

Final Report

Mid-term Evaluation
of
The AID-COMMILLA Project entitled *Coordinated Effort to Access to Justice for*
Vulnerable Groups

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As this evaluation report showcases, the practical achievements of the Project in terms of empowering, educating, and getting to the institutions of justice a spectacular number of people would not have been possible without the generous support of the European Commission that funded the Access to Justice Project. As such, the European Commission deserves special appreciation for the role it has played in partnership with the project implementing organisations in promoting socio-economic development of a large populace.

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On a personal note, I would like to share a personal limitation. While preparing this report I lost my father in law on 13 February 2010, a sadly event that has delayed the timely submission of the present report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Introduction

This mid-term evaluation assesses the progresses that have been achieved over the last one year in the European Commission-funded project *Coordinated Effort to Access to Justice for Vulnerable Groups* (2009-2011), a project undertaken by AID-COMILLA and its two associates JSK and BDSC. The Project with its functions in five areas began its activities on 1 February 2009, and the present report evaluates its activities that have been implemented as of January 2010. The object of this report is to learn lessons for the future, i.e., the remaining working year of the Project, and to make recommendations towards its further improvisation including in the area of partnership strategies. I have tried and sought to attain this objective by surveying the strengths and limitations of the Project and relying on experiences of the concerned stakeholders.

The report is based on the knowledge, information and analyses that I gathered from my personal field-visits to three of the five project areas. During these visits I observed and inspected a number of activities, especially one activity from each strategic implementation modes. Moreover, I spoke to and interacted with the stakeholders, i.e., those downtrodden people whom the Project was meant for. Interviews with the beneficiaries and the people involved in implementing the Project gave me further valuable insights into the operation of the Project. I have assessed each of the declared and expected outcomes of the Project. Lessons drawn from field-visits have been buttressed by my analyses of relevant documents and reports supplied by the concerned three organisations.

B. Background

The *Association for Integrated Development – Comilla*, popularly expressed and known as AID-COMILLA undertook a human rights-based activity entitled *Coordinated Effort to Access to Justice for Vulnerable Groups* which has been funded by the European Commission's *European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)*. The functional slogan of the organisation AID-COMILLA – *Working for Women's Voice since 1995* – signifies that it works specially for women empowerment and protection. The AID-COMILLA's Access to Justice Project under review is no exception to pursuing this broader objective of the organisation. As stated, the objective of the present Project is to widen access to justice for the vulnerable people by combating violence against women, rape, *fatwa*-giving, wife-beating, sexual harassment, dowry-crimes, trafficking in women and children, police torture or custodial violence, and so on. The organisation proposed that it would achieve these purposes through awareness-rising with regard to the thematic issues of the Project, training (for example, through workshops), lobbying, and

by taking other means such as alternative dispute resolution attempts that create an environment for access to justice.

The lead project implementer, *AID-COMMILLA*, has two other implementing partners, Jano Seba Kendra (JSK) and the Bangladesh Development Service Centre (BDSC), who are also non-profitable non-government organisations with sufficient expertise and incredible interests in the development of the socially excluded/disadvantaged. This is to note that the dimensions, strategies, and modes of operation of the project activities at the charge of *AID-COMILLA* are followed by the two other sister organisations with necessary changes and adaptations.

The two associate organisations are experienced development organisations and are responsible for implementing the *Access to Justice* Project at Lakshmipur and Sunamganj. A community-based organisation “working for the disadvantaged”, the JSK was established in 1989 with a motto of developing human resources, empowering poor women, ensuring safe drinking water and nutrition as well as of ensuring good governance and human rights protection for the targeted people. The BDSC began its journey in 1978 and has since then focused on achieving a just and economically equitable society through undertaking actions directed towards improvement of lives and livelihoods of the marginalised such as actions in the areas of education, health, human rights, social protection, and women empowerment. As such, the *Coordinated Effort to Access to Justice for Vulnerable Groups* fits well in the broader functional objectives both of JSK and BDSC, particularly within their human rights and women empowerment goals.

The Project activities have been being implemented in five strategically selected areas in five Districts: (i) Comilla (Comilla Sadar Upazilla), (ii) Feni (Proshuram Upazilla), (iii) Kurigram (Nageshwari Upazilla), (iv) Sunamganj (Sadar Upazilla), and (v) Lakshmipur (Raipur Upazilla). The sheer level of poverty and the backwardness in all respects amongst the people of these areas is well recorded, except for Comilla where the situation is slightly better compared to other places. Nevertheless, as I have seen for myself, the people who are selected in Comilla for the benefits of the access to justice project are truly vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Of the 5 work-areas, the first three project areas (Comilla Sadar, Proshuram, and Nageshwari) are being covered by the lead partner *AID-COMILLA* while the other two areas belong to the remit of JSK and BDSC respectively.

C. Evaluation

As mentioned, the Project under review is schemed to span for a period of two years, 1st February 2009 to 31 January 2011. On the completion of its first year on 31 January 2010, the Project has just entered into its second and the concluding phase which would continue till 31 January 2011. As an integral part of the Project, *AID-COMILLA* proposed

that it would have conducted mid-term and final evaluations, both internal and external. It is in this backdrop that I was engaged as an independent consultant assessor to undertake the mid-term evaluation and to prepare this report, for which I worked for two months, January 2010 – February 2010. The present report evaluates the activities that have been undertaken during the first year of the Project.

Broadly speaking, the present evaluation has the following purposes:

- To provide the donor (and also the implementers) with an independent review of the Project activities.
- To evaluate the institutional capacity and efficiency of the three implementing organisations in carrying out the activities undertaken.
- To underscore the lessons learnt from the strengths and weaknesses of project activities and strategies of the implementing organizations.
- To make suggestions and recommendations towards making the Project activities more effective.

Put briefly, the object of this report is to learn lessons for the future, i.e., the last year of the Project, and to make recommendations towards its further improvisation including in the area of partnership/coordination strategies. Hopefully, the report would turn out to an added value to the experience and policy considerations of the donor organisation, the European Commission.

D. Constraints and Opportunities

There are a number of established and growing constraints and opportunities before the Project implementing organisations. While the newly installed democratic government (in 2009) has ushered in a new ray of hopes amongst the vulnerable people with regard to the standards of their lives, old constraints to the rule of law such as corruption, undue political interventions, administrative lapses, unemployment and other social evils have not disappeared altogether. These obstacles may have impacts on the environment of the project activities. On the other hand, there are also opportunities and positive factors that might help the Project successfully to achieve its objectives. The democratic government in itself is a confidence-giving factor, and the implementing organisations can capitalize on this. The sheer need of expanding the avenues to justice for the socially vulnerable people, their cooperation, the level of poverty and deprivation amongst the people in the areas selected for the Project, the existence of enterprising and motivated media, both electronic and print, and a sustained working relationship between the media and the concerned organisations, and, above all, a committed and trained staff at the three organisations as well as their motto and experiences of serving the people through rights-based activities are some of the noticeable factors that have helped the Project attain considerable successes at the end of its first year. Needless to say, the above opportunities and constraints continue to exist and will remain relevant for the three Organisations, *AID-COLMILLA*, JSK and BDSC, to consider.

E. Activities and Outcomes/Expected results

The end objective of the Project is to provide the vulnerable people with improved and unhindered access to formal and informal institutions of justice. While vulnerable people such as women and the distressed/disadvantaged remain at the core of the project goals and activities, other target groups for whom the actions are directed are: students-and-teachers, police, advocates, local elites and leaders such as elected local government representatives, government officials, judges/magistrates, marriage registrars, people from the media, civil society members including development practitioners, victims of violence and even the perpetrators, the disabled, and so on.

As mentioned above, a number of activities were proposed to be undertaken in order to carry out the declared goal of widening access to justice. The activities proposed and undertaken in the first year are: paralegal and human rights training for the members of staff, wide dissemination of the concerned legal and social imperatives through fixing posters, stickers, billboards, and message-plates fixed on the back of rickshaws, holding seminars and workshops (at Union, Upazilla, and District levels), demonstrations through building human chain, shows of folk songs, and video-shows, dialogues and exchange of views with students and the concerned stakeholders, settling disputes through mediation (arbitration) or court litigations, and providing other forms of legal aid including the reimbursement of medical costs. Also, there is in place an innovative means of educating the vulnerable about their entitlements and available remedies for their grievances through holding what is called 'courtyard meetings'.

The estimated number of beneficiaries who are to benefit from various sectors of activities undertaken by the implementing organisations ranges from 5,00 to 200,000. Specifically, the outcomes that have now become apparent one year after the Project's launching are that members of target groups have been well sensitized to the causes of the vulnerable people and have been acquainted with the law and their obligations and roles (legal or social) in helping the vulnerable to get access to justice. To take a specific instance, the students and local leaders (social, political and religious) have been able to imbibe a changed mindset vis-à-vis their roles in promoting and protecting, e.g., the rights of women and other distressed people. Also notable is the enhancement of capacity and confidence amongst the implementing partners to achieve these outputs, which would undoubtedly impact on the future outcomes from the Project.

At the level of achievements, the five expected results, perceived by the Project implementers, have been largely successfully attained.¹ *Firstly*, around 1500 people participated in workshops and around 15,000 people joined the human chain to stage rights-claims on several occasions, and adequate messages containing the thematic issues of the Project have been displayed and circulated through posters, billboards and so on, with the result that the concerned people have gained a sense of duty to help

¹ Please see the Annex No. 1.1., attached to this report.

establish an accessible and functional justice system. *Secondly*, around 3,000 people participated in workshops and around 30,000 people participated in human chains at the Upazilla level, and around 45,000 pieces of materials containing Project issues were displayed and circulated at the Upazilla level.² The same result as with the first one has been apparently achieved. *Thirdly*, at the Union (village) levels, around 5,000 people from 100 Unions participated in workshops, returning homes with a changed mindset to contribute to the justice delivery system, and around 20,000 people have watched video-shows with messages against torture and violence against women and have received information through shows of *jari gans* and other means of dissemination of information. These have yielded in a greater consciousness and commitment towards protecting the vulnerable people and establishing justice, formal and informal. *Fourthly*, around 2,000 students have participated in several dialogues conducted on the themes of the Project, who have arguably become motivated and sensitized towards the causes of women and other suffering people in society. *Fifthly*, the members of staff who are engaged in implementing the Project have been better trained on paralegal skills, human rights and gender issues, and monitoring skills. As a result, these human resources have greatly been well-equipped to better drive the project activities towards their declared goal.

Of special note is the practical achievement of the Project. Through mediation or *shalsih*, a considerable number of disputes, ranging from simple to highly complex family and personal-level disputes, have been amicably settled without any cost whatsoever. With the AID-COMILLA alone, 134 disputes have been registered as on the date I visited the organisation, with only 4 disputes having been sent to courts. This popular, cost-free, and user-friendly means of getting justice to the poor and the disadvantaged has raised a sense of confidence amongst the local people in that they now think they have places to go with complaints of injustice. Mention should also be made of the result/benefit emanating from imparting education to the vulnerable women through courtyard meetings. The beneficiaries have gained more confidence and skills in solving out their day-to-day problems arising from the breach or twisting of existing laws of the country.

F. Lessons, Findings and Recommendations

It is expected that greater sustainability in building the capacity of institutions engaged in delivering justice in Bangladesh is more likely to be achieved by methodologically and vigorously pursuing the declared goals and targets of results. Reforms in the existing procedures and systems *re* access to justice are more likely to occur through the concerned stakeholders who have benefited from the Project and have otherwise come into contact with the project activities.

The skills and cost-management of the Project implementers are highly appreciable. For example, the employment of national project managers, and the minimization of other costs, should be continued and replicated in prospective projects. The collegiality among the members of staff and their continuing training should be maintained and further

² Please see Annex No. 1.1.

improvised. Motivation to the members of staff through such training and other means such as increases in pays should be taken care of by the implementing organisations.

There are a number of **strategic recommendations** set forth at the end of the present report. There are actually no major suggestions directed towards dramatic overhauling of the project activities. Those recommendations are meant for the effective realisation of the Project-goals and for the removal of the few detected weaknesses. To note summarily, the present consultant would like emphasise the need for:

- (i) innovation in training of the staff which should be more inclusive,
- (ii) the increase in service centres, courtyard meetings, and number of working days to help the clients settle disputes,
- (iii) the change into the level/category of audience, contents and style of dialogues,
- (iv) a specially designed training for *imams*, and marriage-registrars (kazis) and their assistants, and, among other things,
- (v) the intensification of monitoring and evaluation.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Access to justice in context

Access to justice is a wider idea, and constitutes a 'complex' in the realm of law and constitutional governance. There are many parameters, not comprehensively charted out by scholars and development practitioners, that helps determine the qualitative question whether people in a given society has access to justice. Thus, access to justice is often linked with the level of legal awareness, legal empowerment, performing and independent legal institutions such as the judiciary in particular, social and economic capacity of the aggrieved to have recourse to the court or legal remedies available elsewhere and so on. Having access to justice not only means that there should be in place a legal environment that is facilitative towards people from all walks of life but also requires the absence of hindrances of any sort - economic, educational, social, informational, structural, and so on - that effectively prevent one from either coming to the shelter of law or reaping benefits from the system. In other words, the procedural attempts involved with the ideal of 'access to justice' are indeed means of bringing *justice* to the common public, i.e., to materialize the goals of rule of law. Thus, access to justice means nothing less than guaranteeing *equal legal protection*, in every perceivable connotation of the term, for all irrespective of religion, sex, caste, creed, wealth, and anything else.

'Access to justice' also means and refers to the people's ability in terms of material, economic, and informational resources to have access to the justice delivery system to remedy their grievances arising from inactions, lapses, and failings by the state and non-state actors. In practical terms, "access to justice has involved initiatives to expand the opportunity for poor and disadvantaged individuals and groups to settle their grievances through legal institutions, swiftly and efficiently". Importantly, where these institutions exist, "it is critical [for the ideal of access to justice to be operational] that they are deployed in an effective manner and that citizens across the board are willing or able to use them".³

The present review assesses the Project activities keeping in mind these dimensions of 'access to justice'.

The Constitution of the People's republic of Bangladesh,⁴ although it does not contain any direct provision guaranteeing access to justice, is the fundamental legal instrument that sets out a state obligation to ensure access to justice for all. This obligation may be drawn particularly from the Constitution's provisions concerning fundamental rights and fundamental state principles, and, among others, from, constitutional imperatives of

³ Khair, Sumaiya. 2007. *Legal Empowerment for the Poor and the Disadvantaged: Strategies, Achievements, and Challenges*. Dhaka: CIDA Legal Reform Project, p. 1.

⁴ Adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1972, the Constitution came into effect on 16 December 1972. The Constitution of Bangladesh has so far received been fourteen amendments.

responsible government, public participation in the governance of the state, and an independent judiciary.⁵ For example, the Constitution (in Articles 27 & 28) guarantees everyone's right to be recognized in and before law and to be treated equally in accordance with. It also provides, among other things, for fair trial, protections regarding arrest and detention, and protection from discrimination.⁶

In addition to constitutional obligations, Bangladesh has assumed under a number of international human rights instruments certain obligations to protect human rights and ensure justice for its citizens. Notably, it has ratified the International Covenant on *Civil and Political Rights* 1966 (ICCPR), and International Covenant on *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* 1966 (ICESCR). These two instruments, respectively acceded in 2000 and 1998, create obligations for Bangladesh to respect and ensure a number of rights such as the right to equality, the rights to life and liberty, the right against discrimination, the right against torture, and a broader spectrum of rights ensuring social justice.⁷

Despite the abovementioned higher constitutional imperatives and other legal obligations including international human rights obligations vis-à-vis the people's access to justice and the rule of law, it is a pity that accessing justice for most people in Bangladesh is severely problematic and in many regards far from the reality. Needless to say, constitutional obligation as to ensuring equal legal protection and social justice would be rendered futile if the wider sections of the public remain excluded from the justice system for any reason such as ignorance, administrative lapses, restricted legal opportunities, high legal costs and so on. In effect, the access to justice in Bangladesh through formal legal system is currently obstructed or impaired by many hurdles such as excessive delays in court procedures, illiteracy and lack of information about legal rights and avenues to remedies, prohibitive costs of suits and criminal proceedings, corruption in legal institutions⁸ and inefficiency of the people involved with justice delivery services, and ineffective criminal justice tools to combat torture, violence against women, custodial violence and so on.⁹

⁵ The State's 'access to justice' obligation can be interpreted as having been prescribed in the Preamble to the Constitution, which categorically declares that it shall be a fundamental aim of the state to achieve a rule of law-based society where social justice and recognition and protection of human rights and dignity for all will be secured.

⁶ See Articles 33 and 35 of the Constitution, *ibid*.

⁷ Of the same implications are the following instruments: The International Convention on the *Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination* (acceded 1979), The Convention on the *Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) (acceded 1984), The Convention against *Torture and Other, Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (acceded 1998), The Convention on the *Rights of the Child* (CRC) (ratified 1990), and the United Nations Convention on Anti-Corruption (UNCAC) (ratified 2007).

⁸ For an account of the state of good governance in Bangladesh see Institute of Governance Studies. 2009. *The State of Governance in Bangladesh 2008: Confrontation, Competition, Accountability*. Dhaka: BRAC University.

⁹ A recent work lists the following barriers to access to justice: inadequate laws, too much technicality, ineffective law enforcement bodies, corruption, anti-poor laws, negative attitude, excessive bureaucracy, delayed justice procedure, and abuse of political power. See Jahan, Ferdous and Shahan, Asif M. 2009.

Seen in the above backdrop, any development action in Bangladesh such as the current Project by AID-COMILLA and its partners towards widening the access to justice is a befitting ideal to pursue.

A scholar has broadly identified 5 stages of accessing justice: **naming** (identifying the grievance as a legal problem, which actually helps the victim to rise above the feeling that 'nothing can be done' against injustices), **blaming** (identify the culprit with whom lies the responsibility for the creation of the problem), **claiming** (making a legal claim for redressal of the problem, which may take the shape of litigation or alternative modes of dispute resolution), **winning** (refers to the availability of conditions that would hold a fair process/system that would recognize rights and legitimate interests of the parties), and **enforcement** (legal outcomes must be enforced, and enforcement is successful when legal outcomes are translated into social and political reality).¹⁰

For the sake of convenience, the AID-COMILLA's present project on ensuring an easy access to justice for the vulnerable people may be assessed from these perspectives. It would appear below that, however limited the focus of the Project activities might be, they reflect the above-noted five modes/means of accessing justice.

1.2 Activities and Expected results

Before switching over to the assessment of the activities of the Project, here is a brief introduction to activities and expected results in addition the narration above (see executive summary) and analyses that will follow below.

Activity 1: Arranging workshops at District, Upazilla, and Union Levels.

Result: 5 workshops each at Upazilla and District levels and 100 workshops at Union Levels.

Activity 2: Advocacy (campaigns and dialogues with college students).

Result: 16 sittings have so far been arranged mostly with college students, who are 2851 in number. They are better sensitized and educated about their social role *re* stopping violence against women and wiping out other injustices.

Activity 3: Arranging video-shows.

Result: At Union levels around 11,246 people watched these shows. These people have become aware of legal rules affecting their day-to-day life affairs such as marriage, dowers, maintenance and so on.

"Access to justice for the poor in Bangladesh: Conflict between western model and eastern culture", Vol. 1, No. 1, *Journal of Law and Development*, pp. 1-29, at p. 21.

¹⁰ Anderson, Michael. 2003. *Access to justice and legal process: Making legal institutions responsive to poor people in LDCs*. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Working Paper No 178, at p. 2.

Activity 4: Arranging Folksongs. Result: People who listened to folksongs have become aware of legal rules and prohibitions affecting their day to day life affairs such as marriage, dowers, maintenance and so on.

Activity 5: Court-yard meetings.

Result: A good number of women participants have effectively learnt laws and rules regarding the thematic issues of the project. Women have been increasingly taking resort to law in order to realize their rights as well as to prevent probable injustices to neighbours.

Activity 6: Capacity building training for the members of staff.

Result: The members of staff have augmented and enhanced their skills, and are better motivated to serve the vulnerable people.

Activity 7: Circulation of illustrated or rhymed messages, information displays, and fixation of posters and billboards.

Result: Wider dissemination of information, legal messages/obligations/duties to a greater number of people.

Activity 8: Alternative dispute resolution, and court cases in case of failed arbitration.

Result: Effective resolution of many disputes has been attained, thereby contributing to restore peace and justice.

Activity 9: Workshops with District Judges, magistrates and lawyers.

Result: These important government officials and lawyers have been further sensitized about their roles and agency in bringing justice to the disadvantaged and the poor.

Activity 10: Networking with GOs and NGOs, and holding press conferences.

Result: Relevant stakeholders have become sensitized about their roles and agency in helping the vulnerable people getting to justice.

2. ASSESSMENT AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodology

In order to undertake this evaluation, I made visits to three project areas under the governance of *AID-COMILA*, BDSC and JSK, namely, Comilla Sadar, Sunanganj Sadar, and Raipur at the Lakshmipur District. These visits spanned over four days, and I traveled on 16, 22, and 23 January, and on 1 February 2010. The two other project areas which were not given an inspection are under the operation of *AID-COMILLA*. This choice was made deliberately, as the activities of these two areas are in close conformity with project activities being run in Comilla Sadar by the *AID-COMILLA*. Also, for my evaluation, I intended to survey the activities being run by each of the implementing partners whose head-offices and activities I gave personally visited. While I did not observe and survey (nor was it practicable given the distances of the areas of project activities) every segment of project activities in each of the organisation, I have eventually covered all the aspects/dimensions of project activities. For example, while I observed a session of 'dialogues' at the JSC project area I talked to the clients/beneficiaries and observed courtyard-meetings or folk-songs shows at other places. There are, however, activities which I have observed and surveyed in all or two of the project areas I have visited.

I would like to mention that although I have not visited two project areas at Feni and Kurigram, I have widely consulted the implanting authorities about the programmes running there and achievements that have been attained therefrom. A limitation of my methodology needs to be noted here. I have not watched the contents of video shows, because of the time-constraint, but have learnt of the contents by speaking to members of the staff.

In addition to field-visits and my interactions with the beneficiaries and participants of the protect activities, I have extensively interacted with the members of staff with the three project implementing partners and have relied on reports, statements, and statistics supplied by them. Notably, on 4 February 2010, I have observed a three-hour long policy meeting held at Dhaka amongst the top executives of the three implementing partners of the Project. These primary sources of my knowledge behind this report and the attendant analyses have been supported by secondary material sources mentioned.

The key factors that have been taken into consideration while evaluating the Project included (i) perceptions by beneficiaries as to the benefits they drew, (ii) short-term and long-term impacts of various project activities, (iii) net-working and coordination amongst the partners regarding the project activities, (iv) effectiveness of legal messages displayed and circulated, (v) participation and satisfaction of the vulnerable people who are the recipients of benefits, (vi) skills, experiences, structural and material resources at

the disposal of the implementing organisations, and, (vii) training and motivation of the members of staff engaged in the Project.

2.2 AID-COMILLA- run project activities at Comilla Upazilla

Immediately after the successful launching of the access to justice project and after imparting a very foundational training to the officials and activists with the three implementing partners, the project activities took off the ground on 1 February 2009 in the five project territories including Comilla Sadar Upazilla. At Comilla, I inspected the head office of AID-COMILA and the project office situated therein. I observed a mediation session, and talked to the people: clients, lawyers, and the officials of the organisation involved. Importantly, I visited a courtyard meeting and observed the mode of the 'meeting'.

A detailed document called 'field operational guideline' (FOG) first outlines the people for which learning sessions and awareness programmes about the purposes and missions of the Project would be arranged. Secondly, the FOG details the principal elements of the implementation programmes which includes holding of dialogues and workshops with a cross category of people such as public officials, judges and magistrates,¹¹ local elites and leaders, and students. It also prescribes a *modus operandi* regarding the collection of information/disputes and their recording, counseling or rehabilitation of the victim, and the settlement of disputes. Thirdly, and importantly, the document sets out to give the responsibility of implementing the so-detailed activities to a key figure known as the Project Manager (PM), who is to report to the Executive Director of the organization. Whereas the PM is charged with overall supervisory role, actual project actions are directly controlled and managed by another key figure called 'area manager' who is to report, on a monthly and quarterly basis, to the project manager. Apart from the area manager, there are as many as 12 field organizers (FOs) who visit the project areas, collect complaints and, where applicable, supervise compliance, and conduct learning sessions. The other functions of the FOs are detailed in the FOG, which include active participation in the management of workshops/demonstrations and handling 'clients' (victims, or justice-seekers at any capacity) generally. The FOs and the area managers are required to report to the PM the progresses and activities undertaken in their respective area on a monthly, tri-monthly and half-yearly basis.

The area manager has been given a long list of duties to discharge, including concrete works such as to communicate with key people and to coordinate amongst several functions and people of the Project, to sketch out plans and time-schedules for the demonstration programmes, dialogues, and other activities. The area manager is supported by the field organizers.

¹¹ See Annex 1.2, showing the number of workshop held with judges, magistrates, and selected lawyers.

The other key officials and experts whose responsibilities are detailed in FOG are: Trainer, lawyers (called panel lawyers), accountants, Monitoring Manager, and finally, the Project Manager. To outline their responsibilities briefly, the Trainer is responsible to train the beneficiaries and to prepare training modules. There are however no trainer of trainers within the framework of the Project. The Monitoring Manager monitors the project activities on a regular basis and through a pre-determined process, and reports to the PM. He is also responsible to play a role in chalking out monthly, tri-monthly and yearly plans of actions. As noted above, the Project Manager is responsible for the overall implementation and progress of the Project. Notably, she is responsible for the development of operational guideline, to augment capacity of the project and personnel, and to give policy directives.

The FOG is a wonderful document which can be seen as a lens through which to see the Project under scrutiny here. Its strength lies not only in the details of the operational strategies, but also in the ethical elements it provides, mandating everyone concerned effectively and ethically to discharge obligations.

Publicity, awareness-rising and educating the beneficiaries

It has been one of the important components of the access to justice programme that all stakeholders, from government officials to the victims of torture, are sensitized and educated vis-à-vis the focal functions of the Project. As I have seen, the publicity about the project-activities, which have a pedagogic value, is done through fixing leaflets, printed slogans and messages of legal warnings, demonstrations of stage-shows, staging jari gans (local folk songs specially composed with the theme issues of the Project), holding dialogues with key government and NGO officials, local elites and religious leaders, arranging seminars and dialogues/debates at the school and college levels, and so on. Notably, maintenance of a continued communication with the government officials, marriage registrars and judges/magistrates, whether in the context of any specific motto or only as a matter of good will and gesture, has helped the Organisation operate its activities more smoothly than it would have been the case. Apart from this, there are some other innovative aspects of the publicity and awareness-building limb of the project such as fixing the posters holding legal messages about second marriage, dower and dowry on the back of rickshaws. The contents of these means of dissemination are written in extremely understandable and clear language (in Bengali), with an easy access for the vulnerable general public to information they need.

Now a note can be made on the contents of booklets, leaflets, stickers, manuals, and posters. I have seen 13 kinds of stickers which portray messages or calls for the following purposes: to stop dowry, to educate on the entitlement to dower, equality before law, to caution against child marriage and unlawful/arbitrary divorces, to resist acid violence, to unite and work against domestic violence (wife battering), to educate about the effects of delayed justice (prolonged litigation process), and benefits of alternative modes of dispute resolution and birth-registration. These stickers also

contain invitations to the people to *AID-COMILLA* Centres for legal aid. A glimpse of such an informative message that is displayed in a sticker by *AID-COMILLA* can be taken from the following:

We have come thus far to provide you with legal aid.
Contact: AID-COMILLA Legal Aid Centre
.....

Also, there are manuals on ways of getting access to justice, and on laws used in the daily affairs of the general public. The principal manual contains simplified and easily accessible description of laws under 6 sectors, divided into 26 lessons. The six sectors are: Muslim family laws, Hindu family laws, Muslim inheritance laws, Hindu inheritance/succession laws, constitutional laws, and criminal laws. There are some issues included in the manual which are of special nature, and may not thus be easily identified as belonging to any one cluster of these six legal sub-branches. For example, there is a lesson on alternative disputes resolution and the techniques of reporting and managing domestic violence.

Additionally, there is a short handout with abridged description of laws relating to marriage, rule against polygamy, dowry, divorce, and domestic violence. I have found these publicity and educative means absolutely useful for realizing the goals of the Project, but would observe that in barely one or two cases the messages displayed could be made more effectively communicative.

The legal awareness is basically raised through holding workshops in different areas at Union, Upazilla, and District Levels. I have not been able to remain present in any workshop, but have gathered information about their modes of operation and the issues that are discussed there. Undoubtedly, these workshops with stakeholders coming from a wide range of public life have proved generative of confidence and awareness about the social and legal issues which are within the ambit of the Project. This is to note that the FOs organise meetings and sittings with key stakeholders in the concerned project area, and there are 42 sittings in a year.

Courtyard meeting

AID-COMILLA and other associate organisations conduct courtyard meetings, which are used as a platform of educating the poor and the disadvantaged about their legal rights and entitlements and with a view to increasing the level of their empowerment and ability to use the available avenues to justice. The project area in a given Upazilla is subdivided into three sub-areas, and each sub-area is further divided into 12 cell-areas, and

in each cell-area there is a group of self-motivated and enterprising 25 women. The meeting groups are consisted of women of varied age groups, and some of them are simply the victims of the same shades of injustices and exclusions to prevent which they have been learning means and techniques. Courtyard meetings are ideally held once in a month and there had been 9 such meetings at the point of visit. Each meeting is dedicated to learning lessons on one specific issue or a cluster of issues of the Project-themes. The learning sessions are conducted by a FO in an informal and participative fashion. I have found the courtyard meetings to have radiant effects as women and children beyond the groups do often attend the meetings.

Although the '*courtyard meetings*' as have been styled by the partner organisations implementing the Project, are quite common to strategies of development organisations (NGOs) in Bangladesh, the courtyard meetings under the Project are exceptionally fruitful in achieving the objectives of the Project. They help the attendees identify the problems they are facing, give them a sense of confidence in that they know of a body that would stand besides them, educate them as to how to prevent, manage and solve the day-to-day problems of violation, injustice, torture and other grievances, and ultimately equip them to utilize legal institutions to redress their grievances. A noticeable impact of such courtyard meetings is that in addition to the members of the groups, the male members of society are also being indirectly educated about women rights and their human dignity. Some husbands whose wives have learnt the 'law' governing their family lives from these courtyard meetings have reportedly become sensitized to the causes and woes of women. For example two to three husbands have come forward to pay to their wives both the dower money that was immediately due and, exceptionally, the dower money which would become due upon the death of the husband or on dissolution of the marriage.

Learning and taking actions

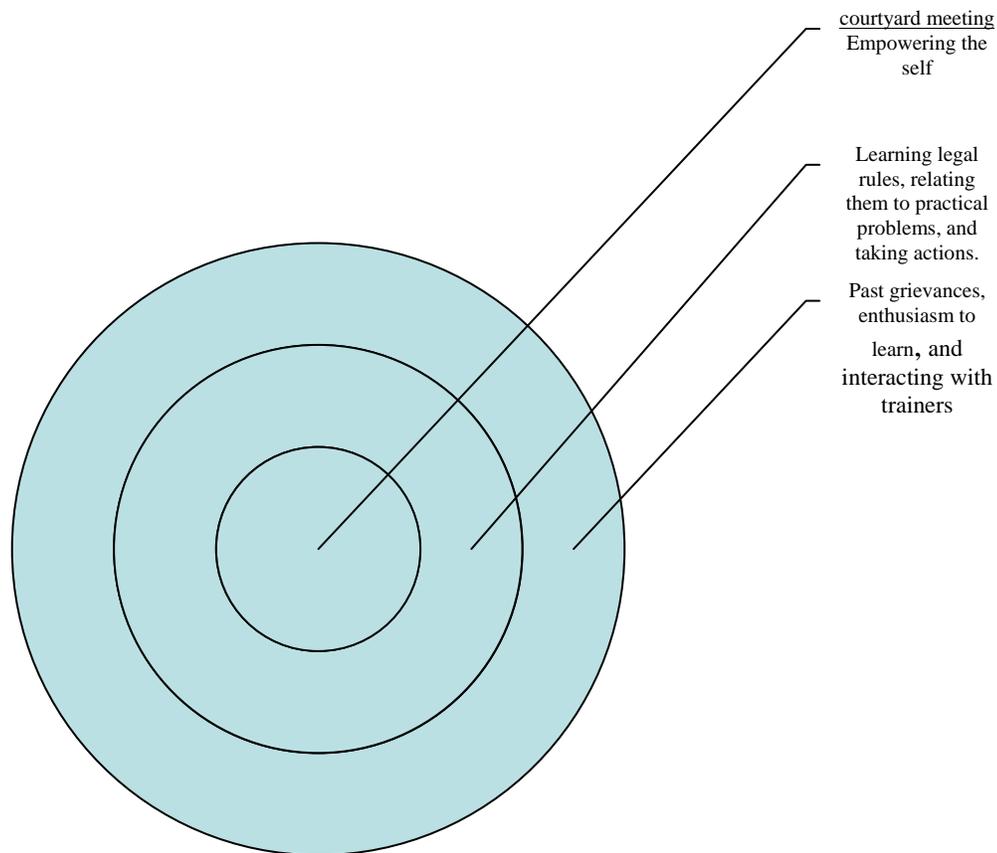
Salma Akter, a courtyard meeting member, learnt the law that giving girls aged below 18 in marriage is unlawful, and **prevented** a child marriage in which a girl of 12 was about to be given in marriage. She motivated the guardians and other key people involved and cautioned them about legal consequences with special reference to *AID-COMILLA* legal aid centre.¹²

¹² As this beneficiary told me, there was a perception that *AID-COMILLA* had some policing powers. The woman was actually referring to the fact that amongst the locals *AID COMILLA* symbolized as a threat to injustices.

Commitment to work for others

Marzia, a middle-age woman, paid taka 22,000 as dowry to her son-in-law for the happiness of her daughter Lipy, but now realises that she gave in to the unlawful demands by her son-in-law. She is a regular courtyard meeting member with a motto to preventing same types of injustice being done to others.

Importantly, some women members, after having been educated, have not only solved their own problems but have also educated other neighbours about how to access justice through legal means such as through *AID-COMILLA* centres or even courts. I have learnt from an attendee, Mrs Salma Akter, that she prevented a child marriage in which a girl of 12 was about to be given in marriage. In another case, as I learnt, a couple that was about to break up, voluntarily mitigated their problem after having been sufficiently sensitized, through members of courtyard meetings, to the legal requirements and social imperatives.



Empowerment through learning at courtyard meeting

Courtyard meetings have thus clearly empowered the women whom they cover, no matter whatever the degree of empowerment is. While asked why they voluntarily turn up to such meeting even though they are not fed in the meetings let alone being paid, the attendees of courtyard meetings spontaneously replied that it was their pleasure to learn about their rights and to be able to become of aid to other women who are in distress. Thus, a sense of community service is being developed through these meetings, to say the least.

Mediation/arbitration (popularly known as ADR)

AID-COMILLA provides legal aid to the vulnerable people including victims of family torture, desertions, divorces, and other forms of injustices. The legal aid service by *AID-COMILLA* has become quite popular, and people are increasingly turning up to the legal aid centres. So far, 113 disputes/allegations of injustice/violation have been lodged, of

which 45 have been so far settled successfully, while others are in the process of settlement. On another count, about 71 urgent incidents of rape, acid-throwing, torture, battering, and so on, were attended by the staff with *AID-COMILLA*, of which 21 came through the 24 hours service centres, while the rest 50 cases were referred to *AD COMILLA* by several government and non-government organisations.

It is thus obvious that the term legal aid is not limited only to the traditional connotations; it also includes even quick advices given to the 'clients' over telephones. The activity is run through a *Legal Aid Centre* which has been adequately advertised (through leaflets, and in publications, and formal and informal announcements) as a 24-hour open centre for help. This is quite an innovative and fruitful idea, as this raises a feeling amongst the victims that there is a dedicated organisation to listen to their causes at anytime, although it is highly unlikely that the victims would have taken resort to the Centre for legal aid at an unreasonable time. This is to note that one day (Saturdays) is exclusively earmarked for the lodging of complaints and conducting ADR or meditation.

The mediations are facilitated by a local lawyer drawn from the panel of lawyers prepared by the organisation. An official from the organisation, from whose area the dispute has come to the centre, helps conduct the process. There is a well-structured system of reporting the complaints and maintaining the developments (such as the next date for sitting). There are claims forms, facts sheets, and agreement forms which are concluded at the end of each successful ADR/mediation. The local connectivity of the lawyer/s facilitating the mediation is a special strength of the process. Besides, the Organisation is seen to have followed 'ethical mediation' in the sense that they strictly maintain the 'no-biasness' principle and nurture the culture of promoting belongingness, participation, and confidence among the users of the mediation process, i.e., the opposing parties to the dispute. This is, however, to note that apart from the professional inherent skills, no other training on mediation seems to have been imparted to the presiding lawyer/s.

For the users of the legal aid centre the most preferred means is settlement. The success rate of settling disputes through ADR is very high, and it is only in intractable cases that disputes coming to the *AID-COMILLA* are remitted to the courts, criminal and civil. Most court complaints find their paths to the civil litigation. As of the date of my inspection, there had been four pending lawsuits in Comilla project area, of which two involved maintenances claims and the other was about the custody of children. The panel lawyers (2 in number) conduct the court cases if necessary. There is also a provision for the appointment of lawyers in addition to panel lawyers on a case-by-case basis. In case of unsuccessful ADR, 'clients' are sometimes referred to the government legal aid scheme, which in most cases is availed of successfully. *AID-COMILLA* officials closely supervise the process of accessing the government-sponsored legal aid. It can be relevantly noted here that although *AID-COMILLA* is often asked by the District Legal

Aid Committee to cooperate,¹³ there is currently no representative of this organisation in this Committee. Such representation from human rights organisations is possible within the framework of the law.¹⁴

I observed the final stage of a mediation process regarding a family dispute in which the husband was extremely adamant to cut the marital tie off on the allegation that the wife's side concealed that the bride was given in marriage before. The wife's side refuted the allegation, and wanted to continue with the marriage but failed ultimately. As a result, the wife agreed to the settlement of 'divorce' but with the guarantee of having her dower money paid. The panel lawyers and the assisting officials managed the mediation well, and I saw them applying all the necessary tactics and techniques of arriving at a successful conclusion of mediation/*shalish*.

To mention specially, in drawing benefits from or making **achievements through *shalish***, AID-COMILLA (and its two associates for that matter) has been significantly successful, despite all the problems and constraints involved with the process. For example, apart from resolving disputes simply, it has recovered for the victim-clients an amount of taka 19,16,550.00 from the respondents/*defendants*¹⁵ as dower money, and maintenance claims and taka 70,300 as maintenance for children. (See the Annex No. 3.2).

I have known that field organizers often face resistance from the interested parties/clients, which they by and large handle carefully. In settling a dispute with monetary obligation, the mediators avoid the leverage of paying in by installments, which might appear to be working harshly on the person required to pay but works successfully actually. The 'rule' of onetime payment is being followed to keep the opposing parties within the bound of the ADR, for, when given the chance of paying in several installments, they often tend to escape the process, thereby frustrating the whole process of resolving the disputes. ***Enforcement of meditation*** outcomes has always been a strategic and socio-politically delicate affair. There, however, is a monitoring and evaluation process in place with the AID-COMILLA. Intensive follow-ups are given to the *shalish* results, and after every six months the implementation of the solution/s reached is reported. Importantly, local elites including chairman and members of local government councils (Union Parishads) are often engaged in the process of settling the disputes and enforcing the awards/outcomes of the *shalish*.

¹³ For example, 17 cases were referred by the District Judge to AID-COMILLA for investigation.

¹⁴ Please see the Legal Aid Act 2000, section 9(1)(Tha), which provides that the Chairman of the District Legal Aid Committee shall co-opt as member one representative from amongst non-government organisations working in the District.

¹⁵ The term 'defendant' here is used not in the same sense as it used in a court-litigation, but only to meant the other side of the dispute who often tries to defend his/her position.

Especially, after a successful mediation or after having deal with a dispute otherwise, the victim is given rehabilitation support by way of providing (one to one) counseling and other material assistances. For example, medical assistances at the cost of the organisation are immediately provided to the victim of torture, and the victim is sent to government shelter homes when no place is found where to send her. Also the organisation looks after the protection of the victim while at the police station.

Of the disputed that made their way to the legal aid centre, tortures are reported in around 15 cases, but no criminal cases are so far filed. This is, I have been told, to avoid the frustration of amicable settlement of family disputes. However, a written pledge as not to torture with the legal threats being noted, orally or in writing, is obtained from the recalcitrant.

On the whole, the mediation and other legal aid facilities at the *AID-COMILLA's* Comilla project area seem to be well-governed from the managerial and technical perspectives, well-announced, and also effectively monitored.

2.3 BDSC-run Project Activities at Sunamganj Sadar Upazilla

I visited three components of the Project at Sunamganj: saw a show of *jari gans*, attended a courtyard meeting, and saw mediation sessions. Before go for these, here is a quick account of activities by the BDSC undertaken in the first year of the Project. They held 20 workshops at the Union (village) level, and one (1) workshop each at Upazilla and District levels. Besides, there were video shows and folk song shows on the themes of the project activity in which around 1133 and 3561 people were present respectively. There had also been staff capacity-building meetings, dialogues with school/college students, and distribution of leaflets and other materials to raise legal awareness. These latter-mentioned activities attracted a sizable number of people/potential beneficiaries.

We found the show of folk songs (*jari gans*) quite effective, in terms of time at which it was arranged and also the place where it was staged. Te lyrics of *jari gans* have been specially written to cover the goals of the project, and these were sung by a team of three *bauls* under the leadership of a famous and respected *bauls* of the locality. At the strategic level, some popular songs were sung before the theme-oriented songs in order to attract more people to the show. Naturally, people are likely to be less interested in purely purposive songs such as the *jari gans* composed on legal matters and problems. Thus, the said strategy is quite appreciable. The show was pre-briefed by people from the BDSC who tried to make the gathering understand about the need of listening to the songs. At the end of the show some people voluntarily came forward to the representatives to discuss their problems, and advices were accordingly given and some were specifically told to register their grievances with the BDSC. This is to note that, it would have been better for the accompanying officials to invite questions/problems from the audience with a note that they could lodge the complaints with their office.

We also visited a courtyard meeting and talked to a client who was beneficiary. The courtyard meeting follows the style and methods of courtyard meetings run by *AID-COMILLA*. After having met beneficiary who received legal aid from the BDSC, we had an idea about the impacts of the Project activities at Sunamganj. The beneficiary was a divorcee, and she received the unpaid dower money and some amount of maintenance for her child. An important issue came out from my interview with this particular beneficiary, which is that the whole settlement as a result of which she got the remedy was based on oral descriptions of terms of the marriage deed. There was no copy of the marriage deed to rely upon, which was reportedly lying at the office of the marriage registrar who was unwilling to release the same. So the BDSC or other partner organisations for that matter may be advised to take legal actions against or to motivate the registrars to issue the certified copies of marriage deeds. Moreover, the beneficiary expressed the view she might have to incur a lot of expenses if she had gone to other legal aid centres or locally available institutions of justice.

Beneficiary of ADR at BDSC

This divorced woman, a victim of absolute caprices of her husband, received an amount of taka 20,000 as dower money, but is extremely happy as she thinks that she would not have even had this but for intervention by the BDSC.

I observed a mediation session at the office of the BDSC. Here, again, the BDSC follows the mode and methods of mediation followed by the lead organisation. Interestingly, however, I have seen some unconventional issues such as land disputes to be coming to the BDSC centre for resolution. I saw this land dispute to proceed to an amicable settlement: at least there were signs of improvements towards a solution. The conducting lawyer also seemed to have good knowledge about the land disputes. I saw another unconventional dispute which was also on the way of being settled. It was about an allegation of having unlawful marital sex, the concerned woman with the demand of having a marriage with the alleged offender and also for compensation. This was a critical and extremely complex issue to mediate, but the parties were seen to have submitted to the good office and jurisdiction of the BDSC legal centre. Unfortunately, this highly sensitive and privative dispute was being mediated openly, with no privacy being maintained. A good number of people that came to the legal aid centre came to know about this because of the inadvertence to the concerned clients' right of privacy.

The departure from the practice of maintaining privacy does not even match with the principle of ethical mediation followed at *AID- COMILLA*.

2.4 JSK-run Project Activities at Raipur, Lakshmipur

At JSK's project at Raipur, we attended a dialogue that was held with the students of a local college, and visited the homes of two clients/users of the services. The dialogue was designed to inform the students about the laws that govern our behavior vis-à-vis family matters and personal legal affairs. This was also to sensitize the students towards their social duties to protect and promote human rights especially for the women and children, and to raise the level of awareness against domestic violence, torture against women, and the entailments and equal rights of women. For this dialogue, six students were previously given topics with focus on these issues on which they prepared. On the day of the dialogue they presented their deliberations within 10 minutes time provided. At the end, the some of the guests made their comments on delivered short speeches. As a guest, I also took part by way of speaking for about 5 minutes, where I tried to activate the students mainly by asking them to pose questions of relevance.

Although, it had some value added to the goals of the Project, the process of dialogue seemed to me to be fraught with ineffectiveness. Most students (more than one hundred, of whom 2/3rd were female students) were pushed to the position of passive listeners to their fellows. No doubt, the arrangement of holding this dialogue is itself of motivational effect. Nevertheless, the dialogue falls short of an ideal dialogue. It would be better to supply the students with materials and areas of discussions beforehand, and then to hold the dialogue in an interactive fashion based on a short briefing about theme-issues followed by questions and answers and critical evaluation. Also, to be more effective, dialogue with students at a particular school and college should be held in at least two sessions.

The beneficiary whom we visited and interviews presented a unique experience. The lady beneficiary, who was a victim of unlawful divorce, received a good amount of dower as per the marriage-deed as a result of the JSK-sponsored mediation. The outcomes included a decision that the recalcitrant husband would also give a monthly payment of tk. 500 for the child of the lady. The lady, however, refused to receive the amount on the ground that the amount was meager, and it was against her status and dignity. We visited the client after four months into the settlement and, after having known this development, advised her to receive the maintenance for her child and then to ask the JSK to arrange for the increase. Apparently, in this particular case monitoring and counseling could be intensified. On the other hand, the client herself was a short of unmanageable beneficiary in that she could not remain steady on her won decisions let alone being confident in arriving at decisions. The woman agreed to the suggestion as to the receipt of maintenance from her ex-husband which we unfolded to her during the visit, but later changed her position to go back to her stubborn decision that she would not receive tk. 500 per month for her child. However, in view of the exiting situations, it

seemed that there was a lack of strong monitoring and effective counseling to the woman.

3. STAFF TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION

As noted above, the Project activities started off only after a basic training about the Project, its aims and objectives, and also about how to manage and operationalise the activities. All members of staff, except the officials in the accounts department and support staff, of the three partners took this 6-day long training. The (paralegal) training covered 6 sector-wise laws that fall within the framework of the Project activities. The exclusion of accounts department and the support staff from the training seems to be a flaw; they should also be trained about the activities of the Project they are working in. This would help them become more sensitized to the thematic issues of the Project and would enable them to get the people around them aware of the project activities. This is to appreciate however that the members of the staff of the implementing partners do receive training periodically on other skills such as project management and evaluation and monitoring as part of other projects undertaken by their organisations. This does not, however, obviate the necessity of imparting development and skills training to the members of the staff of the current Project.

Staff-members of each partner organization working in the Project under review sit together every quarterly to discuss issues and problems and to review the legal problems and developments. Also, every member of the staff is at freedom to talk to the PM at any time to seek advice regarding the specific problem s/he is facing.

Although the three organisations are working separately and at distinct places, they are indeed working under the same umbrella. Hence there is the need of coordination and cooperation amongst them. On the basis of my visits to the project areas and the meeting at Dhaka with top executives of *AIDCOMILLA*, JSK and BDSC, I can confirm that there is a system of coordination among the partners, and the Project Manager with the *AIDCOMILLA* has a duty to visit areas of sister organisations and to advise them when needed. It is not unnatural, however, that there is a little discordance amongst the similar activities run by the partners. I am aware of the necessity of diversification in the implementing modes, given the difference in people and social structures of the project areas, but the need for further coordination cannot simply be overlooked. For example, the dialogues with local stakeholders such as school and college students do not follow the same pattern, and some dialogues or learning sessions run by one particular organization are obviously more effective than their counterparts with another partner organisation. What is needed is continually to exchange views about progresses and styles of the activities, that is, before the officials of the implementing partners routinely meet.

4. EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES: IMPACTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

On the basis of my evaluation of the project activities, I endorse the following outcomes that have been gained:

- (i) The members of staff have received human rights training and other necessary skills, which have equipped them better to serve the people under the cover of their Project.
- (ii) There has been extensive dissemination, amongst the general public, of the concerned legal and social imperatives such as the duty to protect the women, to prevent and protest violence against women, the legal prohibition of early marriage, oral divorce, and unauthorized polygamy, and so on. The dissemination has been done through fixing an adequate number of posters, stickers, billboards, and message-plates fixed on the back of rickshaws, holding seminars and workshops (at Union, Upazilla, and District levels), demonstrations through building human chain, shows of folk songs, and video-shows, dialogues and exchange of views with students and the concerned stakeholders. Resultantly, apart from the general public, specific target groups such as students, local leaders, opinion leaders, have become aware of their obligations and roles in society towards attaining justice for the vulnerable.
- (iii) At District levels, government officials, civil society members, police officials, lawyers, marriage registrars, religious leaders, and teachers have become acquainted with the relevant laws and sensitized about their legal and social roles. They are expected to play their roles in, e.g., combating violence against women, and preventing prospective sources of injustice to the vulnerable people. Not to exactly quantify these people, but an estimated number of 1500 may be noted.
- (iv) At Upazilla and Union levels government and non-government officials, people from media, school and college-teachers, students, religious and local government leaders, received information/training with regard to the principal thematic issues of the Project. As a result, a better understanding and commitment has developed amongst these beneficiaries about their roles in establishing justice for the vulnerable section of the public.
- (v) A good number of students at school, madrasah, and college levels, have become morally sensitized to the causes of the vulnerable people, specially women. This particular group consists of beneficiaries who would be the future leaders and actors of the country, and, thus, making them sensitized to the cause of social justice is more likely to have tremendous social impact.
- (vi) A considerable number of family disputes in particular have been either settled or are in the process of resolution through mediation (arbitration).

Some other disputes that could not be settled through ADR have gone to the dockets of the Court. Either way, the dispute resolution schemes of the Project has already cast a serious positive impact in the Project areas. People around are now well-informed that they can get their grievances heard and remedied at almost near to zero cost.

- (vii) A good number of women, including those who have already suffered injustices, have learnt about their entitlements and the avenues to reach institutions of justice. It is expected that they would be better-positioned to prevent potential injustices. Also importantly, they have become more confident and skilled as to the day-to-day problems as may arise.
- (viii) There is now an enhanced capacity, confidence, and coordination amongst the three implementing partners to attain the set goals.

A quick assessment of the above-noted and other outcomes from the project activities and their impacts on the quality of lives of the service recipients would yield in the conclusion that the project has so far been a success story in bringing justice to the vulnerable people, specially women that are deprived, deserted, tortured, and physically or mentally victimized by family members or outside offenders.¹⁶ It becomes clear from the above analyses that the Project activities in the broader arena of 'access to justice' have contributed towards increasing the beneficiaries' ability to use the five stages of accessing justice outlined at the beginning of this report.

The project activities have thus helped the vulnerable people to (i) **name/** identify their grievances as legally soluble problems. The service recipients have undoubtedly developed a feeling that it is not always right to say and think that 'nothing can be done' against injustices they suffer. In the process, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged have been able to (ii) **blame/** identify the culprit for their grievances. This can be deduced from their allegations against the cornered responsible persons such as husbands, torturers, police, or other state agencies, and so on. Thirdly, they have been enabled to (iv) make legal claims for remedying their problems. For example, we have seen victims claiming through ADR or litigations the restitution of conjugal life, payment of dower and maintenance costs, custody of children, and so on. Also there has become created a positive environment of '**winning**' in that the society covered by the Project is arguably in a better position to recognize rights and legitimate interests of the vulnerable people. Lastly, the project activities have been successful in (v) **enforcing** legal outcomes and spreading the benefits of these outcomes and information about them to the potential victims of injustices. Ultimately, the people of the Project areas have become more confident about the availability of legal intuitions at their disposal for the purpose of preventing threats to a just society and achieving remedies for their grievances.

¹⁶ Please see the Annex No. 1.

5. PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIES VIS-À-VIS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ACTORS

The lead organization's and its partner organisations' main partnerships, for the purpose of the access to justice Project and other projects, are with the government, civil society and the donor community. The partnership strategy adopted by any organisation has impacts on its activities and possible outcomes. It is in this context that private-public partnership by each implementing partners as well as partnership amongst the partners *per se* need to be evaluated. All the three organizations have in the past developed workable partnership with government agencies to carry out a number of significant projects. This has seemingly infused into their policy and activities an element of confidence, leading, among other things, to an ability to establish an effective dialogue between themselves and the government officials and judges/magistrates.

Also, the concerned three organisations have the track record of working in close collaboration with civil society organizations and international donor agencies in the past. For example, the BDSC has worked with the NGO forum, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum, Campaign for Popular Education and so on, while the AID-COMILLA has the experience of working with, for instance, Natural resource Institute of the UK (NRI), and the Asian Rural Institute of Japan (ARI). These organisations have also worked closely with the media, both electronic and print, and have utilized this old partnership in the dissemination of mottoes and achievements of the current Project activities under review. During the past year of the Project, there had been several press conferences, and the people representatives of the media had also been invited as participants of various workshops and awareness raising events.

Needless to say, the sustained partnership amongst the three organisations that have under taken the current Project has acted as a boost behind their successful implementation of respective project areas in an integrated fashion. The undertaking of the project by them is a reflection in effect of the already existing partnership and interactions amongst these three organisations. In section 3 above, I have commented on the coordination among the partner organisations about the Project activities. It is suffice to mention here that provided that the partnership amongst them *inter se* is further intensified, the rest of the activities in the concluding year are definitely to achieve considerable success.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS: TOWARDS IMPROVEMENT

The above descriptions and analyses lead us to a conclusion that the lead organisation and its two associate organisations do have sufficient skills, expertise and resources to implement the *Access to Justice* project they have undertaken. The structures of various component activities of the main project, and the methods to implement the project and carry out the declared functions, i.e., to achieve the goals set forth are by and large effective, workable, reliable, and viable. As such I do not have any major suggestions towards overhauling of any of the project activities. However, upon completion of the present evaluation, I have been able to reflect upon certain strengths and weaknesses of the Project, which are in effect described above. In addition to suggestions and recommendation made at appropriate places above, the summarized suggestions and recommendations are as below. It is hoped that these recommendations, if given appropriate consideration in the concluding year of the Project, will substantially contribute to the successful attainment of the goal of the Project, i.e., widening of the access to justice for the vulnerable people of society.

I would like to make the following recommendations and suggestions:

(i). A small library, or at least a bookshelf fully dedicated to the themes of the project, should necessarily be maintained at all principal project-offices. The strength of these resources should be disseminated to all stakeholders. In particular, attendees of training programmes, dialogues and workshops including government officials should be informed of the collection of necessary books/materials at the earliest possible time. Of the three organisations working for the implementation of the Project, the *AID-COMILLA* has been maintaining a collection of necessary materials, but that is simply not strong enough. For example, this does not have easy-readers of Bangladesh's Constitution or copies of main international human rights instruments.

(ii). There should be a change in the mode of dialogues with students. Currently, only college students and, in some cases, senior madrasah students are being involved in the awareness programmes. The present consultant-surveyor thinks that in view of social milieu such as the practice of early marriage and the low threshold in college-level education, the orientation of the dialogues and awareness-building sessions should be redesigned, including more school and madrasah students of senior classes. In the area of legal awareness programme, the utility of what has become known as *street law campaigns* has been increasingly on the rise. In *street law campaigns*, concerned

members of society such as students or even passersby may be informed of laws and legal institutions that they encounter or utilize in their daily affairs through several means from circulating information leaflets to delivering formal teaching sessions combined with the questions and answers modality. Although most means of disseminating information about the project-themes/issues are currently being availed of, there is the need for holding more than one teaching sessions or dialogues at the school and college levels. Lecturing sessions may also be briefly held before demonstrations such as folk songs.

(iii). I think that training facilities currently available are not adequate. More training and motivational programmes for the core staff-members engaged in the implementation of the Project activities should be introduced. The basic training for the members of staff (one such training may be undertaken even now at this second phase of the Project) should include a session on international human rights regimes with particular reference to obligations Bangladesh has assumed by ratifying or acceding to international conventions. This dimension of international obligations vis-à-vis human rights, rule of law, and access to justice should be focused in all workshops and other types of communication with government officials and judges. Of special note is the training for lawyers who conduct mediation/ *shalish* as well as for support officials who facilitate *shalish* and monitor enforcement of awards and outcomes of such *shalish*. The panel lawyers could be sent to any legal aid organisation at Dhaka to train on arbitration, mediation, and other means of legal assistance.

At this juncture of the second phase of the Project, all relevant officials including the officials at the accounts and other support department may be given a special training of 2 to 3 days about challenges of the project activities. The proposed training for the staff should contain necessary focus on ethical, legal, social, and psychological factors attached to alternative dispute resolution and the conduct of court cases. I would also suggest that a trainer be appointed centrally with the posting at the lead organisation who would train the trainers at the partner organisations. Two specific suggestions that I have for the concerned officials are that the officials who remain present in awareness raising activities and who conduct courtyard meetings should ask the people present whether they are currently facing any problem and repeatedly inform them of the facilities available at their organisations.

(iv). I am of the opinion that the implementing partners should take immediate initiative to discuss with the relevant District Legal Aid Committee so as to include therein a representative of the organisations. This will further help them in effectively rendering out legal aid to the vulnerable people. This will

also strengthen their existing resources, even if the present Project has been over.

(v). While the stakeholders for the workshops and other means of awareness rising and carefully and properly suggested, there seems to be no training for marriage registrars (kazis) and their assistants. A special training of at least half a day should be immediately organised for kazis, local leader who conduct local *shalish*, and also for Imams of major mosques of the project areas. The training should focus on all legal issues under the themes of the Project as well as on the social roles of these leaders in promoting and protecting rights of the vulnerable people.

(vi). Currently, advices given to the (clients) Project-users are not recorded in the report. It is recommended that reports should include the advise-giving activity and its possible impacts as well. The annual reports of each organisation should be a little more focused on the activities of the access to justice project.

(vii) I would suggest that further coordination among the organisations be maintained. The coordination at the senior level is by and large operating well, but interaction and coordination amongst the activists who are in the field and charged with the project implementation in actual terms should be further strengthened. An immediate step is needed to review the areas of differences in the project activities, and attempts should be made to reduce the gaps in approaches that need to be closed for the sake of integrated goals of the project.

(viii). While the contents of *jari gans* or folk songs are appreciable, there is a need to change, and also to increase the numbers of, venues where the folk songs shows take place. This has to be done with a view to increase the number of women listeners. Alternatively, short dramas on the themes of the project may be staged during the nights to facilitate female participation.

I would strongly suggest that the scope of mediation and courtyard meetings be increased, and that more centres, or at least complaints receiving centres, be set up at some remote areas to reduce the costs of accessing the legal aid centres. For the second year, courtyard meetings should be raised to 15 meetings from the existing 10, and some more areas are to be involved in courtyard meetings. Accordingly, mediations should be held on one more working day. I would also recommend that each organisation retain the mediation activity as a regular part of their jobs in the unexpected event that the Project does not get an extension or the implementing organisations do not receive funding from any other donors for a similar project. I have seen a tremendous positive impact of the settlement of disputes through mediation.

This goes without saying that in the context of prolonged and seriously costly court process mediation of disputes at almost close to zero cost is a peerless candidate for widening the access to justice for the poor and the disadvantaged.

I am aware of the fact that the above two suggestions would require the organisations to reallocate their resources or even to spend more than they estimated. I would nevertheless press that these be complied with for the better attainment of the goals of the project.

(ix). Presently, the Project components cover almost every constituent-strategy of access to justice. It would, however, be better to have on the board 'public interest litigation' (PIL) which has become entrenched in the Bangladeshi justice system as an strategic arm of providing legal aid to the poor and the disadvantaged as well as a means of getting justice to those who can not have access to justice. The outcomes of public interest litigations are endurable for an accessible and delivering justice system. To take an instance, within the ambit of its current project *AID-COMILLA* has acted for the rescue and sheltering of trafficked women and children and for the rehabilitation of acid-victims. Successful public interest litigations in this regard could have further activated the government agencies in preventing and tackling such situations of human rights violations. To note, there is quite a significant number of successful PILs by some Dhaka-based human rights organisations with far-reaching impacts on the lives of the vulnerable people, and creating policy-lessons for the government agencies and NGOs.

I understand that inclusion of 'public interest litigation' within the folder of Project activities would lead to more costs being incurred by the Project. Also understandably, initiating PIL would entertain certain implementational challenges as these litigations can principally be lodged with the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, situated far away from each of the Project-areas. Thus, while inclusion of PIL at the project's concluding year is not advisable, any prospective human rights-oriented project should seriously consider including PIL with the collaboration of any Dhaka-based legal rights NGO having expertise in pursuing PIL.

(x). It is important that transport and other resource facilities be increased for the members of staff who visit field, attend to courts, and commute to other places in connection with the Project activities. The project implementing organisations may also give serious consideration to the need for providing some monetary or other facilities to smoothen and increase the opportunities of coming to the project offices / legal aid centres.

(xi). I invited suggestions from the two associate organisations as to how to improvise the management of the project activities towards maximizing their declared goals. The BDSC suggested that light refreshments be provided and necessary materials be supplied so as to effectively organise the courtyard meetings.¹⁷ It also recommended reimbursement of communication costs for field officers and an increase of their salaries. Importantly, BDSC also thinks that there should be arranged a leadership training for group leaders and a general training for group members on legal issues such as 'early' marriage, domestic violence, and so on.

In the same vein, the Jano Seba Kendra (JSK) also made some important suggestions, which are actually designed to meet some implementation-challenges they faced including such challenges as political interferences with the mediation process or the court-yard meetings with women. JSK suggests that all school and college students of the concerned area (Upazilla) be included within the awareness campaigns of the Project. It also recommends appointment of one fieldworker to each Union Parishad, the holding of more dialogues with opinion leaders, religiously influential leaders (*Imams*, for example), and the orientation of teachers to the thematic issues of the Project.

I have already covered most of these suggestions above. I now endorse the new suggestions with which these two organisations came up.

(xii). I would like reiterate that the Project has significantly achieved the goals it set for realization at the beginning of its journey. It needs no stressing that impact of any human-rights project can only be appreciated only after certain time. The Project under review here had to create the ground for its actions, and most attention was paid during its first year (2009) to strategize the action plans. Nevertheless, as the report has shown, the project implementing organisations achieved much, which has been possible for their skills and expertise, dedication of the members of their staff, clearly set and manageable objectives, and for well thought-out and strategic modes for prosecuting the objectives.

(xiii) Finally, I would like to conclude by emphasizing the need for the extension of the project. The Project should be replicated for another similar term with the coverage of new areas, and with the inclusion of 'public interest litigation' component. The Project has actually created a 'demand' amongst the general public it has served. I have seen people/beneficiaries expressing

¹⁷ This is to note that the JSK has already been providing light refreshments to the attendees of the courtyard meeting as a strategy to attract the members to the meetings on a regular basis. Interestingly, when asked, the members of such a courtyard group let me know that they would continue to turn up even if the refreshments were withdrawn.

'insecurity' and dismay at the probable closure of the project activities. There have always been limitations on the part of the state in elevating its citizens to an equal footing from where they can access justice. The chance of state interventions in terms of ensuring justice for the grossly vulnerable people who the present *Access to Justice* Project has been serving is far from a possibility in the near future. In these contexts and in consideration of the skills and resources of the three organisations, I would strongly recommend an extension of the project with increased funding. At any case, the present donor, the European Commission, or any donor agencies may consider supporting the ADR and legal awareness building components of the Project for an appropriate length of time. As already mentioned, the mediation of disputes has proved to be of immense benefits to the suffering people particularly in getting them an access to otherwise problematic justice systems of the country. I would further recommend that ADR be made a regular activity of the three organisations: AID-COMILLA, JSK, and BDSC.

ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND JARGONS

ADR	Alterative Dispute Resolution
AM	Area Manager
<i>Baul</i>	“A class of unorthodox religious devotees singing devotional songs in a special mode”.
JSK	Jano Seba Kendra
BDSC	Bangladesh Development Service Centre
FO	Field Organiser
FOG	Field Operational Guideline
<i>Imams</i>	People trained in religious Islamic education/knowledge who conduct prayers and are attached to mosques
<i>Jari gans</i>	Folk songs of a distinct style
Kazi	Marriage registrar (in the modern use of the term)
PM	Project Manager
<i>Shalish</i>	Traditional mode of mediating/settling local disputes principally at the intervention/facilitation of the local elderly/the respected personality as well as local leaders.
<i>Sadar</i>	Principal/Main
Upazilla	An administrative unit in Bangladesh, which can be described as a sub-District
Union Parishads	Local councils (local government units) at the lowest administrative tier, known as Unions.

Annex No. 1.1

A Snapshot of set goals and achievements achieved from the Access to Justice Project

Serial	Planned activities	Expected outcomes		Achievements	
		Quantitative	Qualitative	Quantitative	Qualitative
1	Workshop with administration, press media, advocate, NGO staff, , elected public representative at <i>District</i> Level (Comilla-1, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1, Sunamgonj-1)	05 nos Participants 50 in each workshop total 250 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The target beneficiaries will be aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights. 	05 nos district level workshop held (Comilla-1, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1, Sunamgonj-1) and total 250 participants attended the workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now they are more aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights.
2	Workshop with administration, press media, advocate, NGO staff, federation members, elected public representative at <i>Upazila</i> Level (Comilla-1, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1, Sunamgonj-1)	05 nos Participants 50 in each workshop total 250 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The target beneficiaries will be aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights. 	05 nos Upazila level workshop held (Comilla-1, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1, Sunamgonj-1) and total 264 participants attended the workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now they are more aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights.
3	Workshop with administration, press media, advocate, NGO staff, federation members, elected public representative at <i>Union</i> Level (Comilla-20, Feni-20, Kurigram-20, Laxmipur-20, Sunamgonj-20)	100 nos Participants 50 in each workshop total 5,000 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The target beneficiaries will be aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights. 	100 nos Union level workshop held (Comilla-20, Feni-20, Kurigram-20, Laxmipur-20, Sunamgonj-20) and total 5,539 participants attended the workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now they are more aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights.
4	Human Chain at District Level , Agenda: Domestic Violence, Justice, Rape, Fotwa,	05 nos participants 500 in each human chain total 2,500 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much people will participate and give their hands to combat domestic 	05 nos human chain held at district level (Comilla-1, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now they are more aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as

			violence	Sunamgonj-1) and total 2,178 participants attended the human chain	government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights.
5	Human Chain at Upazila Level , Agenda: Domestic Violence, Justice, Rape, Fotwa,	05 nos participants 500 in each human chain total 2,500 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Much people will participate and give their hands to combat domestic violence 	05 nos human chain held at Upazila level (Comilla-1, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1, Sunamgonj-1) and total 2,730 participants attended the human chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Now they are more aware about Violence against women, domestic violence, gender issue, combat acid crime, trafficking as well as government policy/ our role/ constitutional rights.
6	Bill Board Fixation at District Level (Comilla-2, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1, Sunamgonj-1) ¹⁸	06 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The tools will help to disseminate the message in the locality about access to justice and violence against women 	06 nos at District Level (Comilla-2, Feni-1, Kurigram-1, Laxmipur-1, Sunamgonj-1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Every day a huge number of people viewing the message and they are receiving the message
7	Arranging folk drama and folk song at community level	100 events and participants will be around 100,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The project participants and other stockholders will be aware about the domestic violence and the message will be generated very quickly in short tome 	100 events held and around 47,900 participants take part in the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In every performance about 1,000 men, women and children enjoyed the drama and play a significant role to convey the message to the others.
8	Video Show at village level	100 events and participants will be around 100,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The project participants and other stockholders will be aware about the domestic violence and the message will be generated very quickly in short tome 	100 events held and around 11,244 participants take part in the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In every performance about 1,000 men, women and children enjoyed the drama and play a significant role to convey the message to the others.
9	Arbitration	24 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The beneficiaries will be assisted to solve violence related cases out side the court. 	33 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 24 dowry related cases was finalize. ▪ 09 divorce related case finalized
10	Medical support, court case support to the victim	15 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The poor victim will receive medical support as well as court case support 	36 nos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The victim of acid crime is being supported by the project

¹⁸ Reportedly, 6 extra Bill Boards were distributed in addition to them. One was displayed in Comilla 5 other Bill Boards were distributed in % Upazillas of the Feni District.

11	Para Legal Training	20 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants will be educated about the human rights, government policy, the legal aids system 	36 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants are well aware about the human rights, government policy, the legal aids system
12	Gender Sensitivity Training for Staff	20 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants will be educated about the nature of violence against women, government policy, the legal aids system 	36 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants are well aware about the gender and gender violence against women, government policy, the legal aids system
13	Rights based Advocacy Training for Staff	20 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants will be educated about the Arbitration and will be well equipped for dispute resolution out of court. 	36 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants are able to arrange Arbitration and they know the procedure of dispute resolution out of court and they are practicing.
14	Effective Monitoring and Evaluation Training for Staff	20 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants will be educated about the human rights, government policy, the legal aids system 	36 person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants are well aware about the human rights, government policy, the legal aids system and they can easily monitor the incidence
15	Observation of International Women's Day	01 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve women in advocacy activities promoting women's voice 	1 International Women's Day observed in Comilla, Feni, Kurigram, Laxmipur and Sunamgonj simultaneously.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federation members organized the event as part of their activities for the quarter in lieu of promoting women's development Women members were able to participate in observing Women's Day and gained more knowledge about women's development
16	Poster printing on legal aid, family violence, gender, women rights	20,000 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tools will help to disseminate the message in the locality 	20,000 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project beneficiaries as well as the community people get the message regarding all forms of violence against women.
17	Sticker Printing	20,000 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tools will help to disseminate the message in the locality 	20,000 nos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project beneficiaries as well as the community people get the message regarding all forms of violence against women.
18	Dialogue with Students	10 Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tools will help to disseminate the message through students in their family & Community. 	16 Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating students shared their learning's' with their parents as well as to their neighbour at their community.

Additional information about certain further activities

- One workshop in each District of Comilla, Feni, Kurigram, Laxmipur and Sunamgonj was held with District Judges and Lawyers (exclusively selected), with the result of enhanced knowledge about the roles and legal capacity of these key people *re* access to justice for the vulnerable people.
- A press conference in Porshuram under the Feni district was held with the result of dissemination of information about the activities of the Project. This also has an educative value in that people also learned of the status of laws and remedies concerning their daily lives.
- Moreover, one event of net-working and holding joint programmes with several Government and Non-Government Organisations has been conducted in Comilla, Feni, Kurigram, Laxmipur and Sunamgonj.

ANNEX No. 2

**Statistics on the achievements in the area of legal aid
February 2009 - January 2010**

	Areas	No. of complaints received	No. of disputes resolved thro' ADR* and self-initiation	No. of disputes Sent to Courts (and resolved)+	Advices given	Postponed	Resolution process continuing
1	Comilla*	113	43 (+2)	4	10	12	21
2	Raipur	84	35	6	0	17	26
3	Sunamgonj Sadar	48	15	1	0	18	14
4	Porshuram	108	35(+3)	3(+2)	5	3	57
5	Kurigram	106	60 (+8)	6 (+3)	0	15	14
	total	459	201	25	15	65	132

* Figure in the parentheses in this column indicates the no. of disputes resolved amicably and off-the-project-led ADR process.

+ Figure in the parentheses in this column indicates the no. of disputes resolved in the court, while the figure outside of parentheses denotes the no. of disputes pending in the court.

* In the Comilla project area, 21 cases are pending for resolution/treatment at the 24-hours-open centres of legal aid.

Annex No. 3. 1

Messages displayed with illustration and pictures in various leaflets, stickers and posters:

- i. Early (child) marriage is a punishable crime. The Kazi will not register such a marriage.
- ii. Husbands are bound to pay their wives the agree dower money (*ahr*) as per Islam law.
- iii. The police can arrest dowry-receivers without any warrant.
- iv. In order to be valid, divorce must be accompanied by a notice of intention to divorce.
- v. Birth registration is complementary to marriage registration.
- vi. Misbehaving with wife (wife abuses) is unjusticious to self-actualization/ self-esteem.
- vii. Death penalty is the punishment for the acid throwers.

Annex No. 3. 2

Achievements through *shalish*.

Achievements through *shalish*.

At the interventions of *AID-COMILLA* (and its two associates for that matter), resolution of certain disputes has led to the recovery for the victim-clients of an amount of taka 19,16,550.00 from the respondents/*defendants*¹⁹ as dower money, and maintenance claims. They have also recovered taka 70,300 as maintenance for children.

Annex No. 3. 3

Complaints coming to AID COMILLA legal aid centres

So far, 113 disputes/allegations of injustice/violation have been lodged, of which 45 have been so far settled successfully, while others are in the process of settlement. About 71 urgent incidents of rape, acid-throwing, torture, battering, and so on, were attended by the staff with *AID-COMILLA*, of which 21 came through the 24-hours-service centres, while the rest 50 cases were referred to *AID-COMILLA* by several GOS and NGOs.

¹⁹ The term 'defendant' here is used not in the same sense as it used in a court-litigation, but only to meant the other side of the dispute who often tries to defend his/her position.