

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

Following successful implementation of a Pilot Phase (2009 – 2015) AVCB II Project has been scaled up to 27 districts covering eight administrative divisions.

Overall objectives

The overarching objective of the AVCB II project is to contribute to improve the access to justice for disadvantaged and marginalized groups in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the project are:

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



Project Snapshot

Time Frame : January 2016 - December 2019
Development Partners : EU, UNDP & GOB
Implementing Agency : LGD, MoLGRD&C
Working Areas : Divisions-8, Districts-27, Upazilas-128, Unions-1,080

Key results through programme interventions

The primary programme interventions designed to achieve these objectives:

1. Improve capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level

With the leadership of the Deputy Directors Local Government (DDLGs) and Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) at local level for improving capacity of the 1,080 union parishads (UP) under 128 upazilas the project provides all required forms-registers, furniture, *ejlash* (court bench), Village Courts Assistants (VCAs) and others. Since the inception of AVCB II Project, Districts Training Pools (DTPs) consisting of government and non-government participants have been providing training to all the key village courts actors like, UP chairman, panel chairman, UP members, UP secretary, village police and others following a cutting-edge training manual. The project also provides support to several national training institutions for integrating village court issues in their regular training curricula.

2. Revise Legal and Policy Framework for effective village courts

AVCB II Project engages in advocacy and sensitization activities with the judiciary and police for possible early case screening as well as increasing case referrals from District Courts to Village Courts. Hence, the project continues to lobby with:

- The Supreme Court to issue a Practice Direction for transferring appropriate cases from district courts to village courts as well as establishing clear procedures for transferring and creating an early screening mechanism
- The Ministry of Home Affairs for a directive requiring referrals by the police to village courts, and encouraging referrals by the community policing fora.

The project will draft a proposal on amendments of the Village Court Act based on consultation with relevant stakeholders and will play a crucial role towards policy coordination among relevant justice sectors.

3. Strengthen Government’s monitoring towards village courts performance

The project provides capacity building supports to Local Government Division (LGD) particularly the Monitoring, Inspection and Evaluation (MIE) Wing and local administration to monitor, report and quality assurance aspect of village courts. Apart from this, the project works with Village Courts Management Committees (VCMCs) at upazila and district level for making them more functional and other relevant committees to have village courts as a standing agenda e.g. Law and Order Committees, Legal Aid Committees etc. For well-organized performance monitoring the project is continuing advocacy for a functional monitoring system following the updated Village Courts Rules.



4. Enable beneficiaries to access their services from village courts

For increasing awareness and service seeking behavior, AVCB II undertakes community mobilization interventions at local levels. The project also uses mass and social media platforms along with developing and circulating various communications and behavior change materials among beneficiaries and stakeholders. Apart from this, the project takes numerous interventions, such as:

- Maximizing resources and awareness beyond the project’s initiatives, it implements strategic interventions with all like-minded locally active non government organizations and relevant government departments for disseminating messages among their programme beneficiaries as well as enduring referrals towards village courts
- Continue strategic interventions with elected women representatives for facilitating greater access to services among rural women as well as encouraging their representation as panel members in the village court decision-making process.

5. Evidence-base and knowledge management

The project will institutionalize knowledge sharing both within and outside the working areas. Best practices and lessons learned are being captured regularly for advocacy with the government as well as Southern countries. For these reasons, the project will undertake various studies and surveys e.g. Impact study (baseline, mid-term and final), study on village courts and women empowerment; study on institutional monitoring system, lessons learned study, etc. Also, the project will organize national conference on village courts.

These interventions will create an appropriate environment for more than two crore rural women and men within the project areas by facilitating easy access to local dispute resolution services through functional village courts.

Key Achievements

- Village Courts Rules enacted in February 2016
- Village courts in 1,080 UPs started offering dispute resolution services. In total, 13,100 cases have been reported (25% by women) between July-October 2017, resolved 8,300 cases and 6,800 decisions implemented
- Village Courts Training Manual and Flipchart, revised by the project, is endorsed by National Institute of Local Government (NILG)
- 27 District Training Pools (DTPs) provided capacity building training to 9,176 service providers
- District judicial officers, being officially authorized, are participating in village courts training and became part of District Training Pool (DTPs) with the necessary guidance of the Bangladesh Supreme Court
- 27 districts and 128 upazilas Village Courts Management Committees (VCMCs) have been formed and are functioning.

Working Areas of AVCB Phase II Project

Division	District & Number of Upazila	Unions
Barisal	Bhola-5, Barguna-4, Patuakhali-4	118
Chittagong	Chandpur-5, Chittagong-5, Cox’s Bazar-6, Noakhali-6	172
Dhaka	Faridpur-6, Gazipur-5, Gopalganj-3, Madaripur-4	136
Khulna	Bagerhat-6, Khulna-6, Satkhira-4	130
Mymensingh	Jamalpur-4, Mymensingh-3, Netrokona-3	99
Rajshahi	Naogaon-6, Pabna-5, Sirajganj-5	131
Rangpur	Gaibandha-4, Kurigram-6, Panchagarh-5, Rangpur-5	183
Sylhet	Moulvibazar-4, Sunamganj-3, Sylhet-6	111
Divisions - 8	Districts - 27 & Upazilas - 128	Unions - 1,080

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