was formulated

Extensive case backlog in the lower (formal) courts compounded by long, cumbersome, and complex procedures mean that a large proportion of Bangladeshis, especially the poor, are deprived of their access to justice. The Government of Bangladesh passed the Village Courts Act 2006 to address such issues. However, the law was not functional, and the citizenry had limited incentive or confidence to take disputes to the village courts.

The Local Government Division (LGD) under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) implemented a pilot project called Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh (AVCB) Project (2009-2015) in 351 unions of Bangladesh with financial and technical support from the EU and UNDP. The aim was to improve access to justice through village courts in those 351 unions. The pilot project provided support for building the capacity of service providers, creating demand of village courts through awareness-raising initiatives, policy reform actions, and strengthening an institutional monitoring system.

The success of the AVCB project motivated UNDP, the EU, and GoB to scale it up and launch a follow-up phase in January 2016 targeting 21 million people in 1,080 unions. The traditional justice system plays a vital role in dispensing social justice in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the tribal people mainly rely on this system. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the system, with the aim to enhance access to justice mechanisms in the CHT.

Hence, the Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project expanded its activities in 121 unions of three CHT districts on 10 October 2019. The overall objective of this project is to contribute to improving access to justice for disadvantaged and marginalized groups in 1,201 unions of Bangladesh. The specific objectives are to make local authorities more responsive to justice needs and offer appropriate legal services in the form of a well-functioning village court/local justice mechanism in CHT and to empower local people, especially women and the poor and vulnerable groups to seek remedies for injustices and to resolve their disputes at the local level quickly - economically and transparently.

1.2.2 Implementation modality of the project

This project is implemented under the National Implementation Modality (NIM) with the support of Project Management Unit (PMU), headed by the National Project Coordinator. The day-to-day activities are being implemented through three components, namely Programme, M&E and Knowledge Management, and Operations. In addition, four NGOs experienced in dispute resolution and/or supporting Village Courts are hired by UNDP, under the Responsible Party Agreement (RPA) to implement a number of activities. They are mainly responsible for providing support to UPs in running village courts and mobilizing the community towards village courts through outreach at the grassroots level. For CHT areas, three local NGOs with working experience in CHT will be responsible for providing capacity-building of grassroots level traditional leaders and raising awareness of community people.

The National Project Director (NPD) appointed by the LGD is administering the day-to-day implementation and management. In addition, two committees - the Project Steering

Committee (PSC¹) and the Project Implementation Committee (PIC²) - are providing oversight functions. One PSC and three PIC meetings were held during this project period.

1.2.3 Geographical coverage of the project

The project is working with 1,199³ UPs (1078 UPs of plain land and 121 in CHT) in 154 upazilas (sub-districts) under 30 districts of 8 divisions. The distribution of unions by division and districts is given in the table below:

and districts is given in the table below:

Table-01 Distribution of working UPs by Divisions, Districts and Upazila				
Sl. #	Division	District	No. of Upazila	No. of UP
1	Barisal	Bhola	5	46
		Barguna	4	25
		Patuakhali	4	45
2	Chattogram	Chandpur	5	44
		Chittagong	5	46
		Cox's Bazar	6	36
		Noakhali	6	46
		Rangamati	10	50
		Bandarban	9	38
		Khagrachari	7	33
3	Dhaka	Faridpur	6	35
		Gazipur	5	26
		Gopalganj	3	32
		Madaripur	4	43
4	Khulna	Bagerhat	6	42
		Khulna	6	41
		Satkhira	4	47
5	Mymensingh	Jamalpur	4	38
		Mymensingh	3	33
		Netrokona	3	28
6	Rajshahi	Naogaon	6	49
		Pabna	5	37
		Sirajganj	5	45
7	Rangpur	Gaibandha	4	52
		Kurigram	6	47
		Panchagarh	5	43
		Rangpur	5	41
8	Sylhet	Moulvibazar	4	41
		Sunamganj	3	20
		Sylhet	6	50
	Grand Total	30	154	1199

¹The PSC provides policy guidelines for project implementation and approval of implementation decisions. The local government secretary of the MoLGRD&C chairs the PSC

²The PIC is chaired by National Project Director (NPD), who is responsible for supervising the day-to-day implementation and management of project activities. The PIC monitors and evaluates the progress of the program, and guides project personnel in the preparation of the annual work plan, etc

³Could not start intervention in two UPs of Charfasson upazila of Bhola district due to non-existence of UP bodies to run the village courts

Executive Summary

In order to improve access to justice and bring justice to the doorstep of the rural people, the EU, GoB and UNDP funded Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II (AVCB Phase II) Project to assist the Local Government Division (LGD) for activating village courts (VC) in 1,078 UPs of Bangladesh. It has helped LGD in setting up village courts in 1,078 UPs; capacity-building of VC's service providers (UP representatives and officials); reviewing legal framework; increasing awareness on the role and function of village courts; and strengthening GoB's monitoring capacity. During this reporting period, the project has also extended its support in three CHT districts covering a further 121 UPs and initiated its interventions, with the aim to strengthen the traditional justice system in three CHT districts and explore the possibility of village courts in CHT areas doing an action research.

Project supported village courts in 1,078 Union Parishads have provided efficient and effective legal services to 161,893 rural people, including women and vulnerable people till December 2019. They accessed village courts services and obtained a quick remedy with high satisfaction – about 96% of the village courts users were satisfied.

The project targeted women and encouraged them to seek justice from VCs through awareness-raising activities. As a result, 47,281 (29% of total) women sought services from VC. Besides, the project also contributed to increasing the capacity of about 11,300 women leaders, enabling them to provide legal services as VC panel members. Female proportion of the VC panels increased to 17% in 2019 from 2% in 2017, indicating enhanced involvement of women in the VC's decision-making process. According to the Midterm Review (MTR) of the project, VC has provided a forum for women to speak in a safe space and women members sitting on the panel are treated equally and their decisions are respected.

The village courts have received 8,422 cases from district courts demonstrating that these courts are contributing to reduce case backlogs in the district courts. During Midterm Review (MTR), judiciary stated that VC is a key mechanism for reducing the inflow of cases and pressure on formal courts. Social and economic benefits to the communities they serve are significant. Project supported village courts recovered BDT 541.60 million (USD 6.40 million) directly as compensation from respondents between July 2017 to December 2019, which was provided to the applicants. The applicants used these for multiple purposes such as treatment, meeting family expenses, doing small business, land recovery etc. (Sources: Village Court User Survey, January 2020). VCs restores peaceful relations between neighbors and family members, cited by the MTR report.

The project has drafted the proposal of Village Courts Act 2006 (Amended in 2013) amendment through a series of consultations with different stakeholders and beneficiaries and it will be finalized through a validation workshop.

The project continues to raise awareness at the grassroots through courtyard meetings, community meetings, multimedia shows, rallies, and distribution of information, education and communication (IEC) materials. It has delivered messages on village courts to approximately 8.7 million rural people through its grassroots- level awareness raising activities. In addition, the project has reached almost 163 million people through social media (3 million) and mobile SMS (160 million).

It has provided support to Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (MIE) wing of LGD to revise the Decentralized Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (DMIE) system, by which

local administration, including Union Parishad (UP) will be involved more in monitoring of village courts. During this reporting period, DMIE system has been revised and finalized after consultation with different stakeholders, and taking suggestions from the Cabinet Division. Furthermore, District and Upazila level Village Courts Management Committees have also started monitoring village courts performance.

The EU, UNDP and GoB supported AVCB Phase II project has created strong ownership and demand of the VCs towards the government, neighboring union parishads and beneficiaries. Government has demonstrated its support to this approach by amending VCs rule, issuing different directives to support the functioning of VC, expressing their willingness to scale up this project across all unions of Bangladesh, allocating addition cash contribution from its development budget (particularly for the hardware component), and providing UP-level staff support through completing the deployment of Account Assistant cum Computer Operator (AACO).

The exit strategy and sustainability of this project relies on the appointment of Account Assistant cum Computer Operators (AACOs). LGD has decided that the Village Courts Assistant (VCA) position, created by this project, will be taken over by the AACO following a recruitment drive. Meanwhile, 292 AACOs have been recruited in project areas out of 1,078 UPs. The project has provided training to 93 AACOs and plan to provide training to remaining AACOs so that they can assist UPs in running village courts, taking over the responsibilities from VCAs. The recruitment process in many districts currently stayed by a High Court order following a Writ Petition, which the Local Government Division is looking into. These new recruits will also be trained under the project so that they can work as the bench clerk (*peshkar*) of the village court.

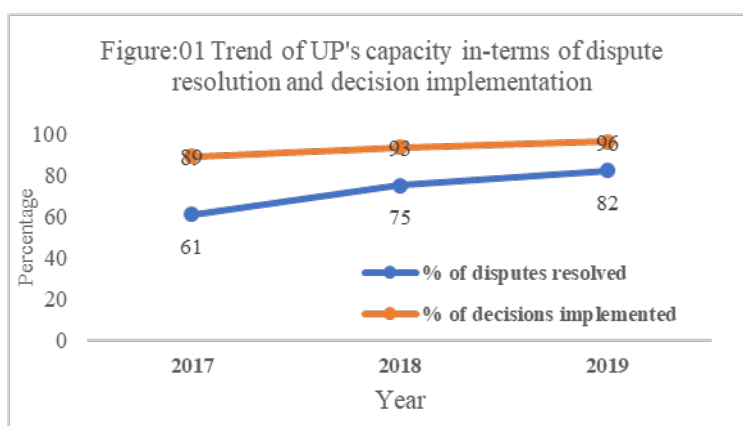
Despite the foreseeable challenges (mentioned under Section 3: Challenges and Lessons Learned) this project will continue to provide support to LGD to offer local justice to approximately 21 million rural people, to amend the Village Courts Act 2006 (Amended 2013), to strength monitoring system to monitor village courts performance, and develop and implement handover strategy of village courts activities to AACOs from VCAs. AVCB phase II project engagement in the CHT region will be a top priority in 2020.

Activities carried out during the reporting period

Activity Result 1.1: Capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level improved, key skills strengthened to enable Village Courts in new target unions, and local justice mechanisms in CHT to function effectively by the end of the project implementation.

The village courts in 1,078 UPs have offered dispute resolution services following the prescribed procedures with proper documentation. The capacity development initiative for VC's service providers has resulted in effective application of the law and regulations during proceedings.

Figure-01 shows that the skill of service providers on dispute resolution and implementation of VC's decisions is gradually increasing in project areas. Being capacitated by project support, village courts in project areas resolved more disputes and implemented more decisions in 2019 than the previous two years.



A study conducted in November 2018 also shows that acceptance of VC decisions by the community is high as across the project areas, only 16 appeals were made by aggrieved parties challenging the VC's decisions which was only 0.03% of total village courts decisions. Similarly, higher courts also recognized the village courts decisions as higher courts gave verdicts of appeal cases rejecting the appeal and keeping unaltered the VC's decisions.

41 traditional leaders in CHT areas who received ToT on "Case Management & Documentation on Traditional System" are now ready with drafted training manuals to provide training to grassroots-level traditional leaders.

a. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)

Table- 02 Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 1.1 Capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level improved and key skills strengthened to enable Village Courts in new target Unions and local justice mechanisms in CHT to function effectively by the end of the project implementation</i>				
1.1.1 # UPs equipped with ejlas (court bench), court forms and registers and have trained Village Courts Assistants (VCAs)/AACOs	0	1080	1078 (1078 UPs are equipped with trained VCAs , VC forms & registers and ejlas (Court	UPs in Bhola district are in dispute over new notification for the formation of new UP. Case filed and stay order issued by High Court.

Table- 02 Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
			Bench))	LGD advised to postpone activation in the two UPs
1.1.2 # of national training institutes who have updated information on VC issues in their regular training curriculum/ syllabus.	1	4	1 (NILG endorsed Training Manual Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs informed that VC issue already included in foundation training courts of JATI, and discussed in different training courses as Statute Review)	In response to the letter issued by LGD to the cabinet division to integrate the VC issue within the training curriculum to the pertinent training institutes, the Cabinet Division issued a letter (17 April 2019) to the MoLJPA, MOPA, and MHA instructing integrating the VC issue with the training curriculum to their pertinent training institutes.
1.1.3 # of District Training Pools established	0	27	27	
1.1.4 # Officials and representatives of Union Parishads trained on village courts functions (disaggregated by gender)	0	15,120	28,400 Female: 6,000	28,400 includes refresher training to the same group
1.1.5 % UP representatives and officials in AVCB project areas who gave correct responses to 9 key knowledge questions.	0%	55%	-	Impact study will be conducted in 2020 through third-party to know the status
1.1.6 % UPs in the project area which correctly maintain all VC forms and registers.	0	100%	Monitoring reports indicate that registers and forms are correctly maintain by VCA	Same as above
1.1.7 # AACOs trained to take over role of Village Court Assistant (disaggregated by gender)	0	1080	93 (292 AACOs recruited out of 1,078 UPs and provided	The LGD has planned that the position of Village Courts Assistant (VCA) created by

Table- 02 Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
			training to 93 AACOs)	this project will be taken over by the Accounts Assistant Cum Computer Operator (AACO) and accordingly go for recruitment, but recruitment of this position in few districts currently stayed by a High Court's Order following a Writ Petition.
1.1.8 % of resolved cases which are enforced	80	80%	90% (Dec '19)	
1.1.9 % of cases heard in AVCB area which are within the VCs jurisdiction and in compliance with the correct procedure	0	100%	Field visit findings indicate that cases that were reported were VC's jurisdiction	Impact study will be conducted in 2020 through third-party to know the status
1.1.10 In CHT, # of traditional leaders, local CSOs, local administrations, judiciary, legal professionals and other relevant actors that are knowledgeable about local dispute resolution systems and norms	0	5,362	41 (ToT provided to 41 traditional leaders)	Could not provide training to the grass root level traditional leaders as the project got approval on 7 th October 2019
1.1.11 Proper documentation in support to the functioning of local justice mechanisms is in place	0	50% of project areas of CHT	No progress	The project got approval on 7 th October 2019
1.1.12 Training material including other materials related to CHT is in place.	0	Yes	Revised ToT training module of traditional system	Same as above

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

1.1.1 Equip UPs with necessary forms, furniture, *ejlas* (court bench), VCAs, etc.

Prescribed forms, necessary furniture, *ejlas* (Court bench), and personnel (i.e. Village Court Assistants) are required for smooth delivery of justice. These include 22 types of forms and registers for a host of activities like recording cases, registering judgments, collecting court fees, issuing summons, etc.

During the reporting period, the project has re-printed and distributed below the number and types of VC forms and formats for 1,078 unions where quantity has been determined based on the requirement of each union.

Table-03 Brief information about types of VC forms and quantity distributed /				
Sl	Name of the forms	Quantity distributed (set)	No. of pages in a set	Use of the forms
1	Form-1 (Application form)	1443	150 Leaves	Use to file a case
2	Form-2 (Case Register)	1250	72 Leaves/144 pages	Use to record a case
3	Form-3 (Order Sheet of the case)	3142	120 Leaves	Use to record the order of the case
4	Form-4 (Summon to the defendant)	2646	120 leaves	To issue a summon to the defendant
5	Form-5 (Summon to the witness)	1513	120 leaves one side	To issues a summon to the witness
6	Form-6 (Instruction to nominate panel member)	2514	120 leaves	To use for instructing to nominate VC panel member
7	Form-7 (VC panel member nomination form)	1735	120 leaves	To use in nominating VC panel member
8	Form-8 (Request letter to the panel member asking attend VC session)	3101	120 Leaves	To keep the record of the attendance of the VC panel members
9	Form-9 (Solemn-nama)	1766	120 Leaves	To use for keeping record of dispute resolution through Solemn-nama
10	Form-10 (Attendance sheet)	1398	150 Leaves	To keep the record of the attendance of the applicant, defendant and the witness.
11	Form-11 (Case Slip)	500	120 Leaves	To provide information about following hearing date of the case
12 A	Form-12 (A- Decree or Order form)	1145	120 pages	To issue a decree or order of the case
12 B	Form-12 (B- Decree and Order Register)	991	120 Leaves/240 Pages	To maintain documentation about

Table-03 Brief information about types of VC forms and quantity distributed /				
Sl	Name of the forms	Quantity distributed (set)	No. of pages in a set	Use of the forms
				decree or order of the case
13	Form-13 (Compensation Register)	995	50 Leaves/100 pages both side	To maintain a registration of the VC compensated money
14	Form-14 (Fees/ Fine receipt)	1741	120 Leaves	To use in providing receipt against Fees/ Fine
15	Form-15 (Fees / Fine Register)	1025	100 48 Leaves/96 pages both side	To maintain documentation about Fees / Fine
16	Form-16 (Dispatch Register)	1414	108 Leaves	To use for registration of the UP letter dispatch
17	Form-17 (Quarterly report of dispute received and resolved)	199	48 Leaves	Form-17, 18 and 19 will be used to monitor progress of VC performance
18	Form-18 (Quarterly report of dispute received and resolved under Upazila level)	91	48 Leaves	
19	Form-19 (Quarterly report of dispute received and resolved under District level)	68	48 Leaves	
20	Form-20 (Recovery of compensation/ fine)	63	100 leaves	To use for maintaining recovery of compensation/fine
21	Form-21 (Transferring the case to the Criminal Court)	62	100 Leaves	To use for transferring the case to the criminal court

Knowledge and skills of all 1,078 VCAs have been developed through targeted training and mentoring. They have provided administrative support to union parishads (UPs) to run village courts with proper documentation and conducted awareness initiatives to create demand for the court's service.

1.1.2 Develop, update and print training materials (mainstreaming gender and vulnerability issues)

Development and distribution of Video Learning Aid (VLA)

During the reporting period, 5,000 DVDs of Video Learning Aid (VLA) and 200 DVDs of VLA with English subtitles have been produced and distributed to all unions of Bangladesh. It has been developed on LGD's approved script and through field testing. This material aims to increase the capacity of the various stakeholders of the VC trial process. The main user of this material includes VC's service providers. It provides users an overview on the village court trial process from case filing to dispute resolution in an interesting and entertaining manner.

Development, printing and distribution of Frequently Asked Question (FAQ)

The project has developed and printed 3,000 copies of FAQ. The FAQ, handy for quick information, will enhance the basic knowledge of different stakeholders and empower both service recipients and providers. It has been developed through a process having consultation with different stakeholders (service providers, service recipients, officials of LGD) and finally taking vetting from legal experts and LGD.

Develop and print guideline for providing information on legal services with distribution

During this reporting period the project has published 1,210 guidelines with information on legal services and distributed to 1,078 UPs. This material guides the Village Court Assistant when providing information to the justice seekers. It has been developed through a series of consultations and field testing.

Develop Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) module

Initially, ADR module has been drafted through a Consultant having a series of consultations such as KIIs, FGDs, meeting with relevant stakeholders (NILG and PMU staff), and then finalized by doing field tests and incorporating feedback of different stakeholders.

1.1.3 Form Master Trainer (MT) and District Trainers Pools (DTP⁴) and provide ToT for both

a. Provide refresher ToT (RToT) to District Training Pools (DTP) at NILG

Knowledge and skill of members of DTP that were established in 27 project districts have been refreshed through three days (Training of Trainer) ToT in partnership with NILG so that they can provide refresher training to the VC's service providers (UP representatives and officials, village courts assistants and village police). In total, 270 (Men:239 Women:31) DTP members received RToT through 14 batches of training. Considering sustainability of the village courts for ensuring legal services to the women and marginalized people of the rural areas, the DTP was formed in 2017 so that the DTP members can continue capacity development support to the VC's services provider on Village Courts after phasing out of the project.



Furthermore, based on the recommendation of MTR, the project has co-opted 128 UNOs and 27 DDLGs as DTP members -- having consultation with LGD & Cabinet Division and provided ToT where 14 DDLGs & 118 UNOs attended.

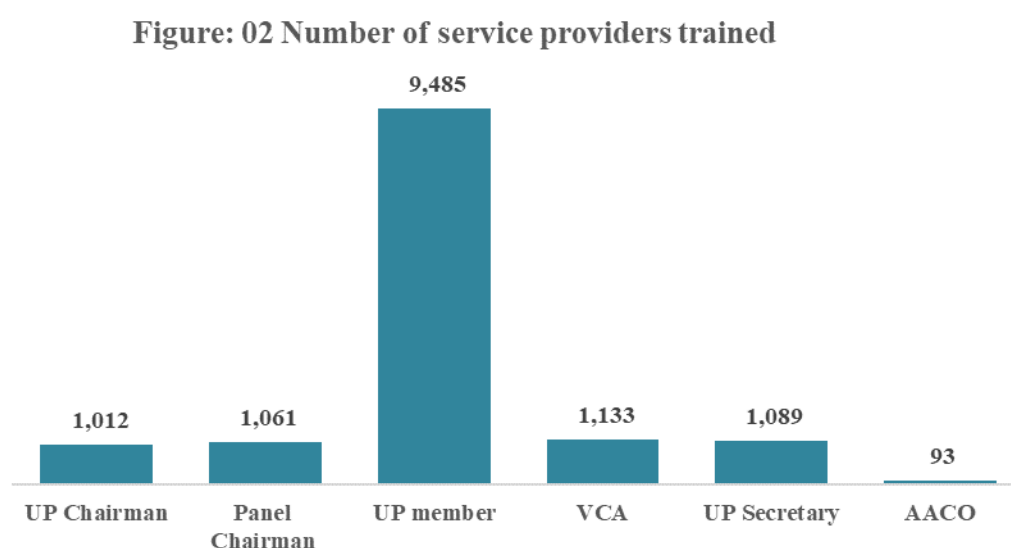
⁴District Training Pool (DTP) is comprised of GoB and project officials and experienced staff from partner NGOs and are responsible for training all Union Parishad (UP) functionaries and representatives about Village Courts.

b. Provide training to field staff on village courts

PNGOs hired by the project have recruited 29 new field level staff (Project Coordinator-1, District Coordinator-4 & Upazila Coordinator-24) due to staff drop out. During the reporting period, the project has provided a 5-day-long Training of Trainers (ToT) to the 29 newly recruited field level staff at Mymensingh in collaboration with NILG. The overall objective of the training was to enhance knowledge and skills of the participants on village courts, its practice, and documentation so that they can provide necessary technical support to the field staff for activating VCs.

1.1.4 Train all key actors on roles and functions of village courts and mainstreaming gender issues

The project supported capacity-building initiatives, which were attended by service providers of 1,078 unions and has increased the knowledge of service providers on Village Courts Act 2006 (amended in 2013) and its functions. Figure-02 shows that the DTP members who were turned into trainers, in turn conducted training sessions for 1,012 UP Chairmen, 1,061 Panel Chairmen, 9,485 UP members, 1,133 VCAs, 1,089 UP Secretaries, and 93 AACOs. Training of UP/panel chairpersons took two days, while those for UP secretaries, VCAs and UP members also took two days. Except for UP members, all training sessions were residential and held at the district level under the guidance of DDLGs. The training was interactive and enabled the participants to share their experiences and gain knowledge on areas such as the documentation process, constitution of VCs, trial procedure, and the maintenance of case records.





Assistant Superintendent of Police, Madaripur district is conducting training on village courts



District Legal Aid Officer, Faridpur district is conducting training on village courts

1.1.5 Sensitization of key stakeholders on gender and village courts

The project conducted 205 workshops with members of Women Development Forum (WDF) during the reporting period to enhance their knowledge and motivation. The workshop included a video of village court processes and discussion about opportunities and importance for women UP members to participate in the VC panel. Of the 7,153 participants, 5,831 were women.

District level workshops titled “Sensitization Workshop on Gender and Village Courts” were held in 17 districts including Khulna, Rangpur, Sirajgonj, Noakhali, Chandpur, Barguna, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Naogoan, Sylhet, Bagerhat, Faridpur, Patuakhali, Mymensingh, Gazipur, Jamalpur, and Chattogram, where 496 women and 567 men participated.



The workshop was participated by a mixed group of stakeholders that included UP chairmen, members, different levels of government officials playing roles as district training pool members, members of village courts management committees, judicial officers, NGOs, journalists, lawyers, women’s rights activists etc.

The workshops identified different challenges for women in seeking justice and in participating in VC decision-making process, which include prevalence of social customs and tradition about women’s role in society, lack of self-esteem of women, lack of agency of women UP members in performing their responsibilities (as in some cases husbands of the women UP members still represent them), lack of access to knowledge and information for women, lack of support from family and society to seek justice and to participate in public life, and specifically lack of support from the UP personnel (male) in performing their responsibilities in UP/VC. Highlighting the need to ensure a gender-friendly environment in

VC operations, participants made individual commitments to promote gender-equal access to VC. To mention few of the commitments:

- Carrying out publicity about VC among community women in the respective constituency of the UP members
- Discussing about the VC and about women's participation in different discussion meetings; including session on VC in ongoing training of youth development affairs
- Carrying out VC activities in fair and transparent manner; cooperating and encouraging women's participation in VC panel
- Dissemination of information about VC among the students and among the guardians through guardians' assembly
- Ensuring cooperation so that women can access VC services in a congenial environment
- Referring women and men to VC when asking advice about settling small disputes
- Including agenda on gender and VC in every monthly meeting of UP, taking efforts to ensure women's representation in all the cases of VC

Participants of the workshop also made several recommendations which include:

- Organizing such capacity building workshops at the union level covering all UP personnel and community people
- Organizing massive awareness campaigns at the village level about village courts and about opportunity for women to settle their disputes locally, and about nomination of women in the panel
- Carrying out motivational work and capacity building/leadership training for grassroots women to encourage their representation in the VC panel process.

1.1.6 Establishment of clear and systematic coordination mechanisms with Upazila and District authorities

Annual Progress Review Meeting at District level

District administration of 26 districts have organized 26 Annual Progress Review Meetings where Deputy Commissioner and DDLG of those concerned districts attended as Chief guest and Chair of the session. The objective of these meetings was to review the VC's performance so far, address problems or difficulties faced by UPs to run village courts, learning gathered by UPs, views of service seekers, and capture the reflection of the field to provide more support through proper communication and coordination.

In total, 1,899 people (Male:1,657 and Female:242) along with representatives from the police department, district legal aid officer, media personnel, representatives from NGO, members of District Training Pool, UNOs, chairmen from the project area, representatives from partner organizations, etc. participated in the meetings. A presentation on village courts performance was displayed to draw attention on how to ensure qualitative justice services for the villagers. The meetings were carried out in Moulvibazar, Sunamganj, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Chandpur, Noakhali, Netrokona, Gazipur, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Faridpur, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Bhola, Patuakhali, Barguna, Rangpur, Naogaon, Gaibandha, Sirajganj, Panchagarh, Pabna, and Kurigram districts.

Major recommendations yielded from district level workshop:

- To orient representatives of Police Stations and sensitize them to refer cases to VCs if those fall under VC's jurisdiction
- To digitalize the VC's procedure
- To activate VC in all unions beyond project area; exercising the success and learning from project area
- To amend VC Acts 2006 addressing the following topics: increase financial jurisdiction from BDT 75,000 (\$887.57) to BDT 100,000 (\$1183.43); giving appellate authority to UNO
- Clear instructions need to be given on what initiatives can be taken if the defendant does not come after being summoned by the Chairman
- Including family-related cases such as dowry, maintenance, early marriage into VC's law as now Union Parishads receive a high number of cases related to those issues.
- Women's participation in VC's decision-making process need to be increased through awareness raising and capacity development initiatives
- Awareness raising initiatives on village courts need to be continued through contributions of Union Parishads
- Progress review workshop explores the option for analyzing success, learning, and limitations for the way forward. Thus, it is suggested to organize the same event each year
- The Chairmen of almost every district are suggested to recognize their contribution by awarding UPs for their performance on VCs by the district administration
- The decisions of VCs must be executed, and UNO should play a prompt role for executing the VC decision through filing of certificate case
- Take necessary measures for continuation of capacity building initiatives after the end of the project
- Continuation of Village Court Assistance position is highly recommended
- Local NGOs working at union level will share VC related information during their own awareness raising event.

Commitments received from participants toward activation of VCs:

- District Information Officer of Chandpur committed to share the video made by AVCB Phase II project for sensitizing mass people on VC within their own interventions
- Islamic Foundation agreed to share message on VC during Jumma prayer through circulating a letter
- Deputy Commissioners and DDLGs said to take necessary steps to hand over the charges to Panel Chairman during the absence of UP chair
- Committed to run VC hearing session sitting on the *ejlas* (Court Bench) and following rules and procedure of Village Courts Act 2006
- Deputy Commissioners instructed all UNOs to visit village courts regularly to monitor their performance and report accordingly
- All UP Chairmen were instructed to operate VC following the rules and procedures and to document the VC proceedings as per law
- All Chairmen will conduct VC sessions at least once a week
- Village courts performance report must be shared with UNOs, DDLGs, and DCs for way forward.

Half Yearly Coordination Meeting

A two-day **Project Progress Review Workshop** was held with DDLGs and field level staff on 10-11 April 2019 at BIAM Foundation, Dhaka. Mr. Md Tazul Islam, MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives attended as Chief Guest while Ms.

Audrey Maillot, Team Leader-Governance of the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh and Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh were the special guests. Mr. S M Ghulam Farooque, Senior Secretary, Local Government Division (LGD) chaired the



workshop. In total, 188 participants (Male: 169; Female: 19) including different government officials from ministries, 24 Deputy Director of Local Government, 8 UP Chairman, 27 District Facilitators, 4 NGO focal persons, 4 Project Coordinators, 4 Monitoring and Reporting Coordinators, 27 District Coordination Officers (DCOs), 23 Journalists, and Project Management Unit members took part in the workshop. Honorable Chief Guest recommended making the VC functional at all unions of Bangladesh, taking guidance from the project using its successes and lessons learnt.

Remarks marked by Guests:

Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh admitted that village courts, the only state-led rural justice systems, are found to be significantly faster than formal judiciary to ensure access to justice to the most vulnerable and poor.

Ms. Audrey Maillot, Team Leader-Governance of the Delegation of the EU conjured to the GoB to come forward and horizontally expand interventions, scaling up to cover hundred percent unions due to its unparalleled services and benefits to the community.

Mr. Farooque, Senior Secretary of Local Government Division (LGD) acknowledged efforts by of the AVCB II project to establish examples in 'bringing services to the doorstep of the people.' He asked all the concerned, including all the Union Parishad chairmen, to execute the village courts properly and sincerely to make the village courts more acceptable to the rural people.

Mr. Tazul Islam MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) recommended making the VC functional at all unions of Bangladesh, taking guidance from the project using its successes and lessons learnt.

An open discussion was moderated by the chair of the session where chairmen from different UPs shared their suggestions to carry forward VC. Recommendations documented from the participants are:

Recommendations from UP Chairmen:

- To increase financial jurisdiction of village courts from 75,000 (\$887.57) to BDT 100,000 (\$1183.43);
- To activate VC across Bangladesh as solving two cases in a week in each union could make a big difference in the country for ensuring local justice;
- To refer the cases that are triable at village courts from police station to village courts
- To introduce a clause in VC's Act on how to deal with the case when respondents avoid the summon instead of returning the case to applicants.
- To reduce volume of documentations as it takes too much time
- To arrange training for young people at local level to activate VC accordingly
- To keep clause of punishment if anyone avoids VCs summon
- To increase the community mobilization initiatives and take necessary steps to reduce influence of frauds/brokers and vested interest groups who often exaggerated facts to keep complaints beyond the VC jurisdiction

Recommendations from DDLG:

- To increase the frequency of refreshers training or orientation for UP representatives and officials
- To take initiative to give award for best performing UP chairman
- To emphasize on training of UP secretaries as they will serve for a longer period than elected bodies

Recommendations from DF and NGO:

- To increase government monitoring which can contribute to make a significant change as well as confidence of the chairman for establishing village courts at their end
- To involve judicial officers more in field monitoring which also can motivate chairmen and other UP officials
- To organize special events for women leaders to involve them as panel members and sensitization workshops for UP Chairman, Members and Secretaries
- To do something special with identified women leaders and to invite males in CYM to address gender equity
- To support women-friendly environment at UP so that women can feel comfortable going there.

Activity 1.1.7 Provide support to National Training Institutes (NILG, BCSAA, JATI, BPA, etc.) to update and develop training materials and ensure VC is integrated into regular curricula/syllabus, ensuring that gender and vulnerability issues are mainstreamed

In response to the letter issued by LGD to the cabinet division to integrate the VC issue with the training curriculum to the pertinent training institutes under the respective ministry, the Cabinet Division issued a letter (17 April 2019) to the respective Ministries (i.e. Ministry of

Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; Ministry of Public Admission; and Ministry of Home Affairs) instructing for integrating the VC issue with the training curriculum to their pertinent training institutes.

LGD sent another letter (17 October 2019) to Secretaries of Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and Ministry of Public Admission and Ministry of Home Affairs requesting to update the status of integration of VCs, referring to the letter from Cabinet division. In response to the letter of LGD, different ministers took following initiatives:

- The Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs informed that VC issue was already included in foundation training courts of JATI, and it was discussed in different training courses as Statute Review.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs issued a letter on 08 December 2019 to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) along with the head of other pertinent institutes of the Ministry of Home Affairs to include VC issues in their basic training curriculum. In response to this letter, Additional DIG (Training-01) issued a directive on 13 January 2020 to their pertinent training center /unit to include village courts issues in their training curriculum.
- In response to the letter issued by Additional DIG (Training-1) dated 30 June 2019, Bangladesh Police Academy informed on 6 July 2019 that at present village courts issues are not included in different training courses under the In-Service Training Department. However, they are committed to include in their training curriculum in the future.

1.1.8 Capacity development of traditional institutions, local CSOs and local administration in CHT as well as judiciary, legal professions, and other relevant actors in CHT

Revise and printing of ToT training manual of traditional justice system

The ToT training manual/module of the traditional justice system (case management and documentation) was revised and customized by following internal and external consultation processes with different stakeholders. The internal consultation meeting was held on 12th November 2019 at the UNDP Rangamati office with the project team while the external consultation workshop on reviewing content of ToT module was held at the Chakma Circle Chief's Office on 9th December 2019. 32 participants (Male-22, Female-10) from different professional backgrounds (i.e. traditional leaders, lawyers, development activists, social workers etc.) were present and gave their opinions to revise and improvise the ToT module content. The module will be used to provide training to grassroots level traditional leaders.

Based on the recommendations and opinions from the external sectoral experts, the project staff have revised the ToT module on case management and documentation. Finally, the revised module was endorsed by all key experts and the Chakma circle chief. The content of the training module are : case management, documentation and archives systems in traditional justice in CHT, history and background of the traditional justice systems in CHT, gender, justice and human rights, roles and responsibilities of traditional leaders, institutional and administrative features of CHT, differences between formal and informal justice systems, equality and justice, office management, traditional forest and land management systems in CHT, and facilitation skills etc.

Provide Training of Trainers (ToT) on basic training, Traditional System (Case management, documentation etc.) for traditional leaders, civil society members and NGO staff at District level

During the reporting period, two intensive Training of Trainers (ToT) on the “*Case Management & Documentation for Strengthening Traditional Justice Systems in the CHT*” for selective traditional leaders were conducted between 17-21 December 2019 in Bandarban District. The main objective of the ToT was to create a resource pool with potential traditional leaders, development activists, lawyers, women leaders, social workers etc. to provide training to the grassroot level traditional leaders. 41 participants (Male: 33, Female: 8) from both Khagrachari and Bandarban Districts participated from different ethnic communities (i.e. Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Bawm etc). Participants were selected based on the following criteria: previous experience of facilitation and conducting training, in-depth knowledge on the training topics, possibility of future engagement, leadership quality, educational qualification, and personal interest for training facilitation.



Key resource persons of the training were Chakma Circle Chief Barrister Raja Devasish Roy, renowned educationist and development practitioner Professor Mong Sanu Chowdhury, Senior advocate from Rangamati district Judge Court Mr. Hla Thowai Prue Marma etc.

Organize Launching Ceremony and Inception Workshop

Launching Ceremony of ‘Strengthening Traditional Justice Systems in the CHT’ of AVCB II Project was held at the Parjatan Motel Complex, Rangamati hill district on 25th September 2019. The main objective of the event was to inform and share about the project activities of the AVCB Phase II project with all relevant government and non-government stakeholders, local administration & public representatives, local traditional leaders and CHT institutions etc. The Launching Workshop was presided over by the National Project Director, AVCB Phase II Project and Additional Secretary, Local Government Division. Secretary, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs attended the workshop as Chief Guest while EU Ambassador to Bangladesh, UNDP Resident Representative, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, and Additional Secretary, MoCHTA & National Project Director of SID-CHT were present as special guests.



Around 76 participants including representatives from different CHT institutions, traditional leaders, representatives from different government line departments, public prosecutors from 3 districts, public representatives and representatives from local administrations, etc. participated in the event. In the program, all respective stakeholders from central government and CHT institutions committed proactively to extend their support for proper implementation of the project across the CHT.

During the launching event, there was a demand to arrange similar events in other two CHT districts, hence the project organized two inception workshops in Khagrachari and Bandarban districts on 26th November 2019 and 30th November 2019 respectively. Like the launching workshop, the main objective of the inception workshop was to inform and share about the project activities with all relevant government and non-government stakeholders, local administration & public representatives, local traditional leaders, journalists, CHT institutions and government line departments. Altogether, 204 participants attended both inception workshops where 59 were females. Representatives from Hill District Councils (HDCs), Deputy Commissioners, DDLG, representatives from Police department, CHT traditional leaders (i.e. Mong Circle Chief, Headmen and Karbaries), local government representatives (i.e. Upazila Chairman, Upazila Vice Chairman, Union Parishad Chairmen & members), development workers, journalists, representatives from district bar associations, women leaders etc. were present in these workshops.

Organize Planning/review Workshop

Two days Annual Planning workshop for AVCB Phase II CHT component was held on 22-23 December 2019 in Bandarban where all staff of AVCB Phase II CHT component were present. The objective of the workshop was to review the progress of 2019 and prepare a plan for 2020. The workshop enabled participants to understand the project activities, their roles and responsibilities and future plans as this was the first meeting of the full team since the project started in CHT in September 2019.

The workshop started with the sharing of brief background information of the project by Mr. Sarder M. Asaduzzaman, Senior Project Manager, AVCB, Dhaka. After that, both project and financial progress including challenges faced in 2019 were discussed. Finally, a realistic and effective work plan for 2020 with specific timeframe was developed in line with the approved project document in consultation with all participants. Action Research intervention that will be conducted in 15 UPs of CHT aiming to explore feasibility of village courts in three CHT districts as well as selection criteria of 15 UPs were also discussed in the workshop.

Organize Project Reflection workshop

During this period, one project reflection workshop was held at the Chakma Circle Chief Office, Rangamati on 17th November 2019. The main objective of the workshop was to learn and observe the case management and documentation of the Chakma Raja/ Chakma Circle Chief Office and to reflect on the self-action and documentation of case management and documentation. 44 participants (Female- 23 and Male- 21) including 37 traditional leaders from different upazilas of Rangamati district attended.

The entire Project Reflection workshop was facilitated by Raja Devasish Roy, honorable Chakma Circle Chief, Subrata Chakma, PS to Chakma Raja & Chakma circle chief office and Advocate Bhabatosh Dewan, Traditional Leader (Headman). The participants learnt about the

operational procedures of the Chakma Circle Chief Office and documentation processes of cases and practices of traditional courts at local level i.e. (operation, management and documentation of cases for customary courts etc.) and duties and responsibilities of traditional leaders as Headman and Karbari.

Through the workshop, all the participants got the opportunity to see the Chakma circle chief office, record rooms and learned about the documentation procedure of Chakma circle office, which will help them to document and maintain procedures of case management as traditional leaders.

Activity Result 1.2: Legal and policy framework revised to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of VCs and local justice mechanisms in CHT

The existing legal framework for village courts is the Village Court Act 2006 (Amended in 2013) that describes its functions, jurisdiction and formation process. The project has drafted a proposal on amendment of VC Act 2006 (Amended in 2013) having series of consultations with judiciaries, police, UNOs, DDLGs, DCs, UP representatives, practitioners, academicians and beneficiaries for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of VCs. It will be finalized in the first quarter of 2020 for placing to the ministry for starting the process of amendment.

With continuous follow-up and lobby by the AVCB Phase II project, LGD issued a letter dated 20th August 2019 to the Ministry of Home Affair seeking necessary actions from the home ministry so that cases could be transferred from police station to VCs.

Being sensitized through the consultation workshops held in 27 districts with judiciaries, police and local administrations, a total of 8,422 cases had been transferred from district courts to village courts in project areas between July 2017 to December 2019, of which 5,070 had transferred during this reported period. Upward trend of referred cases from district courts to village courts (Referred case: 3,100 in 2018 and 3,773 in 2019) could be interpreted as increasing recognition of village courts as a reliable mechanism by district courts.

a. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)

Table- 04 Progress against OVI				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 1.2 Legal and policy framework revised to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of VCs and local justice mechanisms in CHT</i>				
1.2.1 Proposals developed to amend Village Court Act / Rules or Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to facilitate transfer of cases to Village Courts	No	Yes	VC rule has enacted in Feb 2016. Project has generated recommendations through a series of consultation held till December 2019	National level validation workshop will be held in 2020 to finalize the proposal of amendment
1.2.2 Proposal developed to facilitate transfer of cases to Village Courts	No	Yes	Project has generated recommendations through a series of workshops held with	

Table- 04 Progress against OVI				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
			judiciaries and police.	
1.2.3 Directive from IG Police to facilitate referrals to VCs in place issued.	No	Yes	A letter has been issued dated 20 th August 2019 from LGD to the Ministry of Home Affairs. This letter has sought necessary actions from the home ministry so that cases could be transferred from police station to VC.	
1.2.4 Practice Note from Chief Justice (CJ) on screening and referral of cases by District Courts in place.	No	Yes	Practice note has been drafted	
1.2.5 Judicial officers authorized to participate in VC training and become part of District Training Pool	No	Yes	GOs issued by NLASO and MoLJ&PA with the necessary guidance of Bangladesh Supreme Court	
1.2.6 In CHT, existing customary laws & practices are reviewed, codified/ documented and harmonized with other justice systems in CHT and the law (incl. gender rights)	0	Yes	Review is underway through consultants	No significant progress as the project has started implementation at the end of 2019

Akbar Ali got decision by 21 days after struggling for four years

“I shall ask everyone to go to the village court as I got justice within 21 days” – said Md. Akbar Ali (42 years old), contractor of Shironti Union of Sapahar Upazila in Naogaon. This story of Akbar’s struggle shows how he passed four years to seek justice from higher court and how the hardship ended.

Akbar filed a case on 14 June 2015 against Asaduzzaman Nur (37 years old) a villager of Sapahar Union of same Upazila in Naogaon at district court and claimed his involvement in vandalization of a construction work of a fire service civil defense office as well as stealing some precious



materials from there which amounted to BDT 17,000 (\$201.18). Nur got arrested after five days of the case filing and got bail after passing 15 days in custody.

The case started to run as usual and passed four long years in district court. Applicant Akbar and defendant Nur attended the court regularly as per court order and lost huge sums of money for lawyer fees, food cost, transportation cost, and others. In addition, they could not work on that day, though they needed to work every day for their bread and butter. Thus, Akbar lost BDT 1 lakh (US\$ 1,184) and Nur lost more than BDT 2 lakh (US\$ 2,367).

Meanwhile, the project initiated different capacity building efforts to sensitize relevant stakeholders. Due to subsequent efforts of the project, stakeholders became aware of the jurisdiction of Village Court. At last not least, the higher court sent the case to Sapahar UP on 24 July 2019. Union Parishad issued summons to both parties on 31 July 2019. UP Chairman issued an order to nominate panel members. Later, the VC was formed and gave its decision after full hearing on 21 August 2019 to compensate 5,000 BDT (US \$ 59.1) to Akbar. On 26 August 2019, Nur gave the money to Akbar. The whole process was completed at VC in 32 days including implementation.

Akbar praises the services of the village court. He shared, *“I was really surprised after getting the decision promptly; even I could not imagine it. I am thankful to the government for ensuring this service at the doorstep of the rural people”*.

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

Activity 1.2.1 Engage in advocacy and sensitization with relevant stakeholders on case referral

In total 12 workshops have been organized in Sirajganj, Naogaon, Gaibandha, Panchagarh, Khulna, Bagerhat, Cox’s Bazar, Shunamganj, Sylhet, Gazipur, Netrokona and Gopalganj. In total around 609 persons were present in these 12 workshops, out of which 64 were women. The main participants of these workshops were from district judiciary, district administration, police personnel and selected UP chairpersons. The main findings and suggestions from the workshops held so far were as follows:

- The pecuniary jurisdiction is required to be increased
- Procedure of execution of VC decisions should be simplified
- Monitoring tools should be developed for effectively monitoring the quality of the decision making by VC
- Full time designated staffs should be engaged for VC
- VC system should be made functional all over the country
- System should be developed so that Police can refer the disputes to Union Parishad so that it can be solved through VC system
- More awareness programs should be carried out
- Need to train UP chair further on VCA 2006, VC Rules 2016 and ADR
- A link can be introduced with the UP office and district legal aid office so that UP chairs could take assistance of DLAO in need of any legal support.
- Attendance of respondents after serving the summon should be ensured by making necessary amendments in the VC Act
- Coordination with police regarding VC should be arranged so that VC triable cases can be sent to UP

- VC can resolve disputes amicably thus ensuring a win-win situation for both parties. In order to ensure harmony between the parties, an effective role of the UP Chair is very crucial
- At present, Police is under an obligation to refer even the VC triable cases to formal court due to CrPC
- Provisions should be made to continue village court proceedings if respondents willingly disobey the summon
- Integrity of the UP Chair is the first criteria to have a successful VC system
- CrPC acts as an impediment for Police to refer the cases to UP without referring the case first to the Magistrate court
- UP Chair – Judiciary meeting should be held regularly
- There should be a focal point for VC and District court for regular communication
- UP Chairs' neutrality will yield better results for VC



District level consultation meeting with Judiciary at Sirajganj

Activity 1.2.2 Lobby for Practice Note from Chief Justice and Directive from IG Police on screening and referral of cases to Village Courts

A letter has been issued dated 20th August 2019 from LGD upon lobbying from AVCB sent to the ministry of home affairs. This letter has sought necessary actions from the home ministry so that cases could be transferred from police station to VC. Regarding the Practice Note from the Chief Justice, the National Consultant has prepared a draft and is working to finalize the letter and also carrying out the preparatory work so that proper documentation can be placed before Chief Justice to get the directive.

Activity 1.2.3 Draft proposed amendments to the Village Court Act based on consultation with stakeholders

National Consultant (NC) hired by the project has prepared a draft proposal to get vetted over a national event to be organized in Dhaka with the presence of concerned ministry personnel, donor agencies and others.

As a process of drafting an amendment proposal, consultation with district judiciary in Panchagarh, district administration in Noakhali, and district Police in Bagerhat were carried out during this reporting period. Apart from these, 5 FGDs with UP chair, beneficiaries, PNGO staff, VCA and UP Secretaries and 16 KIIs with CJM, DDLG, UP Chair, Assistant Judge, Judicial Magistrate, Access to justice expert, AVCB Staff, DFs and DCOs were carried out in Jamalpur, Madaripur, Noakhali, Moulvibazar, Naogaon, Bagerhat and Panchagarh where 135 people attended and gave their feedbacks and recommendations on existing legal framework of Village Courts. Some of the noted findings from those events are:

Noakhali (Consultation with District and Upazila administration, UP Chair, Lawyer, etc.)

- Need to arrange incentives for UP Chairman and Members when they conduct adjudication of a complaint in the Village Court
- When the UP Chairman serves notice to the defendant and the defendant does not appear before the Chairman, the objective of the VC becomes ineffective. Thus, the law needs to be amended by introducing the mandatory provision of defendant's appearance in the VC
- Dowry, maintenance and divorce matters need to be vested upon VC
- The pecuniary jurisdiction of the VC can logically be increased to BDT 50,000 (\$1775.15).

Bagerhat (Consultation with Police Officers)

- Develop a referral system between Village Court and Police Station; amendment of section 155 of CrPC will not be an effective measure. It will create procedural gaps and complexity as well as an adverse impact on other sections of the CrPC (Section 107 - 118). Thus, it is necessary to examine the whole procedure before making an amendment proposal
- Develop accountability mechanism by amending laws to minimise the biases of the UP Chairman
- A coordination/reporting system can be developed between Police Station and Union Parishad though an informal coordination is existing between them.

Panchagarh (Consultation with District Judiciary):

- An accountability mechanism for both administration and judiciary needs to be developed for Village Court by amending Village Court Act and Rule. The judicial accountability can be vested upon District and Session Judge and Chief Judicial Magistrate.
- The objective of the Village Court Act is to resolve the disputes in an easy and speedy manner, not to trial the cases. The name of 'Village Court' can be named as Dispute Resolve Board/Council/Committee.

FGD and KII findings:

- Need to amend the law by including the provisions on mandatory appearances before the VC. Imposing fine or ex-parte the trial provision or mandatory provision to appear before Village Court needs to be included in the law.
- The amount of fine needs to be increased and thus the relevant section of the Act needs to be amended.
- There should be supervision from formal Courts of the country.
- The reporting system provided in the Rule needs to be more elaborative and needs to include provisions for providing the VC reports to the Chief Judicial Magistrate.
- There should be a referral mechanism between VC and Police Station. This mechanism should be supported by the relevant law and rules.
- If possible, the case fee for both civil and criminal matters could be common and need to increase up to BDT 50(\$0.59).
- Village Courts monitored by DDLG need to be increased for functioning VC effectively.
- There should be a mandatory provision for attending court day.
- The circular on VCMC needs to be included in the Act or Rule for better attention by the local administration.
- Increase of financial jurisdiction including subject matter jurisdiction.
- Need to allocate honorarium for the Chairman and Members of the village courts.
- Need the support of police to bring the perpetrator in the village courts.
- Need to allocate a separate courtroom, as the present courtroom is used for other meetings also.
- There is no nursing room for women in the UP premise, thus they feel uneasy while feeding their babies. There are no washrooms for women.
- Peoples' confidence is less over Chairman and Members due to biases, malpractice and politicization.

Activity 1.2.4 Printed and distributed necessary VC materials and guidelines.

2,800 copies of Operation Manuals that were developed previously were printed and distributed during this reporting period.

Activity 1.2.5 Undertake field monitoring to ensure legal compliance and quality of decision-making

During this reporting period field visits were carried out in Mahimaganj Union of Gaibandha district, Aranghata Union of Khulna district, Haridaspur Union of Gopalganj district and Bagha and Lamakazi Union of Sylhet district. These visits were aimed to observe the quality assurance of VC decisions and other documentary records. Views and findings were shared with Union Parishad Chairpersons along with the Upazila Coordinator and Village Courts Assistant (VCA).

1.2.6 Review of existing customary laws & practices and codification/ documentation of laws as well as support to existing harmonization efforts of different justice systems in CHT.

Organize regional and district level yearly advocacy dialogue on harmonization

Two district level yearly advocacy workshops on harmonization of traditional laws and justice system were organized on 18th December and 19th December 2019 at the Rangamati and Bandarban Hill District Council respectively. The objective of the workshops were to harmonize the local justice system, streamlining the functions of three circles and developing institutional linkage between the Circle Chief offices and CHT institutions to strengthen the dispute settlement process.

The keynote speaker Raja Devashish Roy, Honorable Chakma Circle Chief presented a brief presentation followed by an open discussion. After the speeches of both special guests and Chief Guest, group exercise was conducted in four groups. Finally, all the groups shared their findings.

In Rangamati, Rem Liana Pangkhua, Member, Rangamati Hill District Council, Sharmin Alam, Deputy Director of Local Government, Rangamati District, Mohammed Saiful Elahi, Joint District & Sessions Judge, District Judge Court, Rangamati District and Mr. Main Uddin Chowdhury, ASP, Rangamati Hill District were present.

In Bandarban, Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman, Chief Judicial Magistrate, Bandarban District, Ms. Ting Ting Mya, Member, Bandarban Hill District Council, Mr. SM Mobasher Hossain, ASP, Bandarban participated in the program.

Issues discussed in both dialogues were: multi-marriage, marriage registration, marriage related inheritance law, inherence, functionalization of traditional courts judgement, writing vs non-writing law and custom, reform of traditional rules/ modernizing the traditional system, codification of all community's customary law and good governance of the traditional courts and monitoring.



Workshop on harmonization at Rangamati

The findings and information gathered through both workshops will be shared in the regional and national level workshops to mobilize the process of harmonization and strengthening of the traditional justice system.

Consultancy for Technical Assistance on harmonization of local justice system (person), IC for reviewing the existing customary laws and practices of different tribes, IC for editing and updating of CHT laws and regulations compiled by CHTRC

During this reporting period, two (2) individual consultants - one for technical assistance on harmonization of the local justice system in CHT and another for updating and compiling CHT laws and regulations were hired. The main objective of hiring the first one was to

review all relevant legal and regulatory frameworks and conduct an in-depth study for harmonizing local justice systems in CHT following the existing laws, acts and practices in consultation with all respective stakeholders and line departments/ ministries. Another consultant will compile a compendium of updated and compiled laws, which are directly linked to CHT and submit a report to UNDP on updating and compilation of laws directly linked to CHT.

Activity Result 1.3 GoB monitoring capacity for evaluating VCs and other local justice mechanisms' performance is strengthened and systematised

Aiming to strengthen GoB's monitoring capacity for evaluating village courts performance, DMIE⁵ system piloted in 15 UPs during the pilot phase has been revised and finalized based on the consultation with different stakeholders (officials of MIE wing, LGD, UP section, Cabinet division) and reviewing Village Courts Act 2006 (Amended in 2013). Government Order (GO) has been drafted instructing local administration (DDLGs and UNOs) and UP Chairmen for monitoring village courts. 41% District VCMC and 42% Upazila VCMC met following the Government Order (GO) of 2013 for monitoring VC performance.

Regarding strengthening monitoring of traditional justice system in CHT areas, the project has started the process of procuring logistics items to equip three circle courts, 377 Headman courts and 4,000 Karbari courts with necessary logistics items (*Ejlas* (Court Bench), Chair, Table, File cabinet, bench, fan, etc.)

a. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicator (OVI)

Table-05 Progress against OVI				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 1.3 GoB monitoring capacity for evaluating VCs and other local justice mechanisms' performance is strengthened and systematised</i>				
1.3.1 # Districts submitting reports to LGD in accordance with Decentralized M&E (DMIE) system.	0	27	Finalized the revised DMIE system taking concern from Cabinet division Government Order (GO) is ready for circulation	Once GO is issued in February 2020 all districts under project areas will start to send report to LGD following DMIE system However, as per plan study will be conducted in 2020 to measure the progress of this indicator
1.3.2 % UPs supported by	0	90%	Same as above	Same as above

⁵Decentralized Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (DMIE) system describe role and responsibilities of UP, Upazila and District regarding monitoring of Village courts including reporting mechanism.

Table-05 Progress against OVI				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
the project which submit quarterly reports to UNO in accordance with the DMIE system.				
1.3.3 % District and Upazila VCMCs in project areas which are meeting in accordance with the GO 2012	0	70%	41% District and 42% Upazila VCMCs are meeting in accordance with the GO 2012	
1.3.4 # UPs using VCMIS system for reporting and monitoring purposes	15	115	<p>Revised online VCMIS is in place</p> <p>Prepared list of 100 UPs where VCMIS will be piloted</p> <p>LGSP-III confirmed that AVCB II project can use ICT equipment for piloting VCMIS in 100 UPs but procurement of their ICT equipment are under process and will be available by April 2020</p>	
1.3.5 LGD produces trends and pattern-based reports on VC performance.	0	At least 1 annual report on VC performance issued	-	No progress as GO have not issued till December 2019
1.3.6 In CHT, existing customary laws & practices are reviewed, codified/documented and harmonized with other justice systems in CHT and the law (incl. gender rights)	0	Yes	Review is under way through consultants	No significant progress has made due to delay implementation of actions in CHT areas

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

1.3.1. Support LGD to take over village courts performance monitoring of 351 UPs in pilot phase

The project has provided support to Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (MIE) wing, LGD for developing Decentralized Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (DMIE) system for monitoring village courts performance across the Bangladesh including 351 UPs of pilot phase. Meanwhile, GO has been drafted by MIE wing with project support highlighting roles and responsibilities of union parishad, upazila and district to implement DMIE system.

1.3.2 Further strengthen capacity of MIE Wing of LGD, and district and Upazila officials to manage performance of UPs and oversee Village Courts through DMIE system

DMIE System has been developed and finalized in following ways:

- DMIE system which was piloted during first phase of this project has been revised by reviewing VC Act 2006 (Amended 2013) and after having a series of consultations with Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (MIE) wing, LGD and representatives of UP section, LGD
- Revised DMIE system has been shared with cabinet division through a meeting and after taking their concerns through formal letter received from cabinet division
- Government Order (GO) has been drafted by MIE wing instructing local administration and UP for monitoring village courts through DMIE system. It is expected that GO will be issued by January 2020.

1.3.3 Strengthen Village Courts Management Committee (VCMCs) across the project areas and lobby for increased balance in gender representation

As reported earlier, twenty-seven (27) District level VCMCs and one hundred twenty-eight (128) Upazila level VCMCs were formed in project areas following the GO issued in 2012 and started functioning. According to GO, both committees are required to meet quarterly to monitor the village courts performance and provide strategic direction. The project has provided technical support for holding VCMC meetings following GO. But during the reporting period 41% DVCMC and 42% UVCMC met following the GO issue in 2012.

1.3.4 Replicate web-based Village Court management Information System (VCMIS) in 100 project unions for efficient performance monitoring

The project has upgraded the online based VCMIS⁶ for piloting it in 100 project unions before implementing it across the project areas. The project has carried out following activities during reporting period:

Upgrade the Village Court Management Information System (VCMIS): During this period below tasks were carried out for the upgradation of VCMIS

⁶VCMIS is a web based case management system developed keeping in mind different steps of case resolutions as per village courts Act 2006 (Amended in 2013) and different forms and register used to document the village courts proceedings. It has option in generating different reports as per pre-defined criteria of user. VCMIS application software has been piloted in 15 unions of Bangladesh during Phase-I of this project.

- Review the existing VCMIS windows server and migrate VCMIS software from windows to Linux-based server to ensure better security and performance.
- Development version installed on Linux server.
- Assessed current VCMIS software and did the following for its improvement.
 - ✓ Improved features for compensation (Taka) instatements
 - ✓ Fixed VCMIS core system bugs
 - ✓ Checked existing union mapping and implemented Bangla Unicode based location (Union, Upazilla, District, Division)
 - ✓ Added option to add different district's applicant/defendant /witness in VC case application
 - ✓ Fixed cases' status and associated with latest options and order
 - ✓ Changed labels
 - ✓ Fixed Miscellaneous bugs



Identification of 100 UPs for piloting: The project has identified 100 UPs for piloting web-based VCMIS based on following criteria: availability of electricity, speed of internet, technical knowledge of VCA and UP Secretary on computer operation. In this regard an assessment was carried out.

Collaboration regarding IT hardware support: A meeting was held between AVCB Phase II project and Local Government Support Project-III (LGSP-III) on 24 April 2019 for getting the ICT hardware support, especially computer and other relevant accessories for running web based VCMIS in 100 unions. Based on the decision of the meeting with LGSP-III, a letter was issued by NPD, AVCB Phase II Project to the NPD of LGSP-III on 2 May 2019 for seeking their support to get ICT equipment and other accessories. On 14 May 2019, LGSP-III confirmed that ICT equipment for all UPs of Bangladesh under LGSP-III is under procurement process. Once ICT equipments is available in all UPs, AVCB Phase II project can use the equipment for piloting VCMIS in 100 UPs.

1.3.5 Advocate for the inclusion of the monitoring system into the updated Village Courts Rules and for setting up a monitoring system of access to justice for the most vulnerable in CHT

Logistic support for upgrading of traditional courts (3 Circle Courts, 377 Headmen and Karbari courts)

For upgrading traditional courts, the project has planned to equip three circle courts with *Ejlas* (Court Bench), Chair, Table, File cabinet, bench, fan and water dispenser; 377 Headman courts with *Ejlas* (Court Bench), Chair, Table, File cabinet, bench; and 4000

Karbari courts with Chair, Table, File cabinet, and bench. The vendor has been selected for purchasing required file cabinets for three circle courts, 377 Headmen courts, and 4000 Karbari courts. It is expected that vendors will deliver the required number of file cabinets directly to headman offices from where Karbari will receive their file cabinets. Procurement of other logistic items such as *Ejlas* (Court Bench), Chair, Table, and bench for all three levels of courts are under process. List of Headmen and Karbaris who will be receiving these items has been finalized after consultation with Circle Chief offices. Distribution points have also been finalized to ensure smooth distribution of the items.

Support to Circle Offices, Headman, Karbari and Women Karbari Network offices

In order to improve communication channels among the traditional leaders, better reporting and monitoring of headman and Karbari courts, the project has planned to equip association/network of Headman, Karbari and Women Karbari with logistical items such as desktop, printers, camera, file cabinet, etc. Vendors selected by following UNDP's procurement policy have already delivered a few items and others are under process.

In CHT it is very difficult to reach all Headmen and Karbari individually as they live in very remote places. Hence, the project has decided to use their networks and associations as a means for disseminating information. Furthermore, these offices will also be used as resource centers and Headman and Karbari will use these centers for preparing reports using project supported logistics items.

Activity Result 2.1 Beneficiaries in project areas understand the roles and functions of the VCs and other local justice mechanisms and are able to access their services when required

Awareness of community members about VCs and its functions has increased through a number of awareness and community mobilization initiatives, e.g. courtyard meetings, drama shows, rallies, workshops, and IEC initiatives. As a result, a total of 1,61,893 community members sought remedies through Village Court up to December 2019. In the year 2019, a total of 82,379 people sought remedies representing a significant increase from the previous year of 58,215.

The project has made notable strides in creating awareness among national and international policymakers of the success of Village Courts as a way to increase justice. The AVCB Phase II project participated in the 2019 Paris Peace Forum. It was shortlisted as one of the projects from over 700 submissions. It was showcased as an example of successful governance innovation.

The project reports around 5,600 media reports about VCs, including 470 national news stories, of which 93 were on television. Most of these stories broadcasted voices of stakeholders, highlighted success stories of VC (including voices of beneficiaries) and described how the VC worked, its services, fees, and processes.

a. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicator (OVI)

Table-06 Progress against OVI				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 2.1: Beneficiaries in project areas understand the roles and functions of the VCs and other local justice mechanisms and are able to access their services when required</i>				
2.1.1 % People in project UPs who say they are aware of VCs and its functions.	9%	70%	Outreach Strategy finalized and accordingly VC messages has been delivered to approximately 8.7 million community people (56 percent is women) directly	Impact study will be conducted in 2020 through third- party to know the status
2.1.2 % People in project areas are able to correctly answer that Village Courts deal with minor conflicts and disputes.	1% of those aware of the Village Courts	50% of those aware of VCs	Same as above	Same as above
2.1.3 Knowledge gap on VCs between men and women narrowed compared to baseline.		Less than 10% knowledge gap	-	Impact study will be conducted in 2020 through third- party to know the status
2.1.4 % of people in CHT areas reporting that they are aware of local justice delivery system	-	70%	No progress	No progress has made due to delay implementation of actions in CHT areas Baseline survey is underway
2.1.5 % of women involved in disputes resolution mechanism of local justice delivery system	-	15%	No progress	Same as above

Rekha Khakshi's Sparkling Smile: Village Court Served for Indigenous People

Bangladesh is home to different communities including ethnic minorities. Dhanuakamalpur Union of Bakshiganj Upazila in Jamalpur district is located at the foot of Lauchapra mountain on the northern border of Bangladesh where different tribal groups are living at the foot of this mountain. The story of Rekha Khakshi (45 years old) from **Garo** tribal community is the same as rural Bangladesh -- though they have their own religions, languages, customs and culture.

Rekha Khakshi, wife of Dijendra Chambu, lives on the slopes of the Lauchapra Mountains in the village of Somnath para of Dhanuakamalpur UP, Bakshiganj in the district of Jamalpur. She has been living in poverty, with an income of BDT 10,000 (US\$ 118.3) per month through farming and livestock rearing with five family members.



Rekha had a confrontation with her neighbors Noy Sangma, Ananta Marak, and Trishna Khakshi who had been occupying a land of hers for a long time. She was in a weaker position than the respondent in terms of financial capacity and was not able to take possession of her own recorded land. The issue was taken up by the indigenous chairman Hesrio Mrong and handed over the land to Rekha. But this settlement generated the respondents' anger towards the applicant. Rekha had a fruit garden over a hillock near respondent Ananta Marak's house. On 13 May 2019, respondents entered into that fruit garden and took off with about 2,000 llychees and 20kg mangoes. Rekha tried to stop them and got beaten by Noy Sangma. Moreover, they cut the trees mercilessly and threatened her if she made further steps on it.

Rekha made a complaint against them to her tribal chairman Hesrio Mrong to solicit justice. After hearing the incident, Mr. Mrong gave a decision to compensate for the price of the lychees, mangoes and the trees but the respondent denied his decision. Rekha became frustrated and accepted the situation as fate.

In this circumstance, she met with Ms. Nurzahan Begum, UP member of Dhanuakamalpur UP in a courtyard meeting and got the Village Court information. UP member advised her to apply a complaint. She found a light of hope that she could get justice through UP. On 19 May 2019, Rekha applied for a civil case for justice by paying only 20 BDT (US\$ 0.23) claiming 25,000 BDT (US\$ 296) as compensation. Village Court accepted the application and started procedures as per VC Act (2006).

On 7 July 2019, the court provided its decision following the hearing session that respondents will pay 25,000 BDT (US\$ 296) by 17 July 2019. Respondent paid the money on 8 July 2019 as per VC decision through Union Parishad.

Rekha invested the compensated money to plant potatoes and new trees in the garden and made a remarkable profit this year. Rekha Khaksi said that the common woman like her can get judicial services at village courts. *"If there were no village courts, I could not get justice easily. I respect this judicial system due to its simple procedure, low cost as well as less time. From now on, I will advise others to go to the village court of the Union Parishad"* - she stated.

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

2.1.1 Develop outreach strategy and implement community mobilization initiatives in each union

Grassroots level awareness activities by partner NGOs:

Contracts with four partner organizations - Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust (BLAST), Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA), Wave Foundation, and Eco Social Development Organization (ESDO) have been extended till 09 September 2020 after getting approval for a one-year extension of the project from the EU. During the reporting period, they accomplished the following activities:

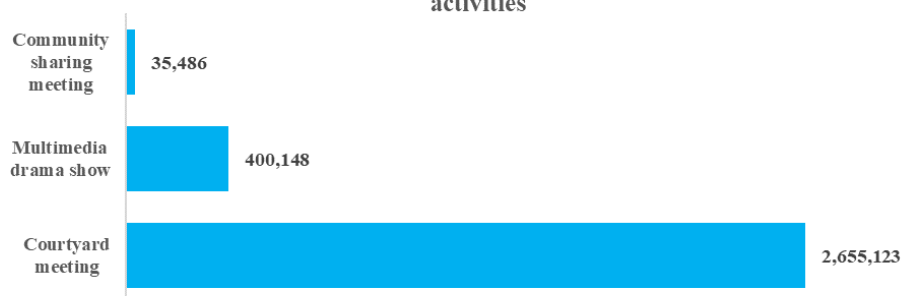


Multimedia show at community level

The project delivered VC-related messages to approximately 3 million people, more than half of whom were women, through courtyard meetings, community meetings, and multimedia drama shows through the four partners.

Community mobilization initiatives: Awareness of community members, service providers and other relevant stakeholders about village courts and its function will be increased through community mobilization initiatives, to be conducted both at national and local level.

Figure: 03 Number of community people mobilized by type of activities



Assist local administration in training: District Coordinators and Upazila Coordinators hired by partner NGOs are members of District Training Pools (DTPs) equipped to provide local administration with training on village courts. They have provided support in organizing and conducting training for 13,873 key VC actors.

District and Upazila level GO-NGO Coordination meeting: Partner organizations have attended 1,662 district and Upazila level NGOs coordination meetings and influenced local NGOs to disseminate VC information.

2.1.2 Develop and implement gender awareness-raising to improve women's ability to use of village courts

Printed and distributed IEC materials on gender

Gender specific communication materials such as gender guideline for village courts, pictorial booklets, and festoons that were developed during the last reporting period have been printed and distributed during this reporting period. 1,250 gender guidelines, 40,000 pictorial booklets, and 1,00,000 fact sheets have been printed and distributed to different stakeholders including UPs, local NGOs/cultural organizations, and relevant government officials. In addition, gender awareness strategy and project gender strategy finalized in this reporting period.

In-house Research: With the purpose of providing a deeper analysis on the gender equality perspectives of accessing justice, the project completed a study titled “Gender Equality Perspectives of Village Courts Services”.

The study report specifies the challenges as well as the opportunities to promote gender equality in the functioning of village courts. As widely explored and discussed, the study finds similar types of socio-cultural and institutional challenges that restrain women to equally benefit from the VC services. Along with the issues of limited or no education, there are some common challenges that women face to access VC services. These include: lack of knowledge and awareness about their basic rights, lack of awareness about VC services, and ignorance about the VC dispute settlement process, financial dependence, apprehension of losing social honour, societal tendency of underestimating women's capability, and lack of support from the family and from the society on women's issues, religious restrictions on women's mobility, geographic distance etc.

With regard to women's participation in VC panel, prevalence of stereotyped beliefs about women's role, prevalence of male-only image in decision making places, partial information about the legal provision, tendency of side-lining the female representatives by the male UP members, lack of support from the chairmen, lack of education and experience and confidence of women UP members, lack of community awareness and trust on women as panel members, and responsibility for child rearing and household works have been highlighted as the main challenges for women's participation in the VC decision making process.

The study recommends a set of actions targeting both community and the UP machinery, such as rigorous information dissemination about VC and community awareness about legal and human rights and about gender equality, intensive capacity building and sensitization of the UP personnel about gender responsive VC services, and leadership and motivational training for community women and women UP representatives.

2.1.3 Developing, updating and printing public education and awareness materials and distribution.

- Printed 480,000 copies of posters focusing on VC services (including gender issues) and distributed among various stakeholders including district information office
- Printed 4,84,000 leaflets on services of Village Courts and distributed among beneficiaries, outreach GO-NGOs including district information offices and other relevant stakeholders

- Printed 4,48,000 stickers focusing on slogan of VC and distributed among beneficiaries, outreach GO-NGOs including district information offices and other relevant stakeholders
- Two bi-annual Bangla newsletters (July-December 2018 and January-June 2019) highlighting the progress and success of the project were developed and 37,000 copies of each were published and distributed to relevant stakeholders. In addition, one e-version of the newsletter “Smile” was published following same content as Bangla newsletter (July-December 2018) and shared with all central level stakeholders
- Printed 30,000 branded folders and distributed during trainings and various events with stakeholders
- Printed 30,000 branded notepads and distributed during trainings and various events with stakeholders
- Produced 20,000 branded pens which will be used in various events with stakeholders
- Printed 1,501 maps indicating project locations and distributed among UPs, UNOs, DC, DDLGs and other relevant stakeholders
- Produced and printed new designs 11,500 envelopes (both small and large sizes) including branding and slogan of Village Courts
- The project has produced a one-minute TVC focusing on how a poor widow having a disable child got justice through Village Court over a land related dispute. Meanwhile it has been shared on Social media which attracted more than 2.5 million views.
- Project produced one entertainment education drama focusing on a story of a poor woman-led household facing dispute with her neighbor and resolved through VC. This drama has been screened during community video shows and broadcast on local dish/cable channels in 16 districts.
- Three radio advertisements were produced in local dialects following the script of the TV commercial with support from three community radios of Barguna, Gaibandha and Moulvibazar and aired on 3 community radios of Barguna, Gaibandha and Moulvibazar. In addition, six dramas and six magazine programmes were developed in local dialect focusing on gender, services of Village Court etc. which will be aired during January - February 2020 in three community radios.

2.1.4 Raise awareness of network NGOs on village courts and support their capacity to do awareness

The project organized 128 upazila-level workshops with local GoB institutions and NGOs for promoting village courts messages through their own outreach activities. These orientations were organized as follow-ups and continuation of the project's outreach interventions conducted in 28 upazilas in 2017. Participants of these orientation sessions reviewed progress, major challenges, way forwards and generated upazila-level action plans of the GO-NGOs in promoting messages of village courts. They have also learned about the VC Act, rules and procedures along with updates of village courts in their respective district and upazila.

In the workshops, representatives from various GoB agencies informed that they shared VC messages with youths, beneficiaries of Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and lactating mothers' schemes, farmers, fish cultivation groups etc. Representatives from various non-government organizations also mentioned that they shared VC messages during micro-credit borrowers' weekly gatherings, general meetings with parents, courtyard meetings with mothers' groups, vocational training with youths, teacher and student meetings etc.

2.1.5 Organize workshop/seminars with journalists at national and local level to increase coverage of Village Courts

A national level consultation titled ‘Role of media for raising massive awareness on village courts’ with journalists was held on 29 September 2019 in Dhaka, attracting 120 participants including 40 leading journalists (e.g. news editors/chief reporters of various TV channels, newspapers, radio and online). As a Chief Guest of the event Md Tazul Islam, MP, Honorable Minister, MoLGRD&C remarked, “promoting services and successes of village courts in media will significantly contribute to reduce case back logs in the courts as well as maintaining peace locally by resolving petty disputes.” Mr. Helal Uddin Ahmed, Secretary, Local Government Division; Ms. Rensje Teerink, Ambassador of the European Union to Bangladesh and Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh were present as special guests in the event. A nationally known and leading journalist was deployed as moderator of the event to facilitate the open discussion session. In the meeting, performance of VC, findings of 27 district-level consultation meetings, success in media coverages on VC, role of media to promote VC etc. were shared. One UP chair of Madaripur and one beneficiary of Bagerhat also shared their experiences regarding services of VC.

During open discussion session, journalists recommended to promote successes of village courts through social media, arranging talk shows on TV with the participation of beneficiaries and field level stakeholders, publishing articles, providing training to field level journalists on VCs, using local news/programmes’ timeslots of TV time, buying time slot from media to broadcast talk shows, forming a reporting pool to cover news of VCs, taking VC in government’s revenue activities rather than a project for ensuring better and sustainable access to justice among rural audiences. The event drew coverage in 42 national media and news agencies including 13 TV channels.



Workshop with journalists at national level

2.1.6 Update and maintain the village courts website and other social media

AVCB II project’s website (<http://www.villagecourts.org>) was updated regularly with VC performance data, news, photos, video etc. Village courts performance, success stories,

remarks of beneficiaries and stakeholders etc. were covered in 4,196 media coverages including three international news out, 343 national (47 TV) news.

Content analysis of media coverage during the period shows that newspapers and TV both at local and national level published in-depth/detailed reports on village courts performance, success stories, and successes on VC services, the importance of VC, successes of the project, etc.

News of different events that took place at national and local level were published in the local and national media. The project review and reflection workshop held in April 2019 in presence of Md Tazul Islam MP, honorable Minister, Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives was highlighted in 29 national news outlets, including 7 TV channels.

In July 2019, an analytical article was published in the Daily Star, one of the leading English newspapers in the country written by a research fellow of BRAC university.

In June 2019, IWM Post No. 123, Summer/Spring 2019, a magazine published by the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), an independent institute for advanced study in the humanities and social sciences based in Austria published:

“The largest attempt to use non-state courts to promote human rights and the rule of law as it exists anywhere in the world today is the project “Activating the Village Courts in Bangladesh (AVCB) which started in 2010 and is currently in its second project phase.”

The visit of the Ambassador of the European Union to Bangladesh and British High Commissioner to Khulna in observing activities of the VC had been covered in 14 news media outlets including 5 national outlets (2 TV channels). This news covered remarks of the delegates, including Ambassador of the European Union and Head of Delegation to Bangladesh Ms. Rensje Teerink.

In December 2019, one news outlet published in South-South Galaxy (<https://www.southsouth-galaxy.org>), a global knowledge-sharing platform supported by UNOSSC, UN agencies and development partners, described the acute challenges of the justice sector in Bangladesh while mentioning village court as a suitable mechanism for upholding peace at the local level.

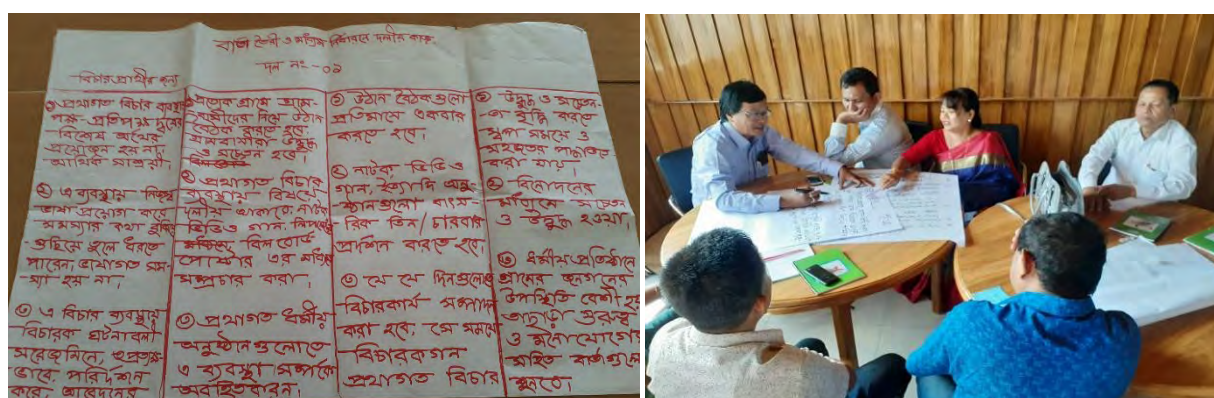
AVCB Phase II project also reached an audience of approximately 3.5 million through its social media page, particularly in Facebook (www.facebook.com/villagecourts), the topmost preferred social media platform in the country, while its twitter page also reached a significant number of audiences. A TVC was boosted on the Facebook page of the project and reached more than 2.5 million people within 30 days.

Apart from this, VC messages (e.g. Let’s visit village courts for getting justice within short time with minimal cost, village courts can resolve cases within BDT 75,000 (\$887.57), fees in village courts is BDT 10 (\$0.118) or 20 (\$0.236) for various cases, in village courts there is no provision to appoint a lawyer to resolve a dispute having interest of women, representation of woman/women is a must as panel member/s, etc.) were delivered through mobile messages to 160 million mobile phone subscribers of the country with the support of the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (BTRC) at free of cost.

2.1.7 Raising awareness on existing legal systems and options for redress mechanisms in CHT

Awareness campaigns (organize discussion sessions, cultural programmes, film shows, theatres, leaflet and poster distribution etc.) at upazila level

Legal awareness among the tribal as well as the whole CHT community is extremely low, which seriously impairs their ability to access justice institutions. To address these problems, the project has planned to deliver the key messages through suitable and effective means. Three consultation workshops were organized in Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban to identify key messages to promote traditional justice system in CHT and best-suited communication tools for message dissemination. On an average, 33 people, including headman, karbari, representatives of local NGOs, lawyers, teachers, and journalists participated in each event.



Group work by participants in Rangamati district

Activity Result 2.2: Evidence-based and knowledge management on village courts increased

Evidence of the impact of the project will be generated through the baseline survey and the end line survey, which will be conducted in the middle of 2020. Project progress and results, lessons learned, and project impact on women empowerment have been documented through MTR, Courts User Survey and study on appeal cases conducted using in-house resources, Lessons Learned Study and study on Impact of Village Courts on Women Empowerment.

Based on the MTR and EC-ROM missions' recommendations, all stakeholders agreed to extend the project for one year, which accordingly happened during this reporting period. Furthermore, two annual reports (Annual Report 2017 and 2018), one success story book, and one leaflet highlighting the success of the project were published and disseminated to different stakeholders and development partners.

a. Progress against OVI

Table-07 Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicator (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
Activity Result 2.2 Evidence-base and knowledge-management on VCs and local justice mechanisms increased				

Table-07 Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicator (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
2.2.1# Studies commissioned which support VC's ability to deliver access to justice.	0	6 (1. Baseline of AVCB II (plain land), 2.MTR, 3. Endline AVCB-II (plain land), 4. Study on institutional Monitoring system 5. Baseline in CHT, and 6. Endline in CHT	2 (Baseline of AVCB II, and MTR conducted)	Edline (Impact study of AVCB II (plain land), and Study on institutional Monitoring system will be conducted in 2020
2.2.2 # Lessons learned studies undertaken and disseminated.	0	1	Lesson Learned study is underway	
2.2.3 Increased understanding of gender and justice issues	0	At least one report on gender and VCs/ CHT local justice mechanisms	Report on impact of village courts on women empowerment is underway	Study will be completed by February 2020

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

2.2.1 Develop and implement detailed M&E and research plan

Developed and deployed Court User Survey (CUS) online-based application:

To reduce complexity of maintaining CUS data accuracy and implement more tracking options, an online-based CUS application is developed. It has features of the monthly CUS information store, data input validation, review data with PMU, finalize the CUS monthly information, user notification, track District facilitators CUS performance, export data to CSV format, and so on. The new CUS online application is deployed on live PMIS server and integrated with PMIS.

Field monitoring by the project:

The AVCB Project's M&E team and other members of project management unit (PMU) visited different unions of Bhola, Barguna, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Patuakhali, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Faridpur, Gazipur, Sylhet, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Chandpur, Panchagarh, Sirajganj, Gaibandha, Rangpur and Naogaon district during this reporting period to monitor the progress made against the target, along with documentation of the VC's proceedings, knowledge and skill of VCAs on VCs and documentation, VC performance, knowledge of UP chairs on VC, satisfaction level of beneficiaries on village courts services, efficiency and effectiveness of village courts, use of IEC materials, maintenance of different registers (courtyard meeting register, counselling register, stock register, attendance register, visitor register, etc).

At the end of each visit, findings were shared with field level staff and were guided for further improvement. Findings were also shared with respective DDLG, DC, and UNO, and sought their support for making the village courts more functional. Meeting with UP chairmen and members were also carried out to motivate them for resolving disputes properly following the VCs act and rules.

Members of the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) attended Quarterly Coordination Meetings⁷ (QCMs) organized by four partner NGOs during this reporting period. The participants of the workshop were the Project Coordinator, Monitoring and Reporting Coordinator, District Coordination Officer (DCo), Finance Officer and focal person of respective NGOs. District Facilitators deployed by UNDP in working areas of each partner organization also attended the meeting. PCU provided technical support to four partner NGOs for organizing meetings effectively. Both financial and programmatic progress, and type of challenges faced by NGOs during implementation were discussed in the meeting.

Members of the PCU have supervised/monitored the work of 27 District Facilitators and provided management and capacity building support for smooth implementation of field level awareness-raising and capacity building through four partner NGOs. They also guided and regularly monitored 4 partner organizations. They checked all the necessary documents, both financial and programmatic and ensured timely fund transfer to four partner NGOs. They have maintained close communication with Project Coordinators, Finance Officers and Monitoring & Reporting Coordinators for MIS data entry, documentation of VC's proceedings, and upholding union wise village courts performance, along with being intensively involved in trouble shooting.

District Facilitators (DFs) deployed in 27 districts were engaged in the following activities in consultation with the respective DDLG and in coordination with the PNGO colleagues.

- Building and strengthening the relationship with UP chairs, UNOs and DDLGs to ensure their support to implement project activities smoothly
- Providing support to local administration to prepare refresher training and VCMC meeting plan and budget and ensure timely submission for NPD's approval
- Maintaining close coordination with DTP members in each district and ensure their presence in refresher ToT held at NILG, Dhaka

⁷Quarterly Coordination Meetings (QCMs) is an NGO's activity organized by partner NGO quarterly where all District Coordination Officers, PC, Monitoring and Reporting Coordinator, Finance Officer and Focal person of AVCB II project of respective NGOs attend. In addition, District Facilitators deployed by UNDP in NGO's working district also participate in the quarterly meeting of the respective NGO.

- Providing support to the local administration in providing massive refresher training held at district and upazila level to provide training to service providers of 1,078 unions
- Providing technical support to the local administration for organizing different district level events such as VCMC meetings, yearly coordination meetings, etc.
- Assisting PNGOs to organize and facilitate CYMs, multimedia drama shows, and community-sharing meetings following the guideline provided by PMU through monitoring
- Maintaining close relationship with local journalists to encourage them to publish reports and related information highlighting the benefits of the VC to make it more popular
- Ensuring effective use of IEC materials by field level staff through monitoring
- Guiding and providing all sorts of technical support to PNGO to attend the quarterly coordination meeting organized by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) to orient local NGOs about VC and to make them responsive to integrate VC in their regular activities
- Monitoring village courts' performance by reviewing documentation of VC's proceedings, and observing village courts hearing sessions
- Coordinating with UP Chairmen and members to run the VC following Village Courts Act 2006
- Conducting courts user survey following the guideline provided by M&E and knowledge management team. In this regard, information has been collected by reviewing case documents and interviewing petitioners and respondents
- Checking reliability and validity of the data by reviewing monthly VC's performance report and cross-checking it with its sources

They have represented the AVCB II Project in different forums/meetings organized by the government. They also have been maintaining professional relationships with judges, police, and journalists to ensure their assistance for activation of village courts.

Field monitoring by the EU

During the reporting period, the project has facilitated one field visit made by the European Union and the British High Commission in 2019. Ambassador of the European Union and Head of Delegation to Bangladesh, Rensje Teerink and British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Chatterton Dickson visited Noihati union of Rupsha upazila in Khulna. Both the European Union Ambassador and the British



Ambassador of the European Union observing a CYM

High Commissioner observed the activities of VC at Noihati uUnion Parishad complex, having seen a live hearing session of VC and consulted with elected representatives as well as beneficiaries of the union. The delegation comprised of Audrey Maillot, Governance Team Leader; Alexandru Calota, Programme Manager (Governance), and Philip Mellish, Programme Manager, Governance, the European Union, and were accompanied by the

National Project Coordinator of AVCB II Project and Deputy Director Local Government of Khulna.

HE Rensje Teerink remarked that VCs are substantially contributing to maintaining peace in rural areas as well as ensuring good governance and reducing litigation in the higher courts. The roles of local administration to make village courts more functional are thus commendable. HE Robert Dickson praised the endeavors to deliver justice for the benefits of rural population in short time and at low cost.

Conduct case audits along with NGOs' performance assessment:

Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh project has engaged four partner organizations a) Bangladesh Legal Aid Service Trust (BLAST), b) Eco Social Development Organization (ESDO), c) Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) and d) Wave Foundation for three years starting December 2016 for assisting the Local Government Division in activating village courts in 1,080 UPs by providing support to UP representatives to provide legal service and creating demand of village courts to the community people.

During reporting period, the project took an initiative to evaluate the performance of the organizations for the period of 10 December 2018 to June 2019. The objective of the evaluation was to identify and critically evaluate the activities as well as to assess the achievements against the deliverables of the 3rd year of the contract.

As the assessment took place in August 2019, so performance/achievement between 10 December 2018 to June 2019 were covered. Intensive document review at the organization's HQ, district offices, and union parishad (UPs) level, including interview with district facilitators (DFs), UP representatives, and village courts assistants (VCAs) took place to collect the information. The team found that the organizations completed most of their activities and achieved more than 90% of its targets in review period.

Development and deployment of Project MIS:

Project MIS that was developed during last reporting period has been deployed in 27 districts during this reporting period. This web-based system has been deployed to track the progress of different indicators related to VC's performance and to monitor union-wise performance of VCs. The system generates different reports (progress report by unions, upazila, district, division, HQ, etc.) based on the pre-defined query criteria.

Three batches of day-long training on Project Management Information System (PMIS) for field-level staff including District Facilitators (DF) held from 12 to 16 August, 2018 at Dhaka. In total, 65 (Male-60 and Female-5) field level staff, including 5 PMU staff, 25 District Facilitators, 4 Project Coordinators, 4 Monitoring & Reporting Coordinators, 26 District Coordinators and 1 Upazila Coordinator participated in the training. The main objective of the training was to increase capacity and skills of the participants on project's MIS so that they can use the MIS and monitor VC performance regularly without



any trouble. After training, 27 district offices have updated the PMIS, entering month wise ~~union~~ level village courts performance data of their respective district. Now MIS is updated and functional and users can monitor village courts performance sitting in his/her offices.

The project carried out a two-day refresher training for UNDP and Partner NGOs' staff (districts coordinators, PC, M&RC, and district facilitators) on PMIS and technique of capturing both quantitative and qualitative results (Court User Survey and Success Story) to build up their skills on MIS and capture both quantitative and qualitative results so that they can perform assigned tasks efficiently. In total, 68 participants attended in three batches of training held at Village Well, UNDP, Level-19, IDB Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka from 25 November 2019 to 2 December 2019.

2.2.2 Undertake baseline survey, independent evaluations, surveys of beneficiaries and officials and others need-based assessments including explanatory study for possible rolling out in CHT

Conduct Mid-term Review:

Mid-term Review (MTR) of AVCB II project by one national and one international consultants have been completed. The mission was for 30 days starting from 27th August 2018 to 10 October 2018.

Impact Study of AVCB II Project:

The project hired the internationally reputed firm, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) to conduct an impact study of AVCB phase II project in 2017. The impact study included two rounds of surveys. The first-round survey (Baseline Survey) was carried out between January to May 2017 and a report was published. The second-round survey was supposed to carry out in 2019 to measure the impact of the project but has shifted in 2020 due to following reasons:

- The baseline was conducted in May 2019 and the implementation of the program was delayed due to some unforeseen reasons. So, gap between baseline and end line is not enough to generate long term outcomes if end line was conducted in middle of 2019. To correctly estimate the long-term outcomes, the AVCB program needs to be operated for a reasonable period in a particular Union Parishad.
- The program has extended until December 2020.

Under the above circumstances, contract with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) has been revised and extended till December 2020.

2.2.3 Undertake in-house research and review interventions in order to support the knowledge base on village courts, and improve interventions (lessons learned studies; specific research topics on gender and village courts etc.)

Lessons Learned Study of AVCB II project:

Lessons Learned Study by one national and one international consultant has been conducted. The mission was for 30 days starting from 18th November 2019 to 02 January 2020. At the end of field work, they have shared findings with LGD, UNDP, and the EU through debriefing sessions. Meanwhile, they have submitted the draft report incorporating the feedback from the AVCB II Project.

Conduct Court User Survey:

To measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the village courts, the project has conducted a Court User Survey. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used to collect the citizens' feedbacks on village court's services and its decisions. A total of 542 service recipients were interviewed in 27 working districts under 8 divisions across the project areas during the period of December 2018 - May 2019, covering 326 unions under 27 districts. Interviews took place at the household level both with complainants and/or defendants whose disputes had been settled by the VC. In addition, intensive document review took place to collect basic information of 542 cases at union parishad (UP) level. A report has been drafted and will be finalized by January 2020.

Impact Study on Women Empowerment:

Impact Study on Women Empowerment by one national consultant has been conducted. The mission was for 40 days starting from 26th November 2019 to 15 January 2020. The consultant has completed her field work, shared findings with AVCB II team through debriefing sessions. Meanwhile she has submitted a draft report.

Activity 2.2.4 Undertake and organise South-South Cooperation activities for mutual learning and exchanging

One international learning visit carried out in Philippines and Indonesia from 5-15 November 2019 where seven officials (three from LGD, one from IMED, one from ERD, one from Ministry of Finance, one from Planning) from Government of Bangladesh and two from AVCB Phase II visited. The objectives of the visit were:

- To learn about community-based and restorative or similar justice services from Philippines and Indonesia from their long and quality experiences
- To share knowledge and experiential learning for replicating best practices
- To build a partnership between Bangladesh and East Asian countries (Philippines and Indonesia) on best practices of customary justice with restorative principles

The visit included basic orientation about justice system of Philippines and Indonesia, Barangay Justice System of Philippines, customary justice system of Indonesia, observation of hearing session of Barangay Justice System, interactions with traditional leaders, judiciaries, target beneficiaries, and government officials. Village Courts, a local level disputes resolution mechanism of Bangladesh was shared with the stakeholders of both countries aiming to exchange learning. Village courts system was highly appreciated by them and they expressed their interest to visit Bangladesh to get more knowledge about village courts. The learning visits allowed the participants to learn from comparative international experiences, practices and initiatives in the advancement of justice services. The delegation recommended the continuation of such study tours.

Activity 2.2.5 Organize a National Village Courts Conference

The project did plan to hold a VC conference at national level in last quarter of 2019 with the presence of Honorable Prime Minister and accordingly, ministry sent a summary to the PMO for Honorable Prime Minister's kind approval but PMO office recommended to hold this conference in presence of Honorable President of Bangladesh. It will be held in 2020.

Activity 2.2.6 Produce and print knowledge products

During the reporting period, 1,000 copies of the Annual Report were published and shared with relevant stakeholders to disseminate the project results, successes, and different endeavors.

Leaflet highlighting the success of the project

Published 5,500 copies of leaflets highlighting the success of the project. It will be distributed by January 2020 to relevant stakeholders like DC, SP, DDLG, ADC, UNO, UP Chair, UP Secretary, and others.

2.2.7 Action Research/feasibility study for exploring/scoping of VC's in CHT (15 UPs of 3 upazilas of 3 districts)

Two ToRs – one for hiring consulting firm for conducting the baseline survey and another one for hiring research firm for conducting action research have been developed. Baseline survey will be conducted in sample areas of 121 unions of CHT areas to learn the status of different indicators before the project implementation. On the other hand, action research will be conducted in 15 UPs of three CHT districts for exploring of village courts in CHT areas.

3. Challenges and Lessons Learned

The types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and most likely to be encountered in the coming days are given as follows with mitigating measures:

Table-8 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
A. Types of difficulties/problems encountered during the reporting period	
1. On time releasing of GoB funds (parallel financing) to ensure implementation of actions funded by the GoB. Delay disbursement of GoB fund causes delay in implementing actions funded by GoB	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project was ready with necessary files for approval so that project can start action just after getting approval from GoB.• Continuous follow up and close coordination with concerned ministry would yield good results
2. Due to delayed approval of TPP, the project could not roll out its activities in CHT region as per plan. At one stage one year, no cost extension also became uncertain as the EU imposed a condition that one-year extension was subject to approval of RTPP	Possible to get RTPP approval in August 2019 with continuous follow up and close coordination with relevant stakeholders including the EU

Table-8 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
3. Replication of VCMIS system (piloted during Phase-I) across the project areas or piloting in 100 UPs requires hardware and capacity building support from the government or other sources. Getting such support is challenging	Possible to find out a solution with extensive support of NPD, AVCB II Project. LGSP-III under LGD confirmed that AVCB II project can use ICT equipment that LGSP-III project provide to UPs. But procurement of ICT equipment under LGSP-III project still under process.
4. Finalization of DMIE system and taking decisions for issuing Government Order (GO) across the country instead of project areas took more time than planned due to - transfer of DG, MIE Wing - transfer of focal person of MIE Wing who is responsible for implementation of DMIE system - absence of NPD for five months - taking concern from Cabinet Division to avoid the duplication of information collection from the same sources as Cabinet also collected VC performance report for their own purpose.	Possible to finalize DMIE system and prepare GO on DMIE system in December 2019 with continuous follow-up and close coordination with relevant stakeholders (DG, MIE Wing, Joint Secretary, MIE Wing, NPD, AVCB II Project, Cabinet Division, and UP Section of LGD
5. Ensure capacity building support to AACOs and handing over responsibility from project recruited VCAs to AACOs as per plan due to delayed recruitment of AACO. As per plan, LGD went for the recruitment of AACOs, but recruitment of this position in few districts is currently stayed by High Court's Order following a Writ Petition.	292 AACOs recruited out of 1,078 and provided training to 93 AACOs. Remaining will be trained by first quarter of 2020.
6. The project envisaged challenges in getting approval of one-year extension due to following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EU agreed to extend one-year subject to approval of RTPP (rolling out AVCB Phase II in CHT areas); ● Getting approval of project documents (PAGoDA, ProDoc and TPP) on time 	Due to close and continuing follow up from the EU, NPD/LGD and UNDP, it was possible to get approval of RTPP for rolling of village courts in CHT areas. Project was ready with necessary project documents (revised PAGoDA, revised ProDoc and TPP) in advance having support from the EU, UNDP, and LGD and has started the process of approval just after getting the approval of RTPP.

Table-8 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
7. Shorter duration of CHT component of the project (from two years to 15 months) with excessive workload had impacts on ensuring quality as meeting the quantity was also a priority for the CHT part of the project.	Process documents are strictly followed to maintain the quality of the programs as much as possible. Relevant stakeholders are engaged in consultation and review meetings for addressing their valuable inputs and views in project implementation.
B. Type of difficulties/problems that may affect implementation in coming days	
1. The project envisages challenges in handing over VC's responsibilities from project recruited VCAs to AACOs as recruitment of this position in many project districts currently is stayed by a High Court Order following a Writ Petition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LGD and UNDP will pursue the government to complete the appointment of the AACOs at all the UPs (with priority to the project area UPs) without further delay. ● Project will provide capacity building support to 199 AACOs by first quarter of 2020 and LGD will take necessary initiatives for handing over VC's responsibilities to AACO ● LGD will issue a letter to DCs instructing the handover of village courts responsibilities to AACOs and accordingly DCs will issue directive to UPs for handing over VCs responsibilities to AACOs
2. The project envisages challenges in rolling out village courts in CHT in terms of implementation. Furthermore, concerns persisted about effective coordination among Regional Council (RC), LGD and MoCHTA.	<p>An agreed modality should be adopted in consultation with Regional Council, LGD, and MoCHTA</p> <p>Close coordination with LGD, MoCHTA, CHT Regional Council, Hill District Councils and Circles and local administration will be maintained</p>
3. VCs are authorized to deal with some cognizable offences. In case of these offences, police retain the power to investigate, which creates a barrier to activate VCs.	Both national and local advocacy and sensitization interventions have been planned to overcome these challenges. The project has been working with the home ministry for issuing directives from the police chief to facilitate referrals to VCs.
4. Mindset set-up of UP Chairman towards Salish may create barrier to activate VCs.	Capacity building and sensitization initiatives through follow up and mentoring will be carried out and so will a plan to change their mindset by involving them in different activities, such as VCMC meeting, half-yearly coordination meeting, etc.
5. Achieving the results and objectives of CHT component within one year remains a formidable challenge. The CHT component was designed for two years	UNDP wishes to engage with the EU on this issue in the coming months to find a mutually agreeable solution.

Table-8 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
where action research intervention is supposed to start in 2 nd year of the project. The implementation period is curtailed due to delay in getting GoB approval for the TPP. As a result, ensuring the success of the project, including the quality of services, adequate capacity building and sustainability of the interventions, might be of a major concern to UNDP as the implementation continues. The action research planned for village courts in selected 15 UPs also requires time for ground level implementation, lessons learning documentation and framing evidence-based policy recommendation for necessary reforms	

Lessons learned:

- The strategy of using ‘cascade training’ through the DTP was effective, allowing deployment of knowledgeable trainers relatively quickly and relatively cheaply.
- The inclusion of the DDLG & UNO in the DTP has been a success and should be continued.
- Regular (annual) meetings with UP Chairs in every district should be continued as it allows the service providers to share their experiences and issues.
- Involvement of local administration is crucial to implementing massive residential refresher training programs for the key VC actors.

4. Updated action plan (January 2020 to December 2020)

Table-09 Annual Work Plan (January 2020-December 2020)					
Activity Result	Activity	Quarter			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1.1 Capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level improved and key skills strengthened to enable Village Courts in new target Unions and local justice mechanisms in CHT to function effectively by the end of the project implementation	1.1.1 Equip 1,080 UPs with all necessary forms, furniture, <i>ejlas</i> (court bench), VCAs and others.				
	1.1.2 Develop, update and print training materials (mainstreaming gender and vulnerability issues).				
	1.1.3 Form Master Trainer (MT) and District Trainers Pools (DTP) and provide ToT for both.				
	1.1.4 Train all key VC actors (AACO, VCA; UP Secretary; UP Chair, Panel Chair, UP members, Village Police etc.) in project area on role and functions of village courts, mainstreaming gender issues.				

Table-09 Annual Work Plan (January 2020-December 2020)					
Activity Result	Activity	Quarter			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	1.1.5 Sensitize key stakeholders (UNOs; DDLGs; judges; police; Women's Development Forum etc.) in project area on gender and village courts.				
	1.1.6 Establish clear and systematic coordination mechanisms with upazila and district level government authorities.				
	1.1.7 Develop capacity of field level staff.				
	1.1.8 Provide support to National Training Institutes (NILG, BCSAA, JATI etc.) to update and develop training materials and ensure VC is integrated into regular curricula/syllabus, ensuring that gender and vulnerability issues are mainstreamed.				
	1.1.9 Develop capacity of traditional institutions, local CSOs and local administration in CHT as well as judiciary, legal professions, and other relevant actors in CHT.				
1.2 Legal and policy framework revised to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of VCs and local justice mechanisms in CHT	1.2.1 Engage in advocacy and sensitization with judiciary and police to enable early case screening within current framework.				
	1.2.2 Lobby for Practice Note from Chief Justice and Directive from IG Police on screening and referral of cases to Village Courts.				
	1.2.3 Draft proposed amendments to the Village Court Act based on consultation with stakeholders.				
	1.2.4 Print and distribute necessary VC materials and guideline.				
	1.2.5 Undertake field monitoring to ensure legal compliance and quality of decision making.				
	1.2.6 Review existing customary laws and practices and codification/documentation of laws as well as support existing harmonization efforts of different justice systems in CHT.				
1.3 GoB monitoring capacity for evaluating Village Courts and other local justice mechanisms' performance is strengthened and systematized	1.3.1 Support LGD to take over village courts performance monitoring of 351 UPs in pilot phase.				
	1.3.2 Further strengthen institutional capacity of MIE Wing of LGD, and district and upazila officials to manage performance of UPs and oversee Village Courts through DMIE system.				
	1.3.3 Strengthen Village Courts Management Committees (VCMCs) across the project areas and lobby for increased balance in gender representation.				
	1.3.4 Replicate web-based Village Courts Management Information System (VCMIS) in				

Table-09 Annual Work Plan (January 2020-December 2020)					
Activity Result	Activity	Quarter			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	100 project unions for efficient performance monitoring.				
	1.3.5 Advocate for the inclusion of the monitoring system into the updated Village Courts Rules and for setting up a monitoring system of access to justice for the most vulnerable in CHT.				
2.1 Beneficiaries in project areas understand the roles and functions of the VCs and other local justice mechanisms and are able to access their services when required	2.1.1 Develop outreach strategy and implement community mobilization initiatives for local citizens about VCs in each project union.				
	2.1.2 Develop and implement gender awareness-raising strategy aimed at improving the ability of women to make use of Village Courts.				
	2.1.3 Develop, update and print public education and awareness materials and distribute to project areas				
	2.1.4 Raise awareness on existing legal systems and options for redress mechanisms in CHT				
	2.1.5 Raise awareness of network NGOs on village courts and support their capacity to do outreach				
	2.1.6 Organize workshops/seminars with journalists at national and local level to increase coverage of village courts				
	2.1.7 Update and maintain the village courts website and other social media				
	2.2.1 Develop and implement detailed M&E and Research plan				
2.2 Evidence-base and knowledge-management on VCs and local justice mechanisms increased	2.2.2 Undertake baseline survey, independent evaluations, surveys of beneficiaries and officials and other need-based assessments including exploratory study for possible rolling out in CHT				
	2.2.3 Undertake in-house research and review interventions in order to support the knowledge base on village courts, and improve interventions (lessons learned studies; specific research topics on gender and village courts, etc.).				
	2.2.4 Undertake and organize South-South Cooperation activities for mutual learning and exchanging				
	2.2.5 Organize a national Village Courts Conference				
	2.2.6 Produce and print knowledge products				
	2.2.7 Action Research/feasibility study for exploring/scoping of VC's in CHT (15 UPs of 3 upazilas of 3 districts).				

5. Communication and visibility

Visibility of Village Courts and AVCB Phase II Project activities were highly noticeable in print and electronic media including community radios, social media, IEC/BCC materials, knowledge products, and various events during the period. All IEC/BCC, visibility materials including banners, festoons, pens, note pads, folders, display corners, reports, presentations as well as media coverage highly promoted the partnership of Bangladesh Government, European Union and UNDP for activating village courts.

Table-10 Progress of Communication and visibility materials	
Items	Progress Status
Poster	Printed 480,000 copies posters focusing on VC services including gender issues and distributed among various stakeholders including district information office
Leaflet	Printed 4,84,000 leaflets on services of Village Courts and distributed among beneficiaries, outreach GO-NGOs including district information office and other relevant stakeholders
Sticker	Printed 4,48,000 stickers focusing on slogan of VC and distributed among beneficiaries, outreach GO-NGOs, including district information office and other relevant stakeholders
Newsletter	Produced 74,000 printed Bangla newsletter (Uchhas) and distributed among UP, upazila, district and Dhaka level stakeholders including outreach GO-NGOs, media. In addition, developed and disseminated e-version of the project newsletter “Smile” with same Bangla content of July-December 2018 among relevant central level stakeholders
Folder	Printed 30,000 branded folders and distributed during trainings and various events with stakeholders
Notepad	Printed 30,000 branded notepads and distributed during trainings and various events with stakeholders
Pen	Produced 20,000 branded pens which will be used in various events with stakeholders
Project map	Printed 1,501 maps indicating project locations and distributed among UPs, UNOs, DC, DDLGs and other relevant stakeholders.
Community Video Drama	Project produced one entertainment education drama focusing on a story of a poor woman-led household facing dispute with her neighbor and resolved it through VC.
TVC	One Television Commercial (60 seconds) was developed in 2019 focusing on a poor single woman-headed household having a differently abled child who resolved her land-related disputes in VC. This TVC was boosted on Facebook page during November-December in 2019.
Guideline on Legal Services	Printed and distributed 1,210 copies of Legal Services

Table-10 Progress of Communication and visibility materials	
Items	Progress Status
Information	Information guideline to VCAs and UP chairmen within the project areas.
Video Learning Aid on VC	Printed and distributed 5,200 copies of Video Learning Aid to all UPs in the entire country including 1,080 unions of the project.
FAQ on VC	Printed and shared 3,000 copies with PNGOs, VCAs and DTP members and UP members within project areas.
Annual Report 2018	1,300 copies of Annual Report 2018 were published and shared with different level stakeholders
Success story book	1,000 Success Story books published and shared with different stakeholders
Leaflet	5,500 leaflets focusing on key results of the project were printed
Gender briefing paper	150,000 gender briefing papers were published and shared with relevant stakeholders including UP members.
Gender Guideline	1,250 gender guidelines were produced and distributed among relevant stakeholders including UPs

Visibility Report is attached as Annex-I.

6. Cross-cutting issue - Gender

The AVCB Phase II Project has targeted women to encourage them to seek remedies from VCs through its capacity building and awareness raising activities. The project followed the gender mainstreaming strategy in all interventions carried out, from planning to implementation. Meanwhile, it has developed a gender strategy, gender guideline for village courts and developed gender awareness raising strategy for the project.

The project has reached 7,700 women with capacity building events that include training for the UP chair, members, secretaries, VCAs, AACOs, and village police. It has mobilized around 8.7 million community people through CYM, community sharing meetings, multimedia shows, youth workshops, and rallies (where 56% were female). As a result, 47,281 (29% of total) women sought to remedy through VCs up till December 2019. Of the women who sought remedies, 78% got a remedy and remaining are under trial. A total of 391 day-long workshops were organized for women UP members and other potential community women to enhance their knowledge of VC processes and to enhance their motivation to act as panels of VCs. The project organized 26 district level sensitization workshops on gender and village courts in 26 districts also.

The project initiatives mentioned above encouraged petitioners and respondents to nominate women as VC panel members. As a result, representation of women in village court's decision-making process has increased from 2% (2017) to 17% (in 2019).

Project's contribution regarding women's empowerment is also depicted from the following statement made by the MTR mission: *"Project supported VCs have provided a forum for women to speak in a safe space and women members sitting on the panel are treated equally and their decisions are respected"*.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation efforts under the project have been described under Activity Result 2.2

8. Way forward

The project will provide support to the service providers of village courts of 1,078 UPs for continuing to offer localized justice to approximately 21 million rural people of Bangladesh. It will increase the capacity of GoB's national institutes for monitoring village court performance and carry out capacity building initiatives. The project will finalize amendment proposal of VC Act 2006 (Amendment in 2013) and place to ministry for starting the process of amendment. Handing over village courts activities to AACOs, building capacity of AACOs, strengthening traditional justice system in CHT areas, and conducting action research in 15 UPs of CHT areas for assessing feasibility of village courts in CHT areas will be the top priority of 2020.

9. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)

Annex-III

10. Financial Report

Annex-II



News of Consultation meeting with Senior journalists in September 2019 on ATN Bangla



News of Consultation meeting with Senior journalists in September 2019 on Nagorik TV



News of Consultation meeting with Senior journalists in September 2019 on ETV



News of Consultation meeting with Senior journalists in September 2019 on BTV, state owned TV channel



News of Consultation meeting with Senior journalists in September 2019 in BSS, state owned news agency



News of Consultation meeting with Senior journalists in September 2019 in Bangla Tribune



News of EU Ambassador and British High Commissioner's visit to Khulna for observing success of VC was covered on Channel I in July 2019



Success of VC was published in details in Daily Samakal in July 2019



A consultation meeting with district level judiciary was covered on Jamuna TV in May 2019



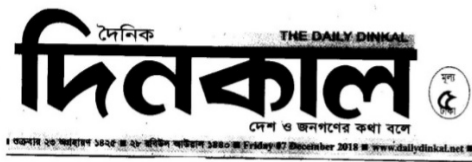
An exclusive talk show on successes of VC was highlighted on Channel 24 in April 2019



A news on the daily Prothom Alo, a leading national daily in April 2019 described successes of VC while focusing on increasing more women participation



A local daily of Bhola Protidin Sangbad published a news heading VC is becoming a symbol of trust among marginalized people in December 2018



Dinkal a national daily published how VC is solving local disputes in December 2018



'People Friendly Court' a news of the Daily Star in November 2018 highly focused on successes of VC and emphasized to make VCs functional across the country



A news on capacity development initiatives in October 2018



An exclusive interview of a UP chair of Gopalganj on Channel 24 in September 2018



VC is becoming popular was a leading headline in Prothom Alo, country's one of the leading national dailies in September 2018

a. Visibility Materials

A) IEC/BCC materials on village courts



Sticker on VC



A Leaflet on VC services



Map-AVCB II Working Areas



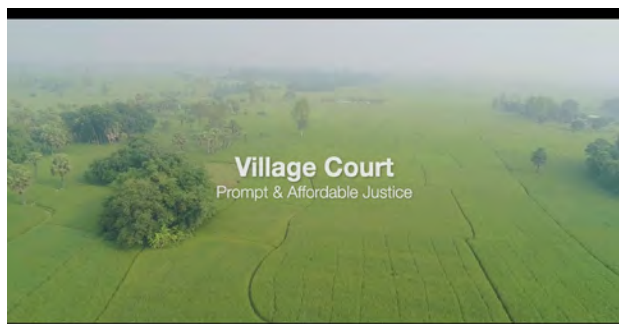
1000 Success story books published and shared with different stakeholders



Poster on VC



Branded Folder of AVCB II



An Introductory Video on AVCB II



TVC on VC



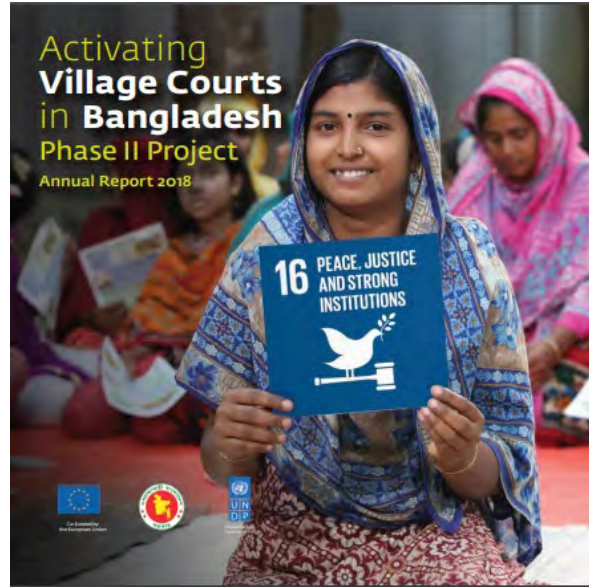
Community video drama on VC



AVCB II Project's Branded Pen



Project Newsletter issue-5

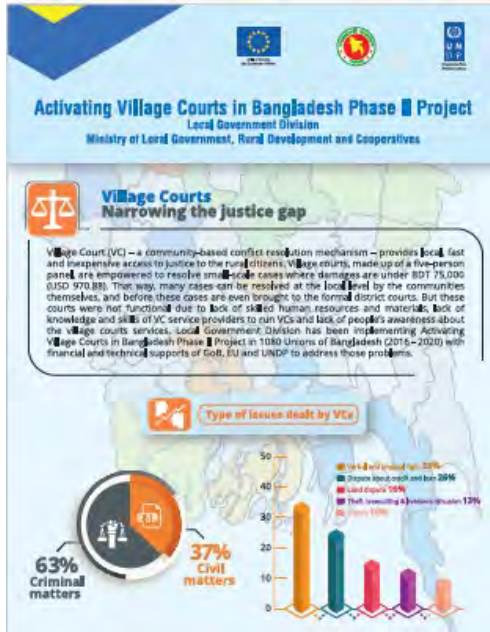


1300 copies of Annual report published and shared with different level stakeholders



A Factsheet on VC, AVCB II





5,500 Leaflet published and shared with stakeholders



Guideline on Legal Services Information



Gender briefing paper



A Video Learning Aid on VC