

### Democracywatch activities on village court:

The traditional shalish system as well as semi-formal judicial bodies like village courts and arbitration councils is failing to give substantive justice, the socio-economic conditions of majority of the Bangladesh village people and lengthy process of the formal courts are preventing them to move to the formal judicial system. Poor people have limited access to local justice system. Union Parishad Chairmen sometimes are not interested to make village court functional rather SALISH by their own mechanism. Main reasons behind this are their vested interest plus limited capacity on local judiciary system. Women members don't get equal respect and power to work. Local Govt. officials are corrupt. General people have no access to UP development works and local justice system. UP office does not work properly, different committees of UP are ineffective. Performances of Village Court and Village Police are very poor and continuous rights violation is a common phenomenon.

The outcome is that vast majority of the people of the country is still outside the net of 'access' to justice, let alone access to 'justice'. However, a simple reading of the Village Court Ordinance implies that almost all major aspects of an effective justice system have been addressed in the law. A proper implementation of the law could improve the state of 'access' to justice dramatically. Through providing capacity support to the UP chairmen can ensure transparency and accountability to make local justice system effective. Many people are not well versed and informed about the function of village court. They even not are acquainted with the effectiveness of the village court where minor cases could be disposed easily without any harassment.

Democracywatch, in association with DANIDA implementing a project called Strengthening Partnership between People and Local Elected bodies for Better Management of Union Parishad in Bangladesh since 2003 in 28 unions in four district of Bangladesh. Through the project DW is addressing the problems like exclusion of citizens from decision making process, poor access to fair justice, unequal distribution of public services and limited capacity of the public service providers.

The Immediate Objective of this Project is to create access to the better public services including access to fair justice for the poor and disadvantage People within the project areas. To achieve the objective the project is being implemented following the strategies:

- Build capacity of the community people on Local level justice system (village Court, ADR etc.).
- Capacity building of Local Elected Bodies (UP chairmen, members, officials) and local government authorities on procedure and mechanism of village court and Alternative Dispute Resolution.
- Raise awareness among the community people, social elites, religious leaders, local journalists, different professionals on importance of activating village courts and creating access for the poor and marginalized people specially women.
- Advocacy for policy implementation, allocation of resources so that local level justice system can be strengthened by activating village court.
- Research, study and documenting lessons learned and share widely from local level to national level.

The project has been implemented in 28 union parishads in 4 districts in different parts of the country. It has created a platform for the poor and marginalized people especially for the women whose rights are frequently violated by domestic violence, divorce for dowry, abuse, torture, neglect and exploitation. The union parishads are now sensitized and acting to address the issues of excluded people.

Output	Activities	Outcome
Poor and marginalized people specially women are enjoying better legal services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2016 Yard Meetings on role of UP in local justice system.</li> <li>• 56 Coordination meeting with UP &amp; local people.</li> <li>• Workshop with the 364 UP representatives (male &amp; female).</li> <li>• 336 ADR initiated.</li> <li>• Orientation on Village court for 252 citizen committees,</li> <li>• Published IEC materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 28 watch dog committees have been functioning to prevent violence against women.</li> <li>○ Over 300 disputes have been resolved.</li> <li>○ 19 Village courts in 19 Union Parishads are well functioning.</li> <li>○ 60% of 3024 citizen committee members are working as catalyst to make general people aware on village courts.</li> </ul>