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## **Press Release**

### **Village Courts project continues in 1,080 unions thanks to the partnership between the European Union and GoB**

**Dhaka, 9 April 2017** – Success of the Activating Village Courts project, which in the previous seven years provided access to justice to over seven (7) million people mainly in rural areas, have led to an increased interest of the domestic and international public and the continuation of the partnership between the Government of Bangladesh, the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The European Union finances with close to 40 million Euros, as said at an event today in Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka, for the two phases of the Village Courts project implemented throughout the country, including the three districts in the CHT. The Government of Bangladesh is providing additional USD 5 million for the project to ensure access to justice to the most vulnerable and poor.

"European Union continues its commitment to strengthen social justice and to ensure that more people throughout Bangladesh, especially the rural poor women and children, can access to justice and have the possibility to find a solution to their disputes and conflicts at community level," said Mr. Mario Ronconi, Head of Cooperation of the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh.

The new scaled-up phase of the Village Courts project will bring improved access to legal services to over 21 million mainly people living in poverty and rural areas in 1,080 unions in 128 upazilas under 27 districts in all eight divisions, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts area.

The pilot phase of the project was implemented in the past seven years in 351 Unions in six divisions (Dhaka, Rangpur, Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong & Sylhet), and have helped 2,511,647 people out of which 1,953,085 women and 552,562 men, get better access to justice.

"The Government of Bangladesh aims to bring public services at people's doorsteps. Village Courts is one of the services that can improve lives, bringing peace and harmony in the rural areas of Bangladesh," said Mr. Abdul Malek, Secretary, Local Government Division, MoLGRD&C.

So far 4,914 Union Parishad representatives and officials and 3,529 village police members have been trained to support the Village Courts.

In the first six years of the project, 69,200 disputes have been successfully resolved out of 87,200 reported to the Village Courts, and over 6,000 cases have been referred to Village Courts by the District Courts.

Most importantly, each case had been resolved in average within 28 days, what used to take more than 2-3 years for petty cases of both civil and criminal nature.

Also, in total BDT 29.3 crore (USD 3.79 million) have been recovered as compensation that is being determined by the village courts panel to resolve the disputes.



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“The Government of Bangladesh shows a high-level of commitment to improve access to justice for all people, and in partnership with the European Union and UNDP, this will be possible to achieve,” said Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, UNDP Bangladesh Country Director.

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