



annual report

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (blast)

2011

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are delighted to present our Annual Report for 2011. This report provides highlights of our activities throughout the year, including in casework for individuals and on public interest issues, advocacy for law and policy reform and training and communications. Given our focus on the use of law to protect rights - whether within the formal or informal justice system - we hope that this Report will also help to document the wider struggles and initiatives in which we are involved.

The report could not have been prepared without the contributions throughout the year of our colleagues across the organisation. Particular thanks are due to the team at the Head Office - **Farida Yeasmin, Abdul Malek, Mahbuba Akhter, Shahriar Parveen** - who compiled information from our district and head offices, and to **Farah Huq** and **Ishita Dutta** for their drafting and editing. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Valerie Scott in re-designing the structure of this report.

The final draft was meticulously reviewed and revised by Farah Huq, and very special thanks are due to her. Photograph credits are due to Jahangir Alam, Sara Hossain, Tusher Nabi Khan and Tawheed Reza Noor.

BLAST extends special thanks to **Bitopi Advertising Ltd.** for their pro bono contributions including to design of this report. We would also like to take this opportunity to name some of those who have made generous contributions to BLAST's work during the year, enabling us through their pro bono efforts to improve the management and delivery of legal services :

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADESH	Association of Development for Economic and Social Help	IGP	Inspector General of Police
ADD	Action for Disability and Development	IRSOP	Improvement in the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons Project
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution	JATI	Judicial Administration Training Academy
AGM	Annual General Meeting	LGD	Local Government Division, Government of Bangladesh
AIDs	Auto-immune Disorder	MKP	Manab Kalyan Parisad
ALRD	Association for Land Reform and Development	MoLJAPA	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
ASK	Ain o Salish Kendra	MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs
AVCB	Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh	NCDW	National Council of Disabled Women
BARCIK	Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge	NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
BELA	Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
BNKS	Bolipara Nari Kalyan Somity	NLASO	National Legal Aid and Services Organisation
BRAC-HRLS	BRAC Human Rights and Legal Services Programme	OWDEB	Organisation for Women's Development in Bangladesh
CBO	Community-based Organisation	PIL	Public Interest Litigation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	PLC	Paralegal Aid Clinic
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts	PLHA	Person Living with HIV/AIDs
CMS	Case Management System	PWD	Persons with Disabilities
CREA	Community-Health Rehabilitation Education and Awareness	RTI	Right to Information
CrPC	Code of Criminal Procedure 1898	SARA	Social Association for Rural Development
DLAC	District Legal Aid Committee	SRS	Safety and Rights Society
DLR	Dhaka Law Reports	SVAW	Stop Violence Against Women Network
DPO	Disabled Peoples Organisation	TI-B	Transparency International Bangladesh
DV	Domestic Violence	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
EC	Executive Committee	UP	Union Parishad
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	UPPRP	Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction Project
HPOD	Harvard Law School Project on Disability	USS	Udayankar Seba Sangstha
icddr,b	International Centre for Cholera and Diarrhoeal Diseases Research Centre, Bangladesh	UTSA	Unite Theatre for Social Action
IEC	Information, Education, Communication	VC	Village Court

GLOSSARY

Adibashi	An indigenous person	Headman/	
Dalit	Traditionally considered as falling outside the four castes of the Hindu caste system, and according to the UN definition someone who is discriminated on the basis of work and descent.	Karbari	An individual holding a position within the traditional justice system of indigenous peoples/Paharis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts who among others administers customary law in family disputes
Dowry	Any property or valuable security given directly or indirectly given by one party to the marriage to another.	Khula	The right of a wife to seek dissolution of marriage under Muslim law
Fatwa	An opinion on a point of Muslim law given by a person learned in the law. A High Court judgment in 2010 declared that the infliction of penalties in the name of 'fatwas' was unconstitutional and a breach of the right to freedom from cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment or punishment	Madrasa	Schools that provide Islamic instructions and teach Islamic theology alongside other curriculums.
		Shalish	An informal, traditional system of dispute resolution

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

This report sets out some of the highlights of BLAST's work in 2011 and in particular its successes in pushing for greater legal protection for all, in particular those living in poverty or facing exclusion and discrimination.

This year has seen many significant developments both inside and outside the Courts in terms of the protection of rights. BLAST has been involved in continuous campaigns to strengthen the justice system and to ensure that it is truly accessible to all women, men and children, not just to those with power, money or influence. Through such efforts, it has won landmark judgments and orders, intervening wherever possible to safeguard the rights of those who are most marginalised, or to uphold the importance of ensuring treatment in accordance with law and to ensure that no person goes unrepresented.

At the same time, concerns regarding non-compliance with court judgments and orders have greatly intensified and access to justice opportunities have narrowed for many. In this context, strengthening state legal aid services and facilitating outreach to these, while providing an alternative available to those who find themselves in dire need of assistance but in conflict with vested interest groups and therefore unable to access any services, remain crucial areas of work for BLAST.

This year, in addition to our usual activities in legal aid and awareness raising, public interest litigation and campaigning, BLAST also explored new remedies available from relatively recently activated bodies, by filing applications for information before the Information Commission under the Right to Information Act 2009, and undertaking research on perceptions of human rights for the National Human Rights Commission. We obtained several important judgments including prohibiting corporal punishment, as well as orders in other cases (such as the challenge to the Beggar's Survey) which sought to criminalise the vulnerable on grounds of their poverty.

Importantly BLAST continued to work on its core mandate areas, seeking to strengthen the justice system from within while maintaining constructive criticism of processes and actions which restrict or curtail the most basic rights.

In conclusion, we wish to thank all those who have made BLAST's work possible and contributed to its successes this year as in the past. They include our Donors who have provided us with the resources to undertake our activities, both institutional donors such as Danida, Diakonia and Oxfam Novib and individuals who have contributed whether through funds, or in kind or through giving us their time and pro bono efforts. I would like to acknowledge the untiring contributions and commitment of our Trustees, Consultative Group members and Management Committee representatives, who have given their time and effort in supporting our staff with technical assistance and critical leadership. I would like to thank our Panel Lawyers and all the organisations with whom we have worked in partnerships nationally, regionally and locally. Most of all I wish to congratulate our dedicated and experienced staff for their commitment and hard work, and for never wavering in their efforts to build a fairer and more just legal system and society.

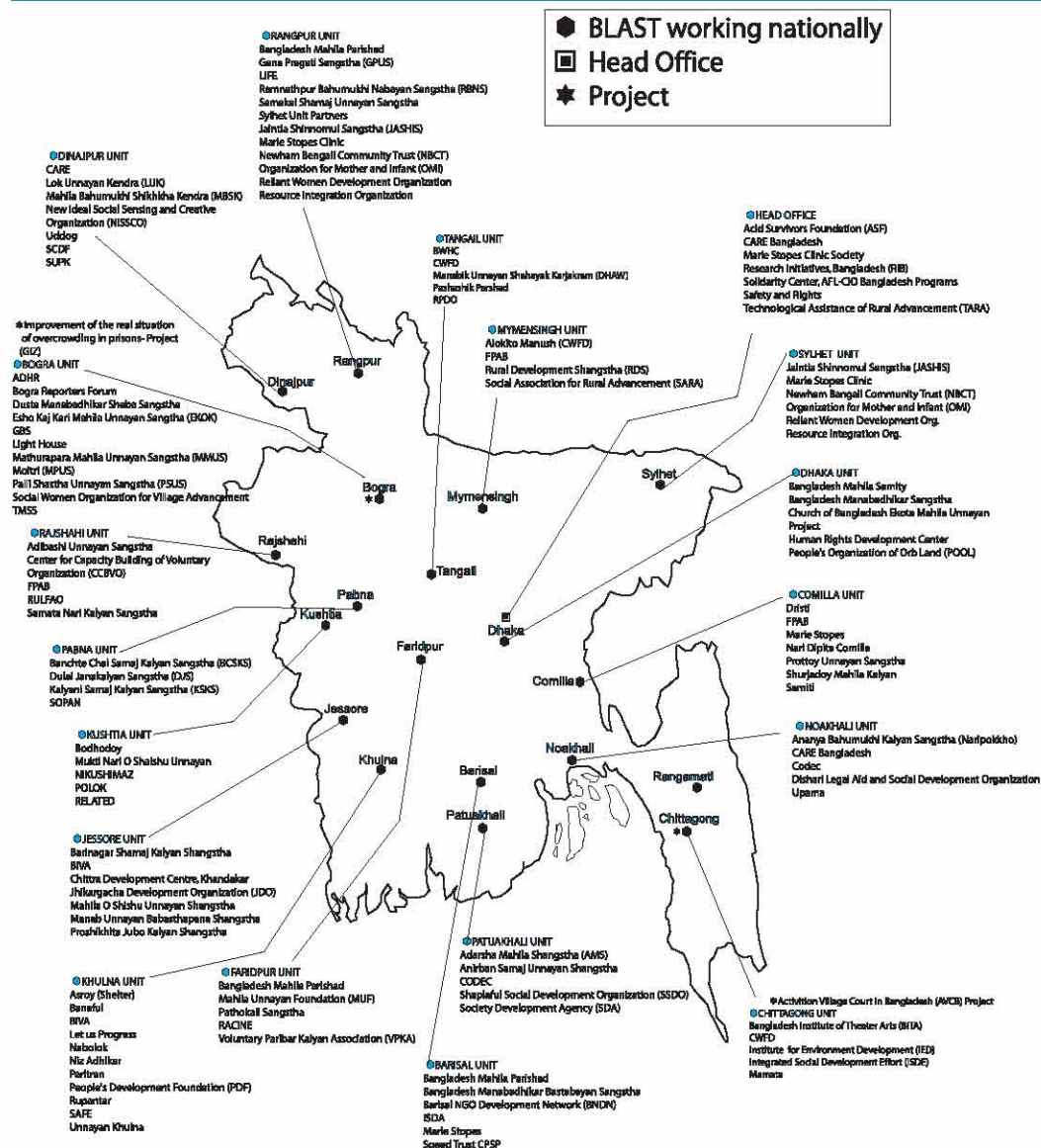
For the Board of Trustees



Dr Kamal Hossain
Chairman

AN OVERVIEW

BLAST AT A GLANCE



Districts in which BLAST Operates	19
Full-Time Staff	279
Panel Lawyers	2300
Members of Board of Trustees	11
Members of Management Committees	225
Case Load:	
Mediation and Litigation Cases (1993 - to date)	96, 506
Mediation and Litigation Cases in 2011	7206

MISSION, VISION AND OBJECTIVES

Established in 1993, BLAST is the leading specialized non-governmental legal services organisation in Bangladesh. After beginning operations at five offices, BLAST has grown steadily, and now has nineteen unit offices across the country, in Barisal, Bogra, Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia, Mymensingh, Noakhali, Pabna, Patukhali, Rajshahi, Rangamati, Rangpur, Sylhet and Tangail in addition to its head office (HO) in Dhaka.

MISSION

BLAST's mission is to make the legal system accessible to the poor and the marginalized.

VISION

BLAST envisions a society based on the rule of law in which every individual, including the poor, marginalized and excluded, in particular women, children, peoples with disabilities, Adibashis, and Dalits have access to justice and in which their human rights are respected and protected.

OBJECTIVES

In view of the above vision and mission statement, BLAST's specific objectives are:

1. To provide free legal aid and to undertake public interest litigation and advocacy activities to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any person for any reason;
2. To administer a trust fund for establishing and maintaining legal aid and services units supported by grants from the Trust;
3. To establish legal aid/assistance and human rights protection units in bar associations and in different localities of the country, including rural areas;
4. To conduct special training programmes through which relevant skills and expertise can be imparted to lawyers, activists and others;
5. To coordinate the activities of the units with other organisations, including NGOs working in related fields;
6. To publish original research articles and reports about matters useful to lawyers;
7. To promote improved legal education, including awareness of responsibilities for providing legal aid to disadvantaged persons, and to promote, establish and maintain national institutions for legal education; and
8. To organise seminars, symposia and extension lectures on various law subjects for advocates, teachers, law students, and to promote participation in international conferences, workshops, and training and educational programmes.

BLAST'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2011

In order to promote access to justice for the poor and the disadvantaged, BLAST institutes individual legal action in courts at every level. It also engages in strategic legal aid through public interest litigation for the protection of the constitutional and legal rights of the powerless and marginalised. Additionally, it has been pursuing legislative advocacy and lobbying for the enactment of equitable laws and policies for those who are disempowered and discriminated.

LEGAL AID (MEDIATION AND LITIGATION)

Within the context of the current social inequity in Bangladesh, BLAST's legal aid services perform a crucial role in providing access to justice and a means to voice grievances to the marginalised and impoverished.

In 2011, BLAST dealt with a total of **13,253 applications**, of which 9,263 were new applications received in 2011 alone. Of these, 8,893 were dealt with through mediation, with 2,048 mediations being carried out and resolved at BLAST's offices. In addition, BLAST had a total litigation caseload of 23,295 cases, of which 5,158 cases were instituted in 2011. Of the 4,141 resolved cases, **2,650 of the cases (64%) were disposed of in favour of BLAST's clients.**

As in previous years, an overwhelming majority of decisions/settlements- 94% of the settled mediations and 88% of the litigation – were resolved in favour of BLAST's women clients.

PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION (PIL)

In addition to legal aid, PIL is a crucial mechanism in safeguarding constitutional and human rights in Bangladesh for those who cannot protect themselves and for preserving the public interest. Based on newspaper sources or on recommendations of concerned citizens, or its own referrals from the field, BLAST conducted eleven PILs in 2011 on the following issues :

- BLAST obtained a landmark judgment holding that corporal punishment in educational institutions – ie schools and madrasas – is a violation of the **right to freedom from ill-treatment and corporal punishment**, and mandating legal and policy reforms, which began to be put in place during the year.
- BLAST was involved in two PIL petitions regarding the **right to freedom from arbitrary arrest** of beggars, in the context of strict enforcement of vagrancy laws, and of a purported 'beggars' survey' which was held in Dhaka City.
- In relation to the **right to freedom from ill-treatment and forced labour**, a petition was filed challenging the failure of the police to record a case of abuse of a thirteen year old girl who had been pressed into domestic service, and /or to investigate the allegations and punish those responsible. BLAST also sought urgent measures for her security, after the defendants moved her to hospital and attempted to persuade her family to not press charges.

- A petition filed by the then Chairman of the Legal Aid and Human Rights Committee of the Bangladesh Bar Council, and others, in the aftermath of the tragic killing on the roads of noted film maker Tareque Masud and cinematographer Ashfaq (Mishuk) Munier, challenged, as a violation of the right to life, the failure of the authorities to comply with their statutory duties to investigate road traffic accidents and take effective measures to ensure road safety, as well as the arbitrary issuance of thousands of licences to persons without requisite qualifications.
- **BLAST challenged the forced eviction** of several thousand residents of the Biddut Bosti in Mirpur, Dhaka through a PIL filed by two residents, seeking a declaration that eviction without prior rehabilitation or resettlement would amount to a violation of the right to life. Court orders enabled the residents to remain in the area over the harsh winter period.
- **BLAST achieved justice** without resorting to the courts by issuing a legal notice to a school that denied a child the right to equal opportunity to education, by refusing to allow them to appear for viva examinations on the purported ground of a physical disability. The school has since agreed to introduce non-discriminatory policies and access/entry, and measures to prevent and punish any acts of discrimination.

INVESTIGATIONS

Fact-finding and on-site investigations are vital in protecting human rights. BLAST conducted information-gathering and fact-finding, liaised with government authorities, and pursued remedies where appropriate on behalf of survivors of violations. In 2011, BLAST conducted eleven investigations, on issues such as domestic workers' rights, children's rights, violence against women, communal conflicts and road safety.

ADVOCACY FOR LAW AND POLICY REFORM

BLAST advocacy campaigns focus on bringing about necessary legal and policy reforms for the advancement and protection of human rights. In 2011, BLAST was involved with the following campaigns :

Labour Rights and Remedies for Workers: A series of in-house meetings and roundtable discussions were conducted and attended by various stakeholders, focusing on a range of issues including litigation strategies under Bangladesh Labour Act 2011, alternative reliefs under the Act, decentralization of Labour Courts and barriers in providing legal aid to workers.

The Legal Aid Act 2000: Six advocacy meetings were organised during the year, focusing on ways to strengthen the provision of government legal aid through its District Legal Aid Committees (DLACs). These highlighted the need for more effective management of legal aid, greater accountability, and greater dissemination of information about the availability of government legal aid, as well as the activation of DLACS and more effective coordination and response.

Safeguards on Arrest and Police Remand: An advocacy meeting was organised in Kushtia concerning the implementation of the landmark judgment earlier obtained by BLAST regarding safeguards following arrest without warrant pursuant to Section 54 and the taking of any person into police remand pursuant to Section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1899. The meeting resulted in recommendations for more systematic monitoring and research, more legislative and judicial advocacy and inclusion of relevant information in government programmes on the specific directives enunciated by the High Court.

Review and Critique of Vagrants and Homeless Persons Act, 2011: Two roundtable discussions were held to raise awareness about the conditions in existing government vagrancy homes and their effect on victims, and to review the Vagrant and Homeless Persons Act 2011, initially in draft and then once it was enacted (without any public consultation). The National Human Rights Commission's Chairperson committed to raise concerns about the law with concerned authorities and relevant Parliamentarians. Possible legal challenges to the Act through PIL were also discussed.

Access to Justice and Establishment of District Courts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT): A roundtable discussion was held in Dhaka on 2 April 2011, with a view to identify developments and recommendations for ensuring access to justice in CHT. The workshop was attended by the Chief Justice and two judges of the Appellate Division, as well as judges, magistrates, panel lawyers, members of the Bar, journalists, representatives of traditional justice institutions, and concerned citizens from the CHT.

AWARENESS RAISING ON RIGHTS AND REMEDIES

Awareness raising programs are a key component of ensuring human rights in that they empower rights holders to know their rights and to demand protection of their rights from the appropriate authorities. BLAST conducted the following training and awareness raising programs in 2011 :

For case details, please see *BLAST and others v Bangladesh and others*, reported at 55 DLR (2003) 363, or the BLAST website which contains the full text of the judgment at <http://www.blast.org.bd/content/judgement/55-DLR-363.pdf>)

Labour Rights: BLAST organised twelve awareness programmes on labour issues that reached over 23,459 female workers and 10,897 male workers. The discussion focussed on a variety of workers' rights including wages and benefits, maternity leave, termination and resignations, health and safety, and other issues relating to their welfare and establishment of rights under the law.

Human Rights and Remedies: Three two-day workshops were organised on 'Securing Human Rights and Remedies in Bangladesh' in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi districts and were attended by local community-based organisations from across the country. The trainings focused on the right to equality, women's rights and new laws and judgments on violence against women and children and were complemented by discussions on practical opportunities to learn about social campaigning tools to raise citizen demands for protection of their rights.

PROJECTS

As part of its commitment to ensure justice for the marginalised, BLAST was involved in a number of projects that focused on the realisation of human rights or access to justice:

Improvement in the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons (IRSOP): BLAST has been involved in implementing the IRSOP project in cooperation with the Prison Directorate of Bangladesh, the Ministry of Home Affairs and German Technical Cooperation (GIZ) Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, to reduce overcrowding in prisons in Bangladesh. The project is currently being piloted in three districts, Dhaka, Bogra and Madaripur, with BLAST active in Bogra. It enables a cadre of paralegals in each district to provide legal assistance to indigent undertrial prisoners, and to facilitate urgent review of their cases through the Case Coordination Committee, bringing together all relevant actors in the criminal justice system to expedite multi-agency responses.

Ending Corporal Punishment: BLAST with the support of Save the Children has been working to put in place a legislative framework that comprehensively prohibits corporal punishment. After receiving a High Court judgment in January 2011 which expressly prohibited all forms of corporal punishment of children in educational institutions, BLAST focused on dissemination of the judgment, producing copies in Bangla and English, along with summaries, and raising awareness on corporal punishment and its harmful impact on children through advocacy workshops and meetings with relevant Government and NGO stakeholders. By December 2012, it had secured commitments from the Minister of Education to frame a law prohibiting corporal punishment in schools and to ensure that teacher training would include a focus on positive discipline.

Growing up Safe and Healthy: Addressing Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Violence against Adolescent Girls and Women in Urban Bangladesh (SAFE): SAFE is an action Diakonia Partner organisations who participated were ADESH, BARCIK, BNKS, MKP, OWDEB, PARTNER, SARA, USS, and UTSA. research project focused on promoting sexual and reproductive health rights and reducing violence against adolescent girls and young women living in urban slums in Dhaka city. Supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the project is being implemented by a consortium of organisations including icddr,b, (which houses the Project Secretariat), BLAST, the Marie Stopes Clinic Society, Nari Maitree (as part of the We Can Alliance) and the Population Council. BLAST's role involves providing legal services (advice, mediation, litigation support, paralegal services) through three one stop legal clinics located in the Mohakhali, Mohammadpur and Jatrabari areas of Dhaka city, and in conducting related advocacy on the obstacles to justice for women and girls seeking remedies for violence and enforcement of their rights to consent and choice.

Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh (AVCB): BLAST is one of the four NGOs nationally involved in implementing the AVCB Project undertaken by the Local Government Division (LGD) of the Government of Bangladesh, with support from the UNDP and the European Commission to provide support to the formal justice system through strengthening local justice. The project aims initially to strengthen 500 selected Union Parishads and enable the activation of Village Courts in each of these areas, to review

the applicable legal framework, in particular the Village Courts Act 2006 and the Village Court Rules 1976, to train the VC members (the UP chairmen and members) and raise awareness among the public about the availability of remedies before such Courts. BLAST's activities are focused in 55 unions of two districts, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong. Over the first year, targets have been met in terms of establishment of the VCS, generation of public awareness on the VC as a forum of local justice, raising the capacity of relevant local justice actors to operationalise the VCs and development of skills within Project Staff to provide the necessary support to the VCs for this purpose. Successes can already be seen in greater and more proactive engagement of the local community in running CBO meetings, and in the operation of the VCS themselves. Champions among UP personnel, in particular Chairmen and Members, have been identified, and close working relationships/partnerships built in many working areas with relevant government officials.

CAPACITY BUILDING

BLAST organises meetings/workshops and training sessions with the two-fold objective of improving the quality of its service delivery and to strengthen networks between organisations working on human rights. It organised four workshops/meetings for staff focusing on improvement of service-delivery by panel lawyers and unit co-ordinators and staff, covering gender discriminatory personal laws, training for lawyers on disability rights in collaboration with HPOD (Harvard Law School Project on Disability), and PIL reviews and possible interventions. BLAST also organised Training Sessions for BLAST staff and others on specific rights, such as for garment workers on labour rights and laws; gender training; training for addressing discrimination against PLHAs; training on securing human rights and remedies for Diakonia partners; and workshops on domestic violence for lawyers from nineteen districts and the lower judiciary. BLAST staff attended four national training sessions (on working with victims; right to information; using ADRs; and economic, social and cultural rights) and two international training sessions (on sexuality, gender and rights; and gender, sustainable livelihoods, human rights and peace). In addition, BLAST attended 35 seminars/workshops organised by NGOs or the Government, and covering a range of topics including legal aid provision, slum-dwellers' rights, gender issues and VAW, human rights and international law, disability rights, access to justice and health rights.

Case Management System: BLAST initiated the development of a web-based case management system in order to improve its capacity to manage casework and deliver legal aid services effectively. The CMS is expected to facilitate better case tracking and also to provide a useful research tool for BLAST lawyers.



BLAST provides legal advice and representation at all levels of the justice delivery system with an emphasis on providing services to those living in poverty or facing discrimination or socio-economic disadvantages. Legal services, including advice, mediation, litigation and legal rights awareness programmes, are provided through BLAST's head office and nineteen district-based unit offices throughout Bangladesh. In addition, BLAST operates four Legal Aid Clinics in Dhaka that undertake awareness activities for slum dwellers on legal rights and remedies, and provide advice, mediation and referral services.

Legal Aid

Clients seeking legal assistance from the BLAST Labour Cell
© Jahangir Alam

OUR CASEWORK

During 2011, **BLAST** dealt with a total of **13,253** applications from across the country relating to a range of issues including family, criminal, constitutional and labour law. Of these, **9,623** applications were received in 2011 alone further adding to the 3,990 applications pending consideration from previous years. Depending on the circumstances, the applications were either referred to be resolved by mediation or resulted in the filing of cases in courts throughout the country.

Of the total applications, some **2,129 (17%)** could not be pursued for various reasons, such as where the clients failed to meet BLAST's means tests, or failed to pursue the matter. Of the rest, **8,893** applications were dealt with through mediation. Additionally, **5,158** cases were filed in court and a further **1,254** applications were pending to be filed at the end of the year.

LABOUR CASES

BLAST dealt with 666 labour matters, out of which **268** cases resulted in litigation in various labour courts across the country for realization of arrears of pay and benefits. Another **65** disputes were settled through mediation through which garment workers recovered Tk. 290,700 in arrears of wages and compensation. BLAST also succeeded in ensuring the reinstatement of four workers in their jobs with arrears of wages.

Case Study 1: MAHBUB IS RE-INSTATED WITH ARREARS OF WAGES

Mahbub, aged about 26, had been a supervisor in the sewing section of U Designers Limited from June 2010. After a few days of his joining, the Quality Controller of the factory became abusive towards him, berating him for every minor perceived fault. At one point, he coerced Mahbub into signing a blank sheet of paper, and then refused to allow him to work any longer. Mahbub filed a General Diary with the concerned Police Station and tried to contact the factory to recover his arrears of wages. Eventually he sought legal assistance from BLAST's Head Office in November 2010. BLAST wrote to the Managing Director and the Factory Manager proposing mediation. They agreed and arranged to meet in January 2011. After a fruitful discussion, the factory's representative agreed to reinstate Mahbub from February 2011, and to pay him the equivalent of nine days arrears of wages. Subsequently, Mahbub confirmed to the BLAST Head Office that he had been reinstated and recovered arrears of wages of Tk. 2,286 (Taka two thousand two hundred and eighty six).

Case Study 2 : NAZMA'S DEPENDANTS RECEIVE COMPENSATION FOR WORKPLACE DEATH

Nazma, aged about sixteen years and resident of Chandpur, was a permanent worker of T S Fan Factory at Dhaka. In late April 2007, a sudden fire broke out from an electric short circuit and soon engulfed the entire factory. Nazma, along with other workers, was seriously injured. She was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where she succumbed to her injuries and died on 30 April, 2007. On behalf of her dependants, BLAST sent two separate letters to her employer asking for compensation but did not receive a response. In late December 2008, BLAST filed a petition before the Second Labour Court, Dhaka, with the assistance of its partner organisation, Safety and Rights Society (SRS). Finally in January, 2011 the case was allowed on contest and the

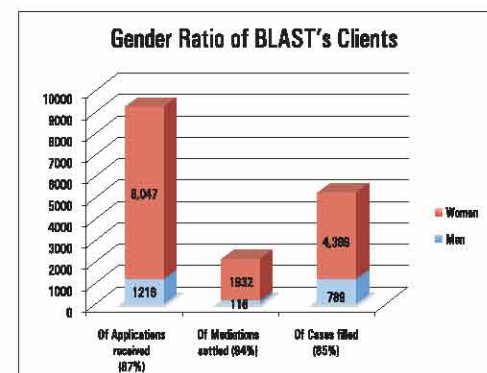
employer was directed to pay compensation in favour of Nazma's dependants of Tk. 90,000 (Taka ninety thousand) within the next thirty days.

As the employer failed to comply with the Court's directive within the stipulated time, BLAST took further legal steps, filing a criminal case under the Bangladesh Labour Act against the employer. During the trial period, the dispute was settled out of court and Nazma's dependants received a total sum of Tk. 60,000 (Taka sixty thousand) as compensation. BLAST later filed an application before the Court praying for withdraw the case, which was allowed after hearing.

OUR CLIENTS

The majority of BLAST's clients are among the poorest and most disadvantaged segments of the population. Most only have primary education. Out of these, the overwhelming majority, approximately **87%**, are women. Among this group, many are women homemakers with dependent children, or garments workers, who have previously attempted to resolve their disputes informally, either with the help of local bodies and trade unions, or through shalish, the traditional form of dispute resolution. Through its legal aid and other services, BLAST has focused specifically on the rights of women and certain vulnerable groups, including Adibasis (in the plains and CHT), children, workers, prisoners and slum-dwellers. It has also developed networks with Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) in providing assistance to persons with disabilities (PWD).

BLAST also protects the rights of the general public through strategic litigation which has focused on rights to health, safe and healthy environment, shelter, life and liberty, freedom from torture and arbitrary police action, fair trial and other forms of accountability and institutional reform.



Case Study 3: KABITA'S STORY

Kabita, who had some visual impairments, was raised by her sister, Sushmita. During the inauguration of the National Blind Welfare Association in 1992-1993, Kabita received a cow, an ox and a little calf. Subsequently, due to her inability to take care of the animals, the Association sold the animals for Tk. 11,000 (Taka eleven thousand) and gave the money to Kabita, who deposited it in a savings account. Due to her worsening financial situation, Kabita, with help from Sushmita, began work as a domestic worker. In 2002, Malika Begum contracted Kabita to work at her house. Malika deceived Kabita into withdrawing her savings and handing it over to her.

When Kabita asked for her money to be returned, Malika, along with others burnt and disfigured Kabita's

face using a heated kitchen utensil. In May 2003, they threw Kabita out of a four-storey window intending to kill her, breaking her legs, her back and her backbone. A rickshaw-puller rescued the unconscious Kabita and admitted her to Bogra's Mohammad Ali Hospital. The hospital refused to issue a medical certificate allegedly under pressure from the defendants. Sushmita approached BLAST for assistance in the matter. BLAST was able to procure the certificate. In the meantime, the Blind Welfare Society and the Disabled Person's Federation organised a procession demanding justice for Kabita.

While Kabita was still in hospital, the defendants abducted her. Sushmita, with the assistance of BLAST, filed a case for abduction, and following an order from the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Tribunal, the police rescued Kabita from the defendants and released her into Sushmita's custody. BLAST further assisted Sushmita in an application for stay of proceedings brought by the defendants against the criminal cases against them in the lower courts. The High Court had originally issued a stay in the proceedings. In 2011, the stay order was finally vacated and the case which Kabita had started in 2003 is now finally proceeding as per due procedure in the lower court.

Case Study 4 : RECOVERY OF CHILD CUSTODY

Aktery Begum, aged about 20, was married to Rezaur, a rickshaw puller, for about four years. They had a one-year old daughter, Mithila. Rezaur became very violent to Aktery after a trivial disagreement. In November, 2011, he abused her further, and then threw her out of their house, keeping Mithila in his custody. Aktery sought legal help from BLAST's Faridpur Unit Office.

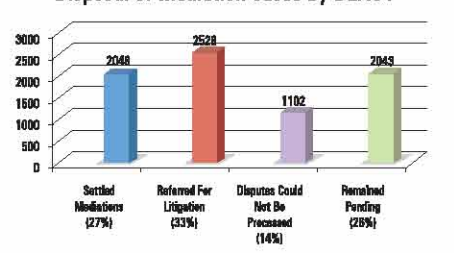
Representatives from BLAST and RACINE, a local NGO, visited Rezaur's house that day. Through their intervention, Aktery recovered custody of her daughter Mithila. At Aktery's request, a mediation was conducted locally and Aktery returned to live with her husband, on his promise that the violence would not recur.

MEDIATION

BLAST promotes alternative dispute resolution (ADR) through mediation for family, land, financial, petty criminal and labour matters. Mediation is cost-effective, in terms of minimizing unaffordable legal costs and fees, and time-efficient, in the context of lengthy court delays. It can also empower the individuals who participate in the process. The swift resolution of disputes instills a measure of confidence in the complainants.

In 2011, BLAST dealt with 7,721 applications for mediation, of which 5,893 constituted new applications and 1,828 were pending from previous years. As can be seen in the figure below, of the 7,721 cases, 2,525 (33%) were referred for litigation, 2,048 (27%) were settled through mediation, 2,043 (26%) remained pending and 14% could not be processed, for various reasons, such as subsequent non-attendance by clients, or non-availability of relevant documents.

Disposal of Mediation cases by BLAST



Out of the said 2,048 mediations that resulted in settlement, 442 (22%) disputes were resolved and Taka 32,522,935 was recovered for clients in family-related claims (dower money, maintenance) or labour matters (arrears of wages, compensation), enabling individuals to rebuild their lives and also indirectly benefiting their dependents. 94% of these

cases benefited women directly. One of BLAST's most significant achievements was to realize and recover such large sums of money for its clients.

In addition to the 2048 clients directly benefitting from mediation services, BLAST estimates that 10,240 people indirectly benefitted as well, for example the children and parents of the women making maintenance claims.

One of BLAST's most significant achievements was to realize and recover such large sums of money for its clients. In general, clients hoped to become more economically self-reliant.

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The above figures indicate that 95% of the targets that were set were achieved during the year. The shortfall in meeting the targets was due to the lack of availability of experienced and trained staff with expertise in mediation. To achieve the targets set in 2012, arrangements have been made for at least one paralegal or mediation officer to be present at each unit.

Case Study 5 : A WOMAN CLAIMS RESTITUTION OF CONJUGAL RIGHTS AND MAINTENANCE

About 34 years ago, Aklima, about 50, married Akbar, aged about 84, under Muslim law. Aklima was Akbar's second wife. The couple had a grown up daughter who was married and living with her husband. Akbar was largely bedridden. Aklima lived separately without any maintenance or any help from Akbar for about one year. Whenever she sought any help from him, Akbar's first wife and children from that family harassed her. In October 2011 Aklima finally sought legal help.

BLAST's Rajshahi Office wrote to Akbar asking for settlement of the dispute through mediation. Akbar's older son attended the meeting on his behalf. In the presence of both parties, BLAST arranged a mediation session where Akbar's son stated that his father was willing to live with Aklima and to pay her maintenance. It was mutually agreed that Aklima would live with and take care of her husband without facing any further harassment or tension from Akbar's family or from his first wife. Akbar's son then made a payment of Tk. 50,000 (Taka fifty thousand) towards her maintenance.

Case Study 6: GAURI WINS SEPARATION AND MAINTENANCE UNDER HINDU LAW

In 2007, Gauri, an NGO staffer, married Rajib, a student, in accordance with Hindu religious ceremonies and through swearing an affidavit. Within a year of their marriage Rajib began subjecting her to psychological pressure and violence. He then abandoned their home, leaving her alone at their rented flat

in Sylhet. With no alternatives, Gauri was forced to move into her parents' home. Despite repeated efforts she was not able to establish contact with Rajib, and received no maintenance from him either. In June 2011, Gauri sought legal help from BLAST's Sylhet Unit Office.

The Sylhet Unit Office facilitated a mediation between Gauri and Rajib, and after a long discussion, both the parties were able to reach a settlement. Rajib paid Gauri Tk. 80,000 (Taka eighty thousand) as arrears of maintenance, and with BLAST's help, they executed an affidavit confirming the terms of their separation.

Case Study 7: RESTITUTION OF CONJUGAL RIGHTS; RESISTING 'FATWA'

Raisul Islam of Munshigonj married Nurjahan Begum in 1998, and they had two children, a daughter and a son. About two years ago, while drunk, Raisul became very abusive to Nurjahan and pronounced a verbal divorce on her. However, following a family mediation, they were reunited, and soon had another daughter. Due to local social pressure, Raisul's parents and other family members refused to accept the baby and compelled him to abandon his marriage. Raisul sought advice from a local 'Mufti' and asked him to issue a 'fatwa' after being pressurised to do so by his family and relatives. The 'Mufti' issued a 'fatwa' holding that Nurjahan had already been divorced by an oral talaq and directed the parties to live separately. Nonetheless, the youngest child was legitimate. The parties were shocked by this outcome and in September 2011 they came together to the BLAST Head Office and sought legal help against Mukul and Abdul, Raisul's paternal uncles.

BLAST's Head Office sent a letter to Mukul and Abdul seeking settlement of the dispute through mediation. When they failed to respond, BLAST's representative contacted them directly. Finally in November 2011, in the presence of both parties, after a successful discussion, it was decided that the parties would continue to live together and that no-one else in the community should subject them to any harassment. BLAST's lawyers pointed out that the issuance of a 'fatwa' of this nature, directing punishment, was clearly illegal, and that following the High Court's judgment and directions, the person issuing such a fatwa was liable to punishment. They had also clarified that even if there had been no High Court judgment in place, the 'fatwa' itself was based on a misinterpretation of Muslim law. The couple were however reluctant to take action against the person who issued the 'fatwa' as they did not want to create further antagonism in the community, and wanted to live together, without pressure from the community.

LITIGATION

BLAST provides legal advice and representation for individuals whose disputes cannot be resolved through mediation or who have been the victims of criminal offences or human rights violations. BLAST is proving highly effective in promoting greater access to justice among its clients giving claimants, particularly poor women and workers, and now increasingly other marginalised groups, a chance to voice their grievances in a public arena.

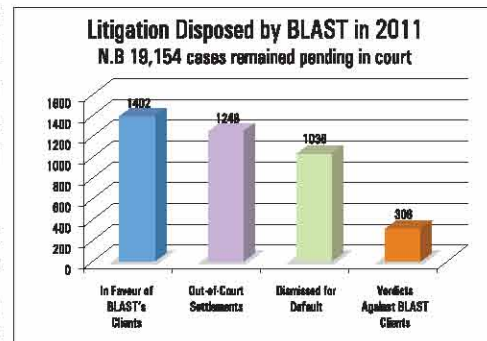
In 2011, BLAST dealt with a total of 23,295 cases, of which 5158 were newly constituted cases, and 18,137 cases remained pending from previous years. Of these, 4,141 cases were disposed in 2011 whilst 19,154 cases remained pending at various courts.

Labour Matters: BLAST has enabled garment workers to recover Tk. 1,013,000 in arrears of wages and compensation, and resolved 210 labour disputes through court. Out of these, 75 cases (36%) were disposed of in favour of BLAST's clients. Of these, 5 cases (7%) were successfully settled in court, which resulted in the recovery of arrears of wages and compensation.

Family Matters: Of the total number of cases disposed, 3,055 cases involved family matters, including maintenance, dower, dowry demands, second marriages, etc. During this period, BLAST successfully resolved 382 family-related disputes through litigation, which resulted in the recovery of Tk. 20,800,766. BLAST also conducted criminal litigation in relation to family-related and/or domestic violence with its primary beneficiaries being women.

CRIMINAL CASES

BLAST offers legal aid services both to persons who have been accused and to those who ARE victims of criminal offences, at all levels of the justice delivery system and especially those living in poverty or facing disadvantage or discrimination. Most of the criminal litigation conducted by BLAST arises in cases of violence against women, in the family and outside and in disputes arising out of family law matters.



Case Study 8: STOPPING DOWRY DEMANDS AND VIOLENCE

Ameera and Moqbul, of Khulna, were married in February 2008 under Muslim law. They subsequently had a son. Moqbul became violent towards Ameera and started demanding payments of dowry. When she couldn't pay him, he subjected her to severe violence. One day, he demanded Tk. 50,000 (Tk fifty thousand), and when Ameera was unable to pay, he threw her and their son out of his house forcing Ameera to take shelter at her parent's house. A few days later, she found out about BLAST through a local lawyer and visited BLAST's Khulna Office explaining her situation. On receiving her application, BLAST facilitated a mediation but Moqbul sought more time and an agreement was not reached. By December 2010, Ameera, with the assistance of BLAST, filed a Criminal Case before the Judicial Magistrate's Court under section 4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act 1980. Due to lack of any medical evidence, she could not file a complaint under the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act, despite the allegations of violence. The case was filed with support through BLAST and conducted through its panel lawyer. During the trial period, the case was settled amicably and it was decided that both parties would continue their marital life with their son, and that Moqbul would not make any further demand for dowry. The case was settled in November 2011.

Case Study 9: JUSTICE FOR MALEKA - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MURDER

Maleka, a student of Class 10, and studying in a local madrasa, developed a relationship with Salauddin. She then came under increasing family and community pressure to marry him. At one point, Salauddin's guardians demanded a sum of Tk. 50,000 (Taka fifty thousand) and three sets of gold ornaments from Maleka's family which they refused to pay, and so the marriage didn't take place. After eight months, Salauddin entered into another arranged marriage, this time reportedly after receiving a dowry of Tk. 40,000 (Taka forty thousand).



In spite of this, Salauddin continued his relationship with Maleka, assuring her that they were already married after compelling her to endorse her signature on a blank paper. They then started living together in a house at Alfadanga, Faridpur. Despite her repeated requests, Salauddin refused to provide her with a copy of their marriage registration certificate (kabin-nama). However, he used to keep forcing himself on her. Maleka asked everyone to help including her local Madrasa teacher, but to no avail.

In June 2011, Maleka was at her parent's house. Zareena (Salauddin's sister-in-law) asked Maleka to go with her to Salauddin's house. Maleka accompanied Zareena but when they reached Salauddin's house, Zareena and Afia (Salauddin's mother) became violent and started to beat her. According to the FIR, Salauddin then drenched her body with kerosene oil and set fire to her, whilst Sumon (his younger brother) hit her with a wooden stick. The neighbours managed to rescue her taking her to Alfadanga Health Centre for emergency treatment. The Health Centre referred her to Faridpur Medical College and Hospital for better treatment but in the absence of a special burns unit there was little to be done.

Maleka's father was distraught and at a loss as to what to do. The representatives of BLAST Faridpur Unit and SVAW (Stop violence Against Women) Network came forward and discussed the matter with both the District Administration and the police. They collected Tk. 5,000 (Taka five thousand) from the Deputy Commissioner (Faridpur) and Tk. 10,000 (Taka ten thousand) from the Chief Executive Officer, Zilla Parishad (Faridpur) and with their support, on 5 July 2011, Maleka was taken to the Burns Unit of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital where BLAST Head Office and Ain o Shalish Kendra (ASK), provided further financial support. However, after fourteen days, on 10 July 2011, Maleka passed away.

In the meantime, with the assistance of BLAST's Faridpur Unit and other local NGOs, a case was filed under Section 4(1)/30, Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act 2000. BLAST is currently providing legal assistance and all the accused are now in custody. The case is pending hearing before the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Tribunal in Faridpur.

ADVICE AND AWARENESS

BLAST conducts awareness programmes across Bangladesh on constitutional and legal rights and remedies. It also produces information, education and communication materials, and arranges regular seminars and discussion and advocacy meetings, as well as expert meetings or roundtables in order to engage different constituencies involved in the protection of human rights, or providing access to justice, as well as particular groups and communities

Garments Workers

In 2011, BLAST conducted six legal awareness training sessions in Dhaka for a total of 195 (105 men and 90 women) garment workers. Participants discussed a range of issues, including working hours, overtime, minimum wages, leave and holidays, compensation, handling of grievances, resignation, retrenchment, termination, discharge, dismissal, benefits, health, hygiene and safety and sexual harassment at the workplace.



Human rights investigations are a crucial step in the protection of human rights. They include gathering information about incidents, observing events, visiting sites, interviewing witnesses and engaging with Government authorities to establish and verify the facts surrounding an alleged violation.

BLAST conducted investigations into eleven individual cases in 2011. The cases were selected in response to requests from other human rights organisations, BLAST personnel, or media reports. Actions taken following the investigations ranged from use of the findings in individual or public interest litigation, in advocacy efforts to seek redress for survivors of human rights violations, or in framing demands for changes to relevant laws or policies.

INVESTIGATION

Tribute for the students who died in the Mirsharai bus crash in July 2011.
© Abdul Malek

FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

The eleven cases investigated during the year covered the following issues:

- Four cases dealt with **violence against children**, and three were in relation to child domestic workers
- Two cases involved **violence against women**, including domestic violence
- Two cases involved **property rights, land rights and related conflicts**; one concerned allegations of land grabbing by a private company for a housing project, and the other involved arson attacks and killings arising over alleged forcible land occupations
- One case involved **road safety and the deaths of children in a bus crash**
- One case dealt with the issue of **safety on construction sites**
- One case involved alleged violations of the right to **freedom of religion**, in particular the right to practice religion

Actions taken during and after investigations ranged from provision of medical help to a survivor of violence, to assistance with legal aid, including attendance at police stations to ensure filing of cases, drafting relevant correspondence, and supporting the litigation process. In some cases, BLAST also undertook local media advocacy. In several cases, BLAST worked in close collaboration with partners at the national or local level, to ensure that the issues in question could be drawn to the attention of the concerned authorities, and support provided to the individual or community concerned.

Case Study 8: 42 STUDENTS KILLED IN A BUS CRASH IN MIRESHORAI, CHITTAGONG

On 11 July 2011, a truck packed with school students crashed and flipped over into a ditch at Abu Tarab Bazar area, Mireshorai Upazila, Chittagong, killing at least 42 students.

BLAST held an onsite investigation, and submitted its investigation report and recommendations to the Chairman of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), the Executive Engineer of Roads and Highways, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Secretary, Ministry of Communication. The Department of Roads and Highway published recommendations, which included ensuring strict implementation of the law banning the use of mobile phones while driving, setting minimum education and training requirements for acquiring driving licences, close monitoring and prevention of corruption within BRTA, plantation of trees on both sides of the highways, introducing improved and effective emergency rescue services, including traffic awareness information in textbooks, and increasing the budget for road safety.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION APPLICATIONS

Road Safety:

Following its investigation of the Mireshorai bus tragedy, BLAST's Investigation Cell submitted applications dated 18 August 2011 under the Right to Information Act 2009 to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Communication, seeking information on the number of road accidents, related deaths and injuries, cases filed, the status of such cases, the punishment awarded and compensation paid out over a period of ten years.

The response from the Ministry of Communication revealed that, according to their records, a total of **41,791 road accidents took place between 1 January 2001 and 15 August 2011**. During this period, only three committees were established to investigate the accidents and 19 meetings were held by the Road Safety Committee. The latter took some important decisions in relation to preventive actions and responses required, including directing that driving licences should be issued only to skilled drivers, measures taken against the issuance of fraudulent driving licences, introduction of highway policing and traffic radio channels, bans on three wheelers on highways, and inclusion of road safety lessons in textbooks, among others. In comparison, the Ministry of Home Affairs' records indicated that **a total of 36,839 road accidents occurred during this ten year period**, and that as a result some 27,959 people died, while 25,438 people were injured. This response also identified that out of a total of 36,199 cases filed, following investigations into such incidents, only 19,186 charge-sheets were issued, while the police issued final reports, indicating that there was no case to be made out, in 16,261 instances, or just under 50% of the case. Most tellingly, only 2269 individuals were convicted, with 257 people being imprisoned and serving a sentence (suggesting a 16% conviction rate).

Violence Against Women in CHT :

BLAST investigated the situation of violence against women in CHT (Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachori) by filing two separate RTIs with the Ministry of Home Affairs, seeking information on the number of cases filed in relation to acid attacks, dowry violence, rape, sexual harassment and trafficking under the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act 2000 amongst others; the number of charge sheets filed; the number of judgments given in such cases; and whether any punishments had been imposed. The RTI application asked for a disaggregation of information by gender and ethnicity.

Other Investigations: Summary of Facts and Actions

Issue: **Right to Freedom from Violence Domestic Violence**

Facts: A husband subjected his first wife to abuse after divorcing her and marrying another woman.

Action: BLAST provided the woman survivor of violence with assistance in seeking emergency medical treatment from Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and in filing a GD at Shobujbag police station, Dhaka.

Issue: **Right to Life – Safety at Construction Sites**

Facts: Tawheed, aged twelve, died as a result of injuries sustained when a brick from a construction site fell on his head while he was walking on a Dhaka street with other children.

Action: The police filed Rampura PS Case No 41/20011 on 24 November 2011 under Section 304-A of the Penal Code 1860. BLAST's Dhaka unit is assisting the prosecution The police have submitted a chargesheet.

Issue: **Right to Life/ Property – Land Occupations, Arson Attacks and Killings**

Facts: BLAST together with ASK conducted an on-site investigation into allegations received of forcible land occupation and arson attacks on the homes of Adibashis in Ramghor, Khagrachari and the killings of three Bengalis

Action: BLAST and ASK sent a letter dated 23 April 2011 to the Deputy Commissioner and the National Human Rights Commission forwarding their finding and seeking urgent investigation of the alleged offences, and prosecution of those responsible.

Issue: **Right to Life/ Freedom from Violence – Abuse of Child Domestic Worker**

Fact: Tushti, aged eleven, who had been serving as a domestic worker in Khulna, was allegedly killed following abuse by his employers.

Action: BLAST's Khulna Unit, with like-minded organizations, organized a press conference protesting the incident, and demanding an urgent response from the authorities, and also sent a memorandum dated 12 June 2011 to the local administration. Subsequently, the police arrested the accused and his wife.

Issue: **Right to Life/ Freedom from Violence – Abuse of Child Domestic Worker**

Facts: Trisha, aged eight was allegedly abused and murdered by a couple who employed her as a domestic worker in Mugdapara, Dhaka.

Action: The police filed a murder case against the couple and arrested them both. BLAST's Dhaka Office is supporting the prosecution.

Issue: **Right to Freedom from Violence – Domestic Worker**

Facts: Shurobhi, aged eleven, from Dinajpur could not be found at the house where she worked in Uttara, Dhaka. Her mother applied to BLAST for help.

Action: BLAST assisted Shurobhis's mother to lodge an FIR as the police initially refused to accept her complaint. BLAST also sent a letter dated 18 September 2011 to the Victim Support Centre of the Bangladesh Police and to a child rights organisation, Aparajeyo Bangladesh to help find the child.

Issue: **Right to Life/ Freedom from Violence – Domestic Violence/ Murder**

Facts: Maleka, aged 20, was burnt to death after she refused to marry a man who was already married.

Action: The police filed Alfadanga PS Case No. 04/53 dated 03/07/2011, and arrested the deceased's husband and others. BLAST's Faridpur office is providing assistance to the prosecution.

Issue: **Right to Freedom from Violence – Abuse of Child Domestic Worker**

Facts: BLAST conducted an on-site investigation on 17 November 2011 along with ASK, Nijera Kori and BRAC into allegations that the authorities concerned, in particular the Officer in Charge and the Upazilla Nirbahi Officer had failed to take action against certain individuals who were obstructing the building of a Mosque by members of the Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat on private lands in Ghatail, Tangail. private lands in Ghatail, Tangail.

Action: BLAST, together with ASK, BRAC and Nijera Kori sent a joint letter dated 5 January 2012 to the local MP, the Deputy Commissioner, and Superintendent of Police requesting urgent investigation and action.

Issue: **Right to Property – Land Grabbing for Private Housing**

Facts: BLAST received a request to respond to a complaint by local residents in a village on the outskirts of Dhaka that a development company had illegally grabbed their cultivable land for the purposes of a private housing project

Action: BLAST joined Action Aid, ALRD, ASK, BELA, Nijera Kori and TI-B in conducting onsite fact-finding and then sending a letter dated 18 January 2012 to the National Human Rights Commission and meeting with them to seek their intervention. BLAST also provided direct assistance to the NHRC by undertaking a technical review of complaints by affected persons.


Issue: **Right to Freedom from Violence – Trafficking of Adolescent Girls**

Facts: Three adolescent girls were trafficked from Sunamganj District and forced into sex work in a brothel in Faridpur.

Action: BLAST's Faridpur Unit Office learnt of the incident and communicated with the police to ensure the release of the three girls and their safe return home.



Following investigations and RTI applications on road safety, BLAST convened a meeting on road safety in August 2011. Ilias Kanchan, noted actor and founder of the campaign 'Amra Nirapod Shorok Chai' (We Want Safe Roads), is speaking.



BLAST has filed a total of 93 public interest litigation (PIL) petitions in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh since its inception in 1993 till December 2011. These petitions have resulted in landmark judgments directing government agencies to comply with their duties under law, or providing expanded interpretations of fundamental rights, including to the rights to life, liberty, equality and due process of law. These judgments have spanned civil, political, economic and social rights, including, among others, the right to equality and non-discrimination based on gender or disability, safeguards from arbitrary arrest, freedom from torture, fair trial, the right to life and freedom from forced evictions, environmental protection, and the right to property. In 2011, BLAST filed five (5) PIL petitions.

PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION

**Litigant sitting in the verandah of one of the High Court buildings, awaiting justice.
© Jahangir Alam**

Protecting Child Domestic Workers

Case Study 9 : SEEKING JUSTICE FOR ABUSE OF CHILD DOMESTIC WORKER

Lokkhi, ten years old, was allegedly forced into domestic labour at the family of an Army Officer. There she suffered prolonged abuse at the hands of her employers, being caned, starved and having chilis thrown into her eyes. On Independence Day 2011, Lokkhi was found lying on the streets, in Rejarbagh, Dhaka, not far from the Police Lines, beaten unconscious and covered in multiple bruising. She was found in front of a house where her sister was a domestic worker. Lokkhi's sister arranged to travel to Feni (their home district and admit her in Feni Sadar Hospital.

Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), a national human rights organisation, undertook a local investigation and sought to file a criminal case in Feni but the police reportedly refused to do so. On 10 April 2011, ASK managed to file a GD entry naming the alleged perpetrators and seeking an investigation and security for Lokkhi.

In the meantime, it was reported by the newspapers, that the employer's family had arranged for Lokkhi release from Feni Hospital and her removal to the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka and had also allegedly offered payment to Lokkhi's family. Under these circumstances, BLAST filed a writ petition on seeking urgent action and measures for Lokkhi's security.

On 13 April, the High Court issued directions on among others the Inspector General of Police to report on action taken to investigate the abuse of Lokkhi. The Court further directed the IGP, concerned police officers and the CMH authorities to ensure security for Lokkhi and to prevent any access to her by members of the employer's family, while allowing ASK officials to visit the girl.

The Court further asked the concerned authorities to explain why their failure to investigate the incident or to take action to prosecute and punish any person to date, or to ensure security for Lokkhi, should not be held to be a violation of their constitutional and statutory duties to ensure protection of the right to be treated in accordance with the law, freedom from forced labour, and freedom from cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment for punishment.

The final hearing is pending.

STOPPING THE CRIMINALIZATION OF BEGGARS

Case Study 10: STOPPING THE BEGGARS' SURVEY

Under section 81 of the Metropolitan Police Ordinance begging is a punishable offence. On 2 February 2011, the High Court issued a Suo Motu rule and a direction on the police authorities to strictly enforce this law against begging in Dhaka city.

BLAST sought to become an intervenor, to raise the issue of risk of criminalization of all beggars and homeless people, the risk of their arbitrary arrest and consequent denial of opportunities to earn a livelihood, in the event that the order were to be strictly enforced. The application was heard and granted.

The case is now pending for hearing.

While the above case was ongoing, under the "Beggar Rehabilitation and Alternative Employment Programme", the Government (Ministry of Social Welfare) had contacted ten NGOs to participate in surveys on 30th September 2011 registering persons as beggars, and classifying them into different overlapping and incoherent categories. BLAST along with other organisations - ADD, ASK, BRAC-HRLS and Nijera Kori -- jointly expressed grave concerns and on 28 September 2011, called upon the National Human Rights Commission to stop the Beggar Survey.

BLAST and ASK further proceeded to file a writ petition impugning the notification. They argued that despite different legal provisions existing for the protection of the rights of children and persons with disabilities, they were at risk of being classified as 'beggars' and forced to undergo 'rehabilitation' under existing laws, and were more at risk due to the order in the earlier Suo Motu Rule. In these circumstances, anyone registered as beggar would be in violation of the law.

On 25 August 2011, the Court ruled that all the documents related to the proposed survey should be submitted to court, prior to hearing of the case. Subsequently, on 30 November 2011, the Court issued a Rule Nisi in favour of the petitioners. The hearing is currently pending.

ENSURING ROAD SAFETY

Case Study 11 : PIL TO ENSURE ROAD SAFETY

The Mireshorai incident involving the deaths of 42 children, and the information gathered through RTI applications, was followed by news of the tragic deaths in a road crash of the award-winning film maker Tareque Masud and ATN CEO and cinematographer Ashfaque (Mishuk) Munier among others on 13 August 2011. This last incident coalesced public outrage over the failure of the government to take adequate steps for road safety. BLAST, along with others filed a writ petition on behalf of the Chairman of the Legal Education and Human Rights Committee of the Bar Council. This challenged the failure of the concerned authorities to comply with their statutory duties to take appropriate measures to investigate such incidents, to take action including prosecution against those responsible, to ensure redress to those affected, and to take effective measures to ensure road safety and prevention of road accidents.

On 17 August 2011, a High Court bench directed the Government authorities, including the Ministry of Communication, Ministry of Home Affairs, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and IGP (Inspector General of Police), to show cause why they should not be held responsible for the failure to ensure the right to life, including taking necessary measures for road safety, among others and directed them to furnish reports as to the measures taken by them to repair, maintain and develop all roads, highways, railways to prevent accidents.

The Court also directed them to provide a report on the numbers of licenses issued/renewed over the past five years, and the criteria used for this purpose. The Court further directed the Ministry of Communication to provide an explanation about a newspaper report stating that 10,000 driving licenses has been issued without conducting the necessary tests, and that a further 24,500 more licenses were due to be issued on that basis, on the request of another Ministry.

On 25 August 2011, the Court issued an injunction barring the concerned government authorities including BRTA from issuing any driving licenses until 17 November 2011 except in full compliance with the law. It further directed the authorities to submit a report on the numbers of licenses issued/renewed so far including information on the examination results of all applicants for such driving licenses.

OTHER CASES

Corporal Punishment:

BLAST successfully conducted a writ petition regarding incidents of caning, beating and chaining of children - both boys and girls. After hearing, the High Court held that corporal punishment constitutes a clear violation of children's rights, including the right to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. It declared illegal and unconstitutional all kinds of corporal punishment of students, such as caning, beating, chaining, forced haircutting and confinement in primary/secondary schools and madrasas. The Court directed the Government to amend the Children Act 1974 to create an offence for imposing corporal punishment, repeal existing laws that allow for corporal punishment, and to ban corporal punishment in the home and other settings. The Government (Ministry of Education) promptly complied with the judgment by issuing a Circular, applicable to all governmental and non-governmental educational institutions, which defines the prohibited nature of physical and psychological corporal punishments and duties of the management to address corporal punishment and clearly penalises conduct by teachers or others in conflict with these guidelines. Various initiatives are currently being taken by the government and NGOs to implement the judgment (please see Ending Corporal Punishment Project below for more information)

Disability Rights:

BLAST issued a legal notice to a leading school in Dhaka questioning its refusal to allow a child to appear for viva examinations for admission on the purported grounds of her physical disability. Following a negotiation with the parents of the child, the school agreed to introduce non-discriminatory policies and access/entry, and measures to prevent and punish any acts of discrimination, and to adopt a policy to this effect which would be disseminated to all potential applicants.

Forced Evictions:

BLAST filed writ petitions on behalf of two residents of the Biddut Bosti in Mirpur, Dhaka, challenging the threatened forced eviction of the entire slum area. The High Court disposed of the petition, but with orders that their possession should not be disturbed during the winter period. BLAST subsequently filed a petition for leave to appeal against the judgment and orders of the High Court. This is now pending hearing before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.



টক শো

জনগণ ও ন্যায় বিচার

প্রশিক্ষণ

টি (ব্লাস্ট)

Mahbuba Akhter (Co-ordinator, Communications and Advocacy, BLAST) (centre) hosting a talk show on citizens' rights and fair trial.
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BLAST's advocacy activities have helped to facilitate changes in Bangladesh's laws and policies. As part of such initiatives, BLAST has organized seminars about public interest litigation and advocacy campaigns, and held issue-based meetings with NGO representatives, judges, lawyers and the media to identify obstacles to access to justice for different communities, and means for overcoming these.

LAW AND POLICY REFORM

Nigar Sultana Hanufa (Commissioner, Barisal Paurashava), campaigning for the National Women's Development Policy, May 2011, Barisal, after attending a BLAST Workshop on 'The Role of Police in Democratic Society'
© Sara Hossain

ADVOCACY

Labour Rights and Remedies for Workers

A recent High Court decision held that criminal cases could not be filed under Sections 307/310 of the BLA following verbal termination of workers. This judgment put many workers at risk of having no relief even when unlawfully terminated. BLAST, in collaborative in-house meetings with Labour Court panel lawyers, trade union representatives, supervisors, garment factories' compliance officers, and representatives of networking organizations, is strategising on how best to move forward with this case, and considering what alternative relief may be available to such workers, and also regarding proposed amendments to the law.

BLAST organised a series of roundtable discussions which saw the participation of lawyers, trade union activists, workers, employers, and representatives from NGOs and prominent trade unions. These included discussions on 'Strategy to Protect The Rights of Victimized Workers' which considered alternate relief available in such cases, 'Decentralization of the Labour Court: Advantages and Disadvantages' which recommended an increase in the number of Labour Courts in industrial areas and discussions with the stakeholders before establishing Labour Courts in every district, and 'Barriers in Providing Legal Aid to Workers' which concluded that greater efforts should be made to increase awareness of their legal rights amongst workers and that services should be made more accessible to domestic workers by BLAST.

Legal Aid Act 2000

During the reporting period, six advocacy meetings titled 'The Legal Aid Act 2000: An Overview' were held by BLAST unit offices. They focused on the ways to strengthen the provision of legal aid through the Government's District Legal Aid Committees (DLACs) and to ensure more awareness and access of such services to the public, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as prisoners and workers. Some of the key recommendations made included (a) raising awareness, eg through the production of effective IEC materials, greater utilization of media, etc; (b) improving administration, eg. continuous review of limitations, increasing eligibility criteria, closer monitoring of case load, greater transparency in DLAC operations, etc; and (c) capacity building for Panel Lawyers through training of lawyers to keep them updated with latest laws and procedure, systematic co-operation with panel lawyers from other NGOs, etc.

Safeguards on Arrest and Police Remand

Advocacy meetings were held focusing on the implementation of High Court directions on sections 54 and 167 of the CrPC regarding torture and ill-treatment in police custody. These were organised by the Unit offices at Kushtia, Dhaka, Chittagong, Tangail, Rajshahi, Khulna, and Pabna, and the participants included members of the judiciary, lawyers, BLAST's District Coordinators, police officers, and rights advocates. In order to curtail this widespread practice of arrest without warrant, it was decided that there should be more systematic monitoring and research, more legislative and judicial advocacy, and inclusion of relevant information in government training programmes.

Vagrancy: Rehabilitation or Criminalization?

Concerned about reports of police "rounding up" beggars, in the run up to the Cricket World Cup in 2011,

BLAST together with ASK, ADD and BRAC HRLS jointly organized a roundtable to raise awareness on the conditions in existing government vagrancy homes and to review the Draft Vagrant and Homeless Persons Act and its effect on its victims. At the roundtable, issues of providing legal representation in such cases and recommendations on the Draft Vagrancy Act 2010 were made, including the following :

- There should be a specific definition of the term vagrant, and beggars should not be treated as vagrants.
- Measures should be undertaken not for criminalising the poor and homeless, but arranging for their rehabilitation wherever possible, or providing them with alternative sources of livelihood.
- Vulnerable groups such as sex workers, drug users, and lost children who face arbitrary arrest and detention as 'vagrants' should be extended legal aid and support.
- There must be limits on the periods of incarceration in vagrant homes.
- Any person over 18 must be allowed to move out of a vagrants home freely, based on consent.

On that occasion, and a later discussion held on 17 September 2011, held jointly by BLAST, Nijera Kori and BRAC HRLS, Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, committed to the NHRC's inspecting and investigating vagrancy homes and taking forward a strong dialogue on economic and social rights for the most marginalised with policy makers, and with the government.

Access To Justice and Establishment of District Courts in CHT

A roundtable discussion, arranged by BLAST, and attended by prominent members of the judiciary, panel lawyers, members of different Bars, representatives of civil society, journalists and human rights activists from CHT, aimed to identify developments with respect to ensuring access to justice in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, with a particular focus on the District and Sessions Courts and the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Tribunals. The latter had been set up in 2008 following a landmark judgment obtained by BLAST and ASK in a public interest litigation for implementation of the CHT Regulations as amended in 2003. The Chief Justice welcomed the effort at stock-taking and noted the recommendations which are summarised below :

- Judges should be provided with training, through JATI, about the CHT Regulation 1900 and about the applicable customary laws of the different hill peoples.
- Separate family courts should be established, accessible to all communities
- Separate Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Tribunals, independent from the Courts of the District Judge and Joint District Judge should be established.
- An Additional Joint District Judge should be appointed in each District to ensure adequate management of the caseload.
- The Courts in the three Hill Districts should be equipped with the same support services as in other Courts in Bangladesh – such as proper accommodation for the judges, a librarian, a treasurer, stenographer and record keeper.

- Pending matters should be resolved expeditiously, proper transfer of files from the DC's office should be ensured and a means of resolving cases with missing records should be established.
- Confusions related to procedural matters under the CHT Regulation should be addressed by appropriate reform of the CHT Regulation, but the CHT Regulation should not be replaced with the CPC.
- The Government should take more initiative to enhance access to legal aid and the CHT Regional Council and Hill District Councils should effectively ensure legal aid services for people in need.
- Steps should be taken to address the ongoing delays in dealing with land disputes in the CHT.

Role of the Police in a Democratic Society

BLAST and Nagorik Uddyog (Citizen's Initiative), jointly organised a two day workshop in Barisal and Khulna on the subject of "Our Rights and the Role of Police in a Democratic Society". In each case, the meeting was addressed by the concerned Mayor, by senior members of the Bar, and police officials as well as rights advocates and journalists. Each event involved presentations on relevant legal developments in Bangladesh and the region, group work to examine case studies regarding the role of the police in securing rights, police accountability, and safeguards on arrest and detention, and a 'talk show', involving local journalists and lawyers in dialogue on recent concerns regarding policing and security.



A little girl standing outside the doors of the National Legal Aid Services Organisation (NLASO)

© Tawheed Roza Noor

NATIONAL NETWORKS

During 2011, BLAST arranged **seventeen networking meetings with local level NGOs** with the twin objectives of enhancing BLAST's legal aid activities and BLAST's learning of the expectations of local NGOs. These exchanges contributed to some 1061 (11%) of the total applications for legal advice received by BLAST during the year.

BLAST also arranged **three roundtable discussions on labour law** that resulted in establishing links with trade unions, employers groups such as the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the Bangladesh Knitware Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), as well as workers' rights fora such as the Shamajik Nirapotta Forum (SNF) [Social Safety Forum], Make Trade Fair Alliance (MTF) and other stakeholders.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): BLAST signed memoranda of understanding with three organisations, the Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction Project (UPPR) (Comilla Pa'urashava); FAIR (Kushtia); and DESHA (Kushtia), covering nine districts in 2011. BLAST now has 133 MoUs in place with organisations across the country to offer legal aid services to referral clients and to make BLAST's activities known in the working areas of these organizations. In turn, BLAST also referred clients to its partner NGOs for shelter, psychological counselling, health care and livelihood support.

Alliance memberships: BLAST remains engaged with various coalition partners in conducting advocacy campaigns on a range of issues including labour rights, occupational health and safety, women's rights (freedom from violence against women (VAW), in particular domestic violence, implementation of CEDAW), children's rights, networking of domestic workers, victim support centre. BLAST provides technical legal perspectives, through joint planning, discussions, analysis and drafting as required. It also collaborates with various ministries including the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, as well as the Law Commission, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Legal Aid Services Organisation (NLASO).

RESEARCH

BLAST has undertaken research projects to complement its advocacy work and highlight areas of human rights infringement, in particularly recently on medico-legal evidence in rape cases, and establishment of Family Court in the CHT.

Research on Medico-Legal Evidence for Rape Cases

BLAST prepared initial research on 'The Practical Challenges Related to the Collection and Use of Medical Evidence in Rape Trials in Bangladesh', in connection with its SAFE related advocacy. This research, undertaken initially by Sylvie Rougerie Macallum, and later by Asmita Basu, indicated that the

availability of a conclusive medical report in favour of the prosecution leads to higher conviction rates, and also highlighted the following challenges :

1. Problems in Preservation of Evidence occur due to delayed examinations. A significant number of survivors are examined more than 72 hours after being raped, the recommended period for collecting forensic evidence. Delays occur because survivors hesitate to report rape allegations due to fear of repercussions, their lack of awareness of the importance of collecting forensic evidence, or because they are pressurized by their families, local leaders or police.

2. Access to Necessary Services. Currently, only government hospitals have forensics department, which are geographically inaccessible, have very limited hours of operation, and are understaffed. Additionally, DNA testing is only available in 7 districts of Bangladesh, and even then can be quite cost-prohibitive. Lack of access is further compounded by lawyers' and counselors' limited understanding/awareness of forensic services.

3. Corruption and Lack of Co-operation. Doctors and medical staff may be susceptible to bribery or influence, while some doctors are uncooperative because they see the requirement to go and testify in court as a burden.

4. Gender Insensitivity of Medical Personnel. Interviewees expressed concern about the limited number of female doctors and nurses in most Forensics Departments. They also expressed concern that medical staff are particularly unaccommodating of disabled women.

5. The Examination Procedure. Aspects of the medical examination can be both discomforting and irrelevant. Particularly, doctors still administer the 'two finger test' which is painful, invasive and potentially traumatic for survivors, and has been denounced by doctors around the world as having no scientific value.

6. Use and Misuse of Medical Evidence. Challenges such as stereotypical attitudes, use of irrelevant and embarrassing information, doctors' uncooperative attitudes, creates an inefficient system.

Research Project on Family Courts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

The Family Courts Ordinance 1985 mandated the establishment of Family Courts in every district of

Bangladesh, but explicitly excluded the hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. In 2009, BLAST challenged this section of the ordinance, asserting that it violated the constitutional rights of the residents of those districts denying them, and especially its women inhabitants, equal protection under the law and freedom from discrimination. However, during the course of the hearings, legal practitioners from the indigenous communities voiced concerns about the effect of introducing Family Courts in CHT on the existing traditional justice systems (karbaries, the Mouza Headmen, and the Circle Chief). Prompted by these concerns, BLAST deployed a research team to explore perspectives of diverse stakeholders in CHT.

The research paper titled '**Family Courts in the CHT : At the Intersection of Gender and Ethnic Identity**', and written by Maimuna Ahmad and Sathi Chakma, concluded that there is a pressing need to establish Family Courts in order to inter alia protect the significant non-indigenous population in CHT. However, it also noted that care must be taken not to displace the traditional justice systems but rather to formally link with it, with the proviso that the traditional system undertake reforms of reviewing their laws and complying with international human rights standards. The paper highlighted the following issues that need to be addressed by the judicial system :

1. Need for Family Courts : The courts constitute a minimum fulfillment of the State's obligation to shelter all equally under the law, and should be provided despite cost- and time- prohibitions, or the availability of an alternate traditional justice system. Three possible methods of incorporating the traditional justice systems are by having (a) parallel systems, (b) integrated family court system, or (c) separate but linked systems, wherein there would be mutually exclusive jurisdiction but with a right of appeal to the Family Courts.

2. Gender Issues: Women face multiple challenges in CHT including limited access to education and work, gender-based and ethnic-based violence. In addition, women from Adbiashi communities seeking justice must contend with patriarchal systems and mindsets inherent in the traditional justice system. Bengali or Hindu women, on the other hand, having no recourse to either Family Courts or the traditional system, have to therefore, depend on informal mediations (shalish) which carry no legal weight and are generally highly gender-insensitive.

3. Maintaining the advantages and removing the disadvantages of the Traditional System: The traditional system (a) is not cost-prohibitive, (b) is accessible, (c) operates at a local, community-context level, and (c) can be effective due to pressure engendered by its public nature. However, on the other hand, there are (a) no structures to set minimum standards of justice, (b) no merit-based vetting process to become a karbari/headman/Circle chief, (c) patriarchal attitudes are deeply entrenched, (d) the system is male-dominated, wherein females hardly attend hearings and the punishments meted out to them were relatively harsher, and (e) lack of adequate and effective accountability measures. In addition, karbaries regularly hear rape cases in blatant violation of statute law and customary laws.

Research on the Baseline Survey on Human Rights in Bangladesh

BLAST, working with a team led by Greg Moran and Dr Maqbul Bhuiyan of DMA, contributed to research for a baseline survey on perceptions of human rights, commissioned by the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh. A survey was held across the country by DMA, with BLAST being primarily responsible for qualitative work and extensive interviews with justice seekers. The report which resulted was shared at an event convened by the NHRC with a widely drawn group of feminists, activists and others.



As a part of its commitment to providing holistic services, BLAST collaborates on various projects focusing on certain vulnerable groups, such as children (Ending Corporal Punishment Project), prisoners (IRSOP Project), or women/girls in urban slums (SAFE Project). It is currently an implementing partner for the Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Project, which is enhancing access to formal justice systems in rural areas.

LEGAL PROJECTS

IMPROVEMENT OF THE REAL SITUATION OF OVERCROWDING IN PRISONS (IRSOP)

Since 2009, BLAST has been implementing a joint project of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in order to reduce the prison population in pilot prisons through appropriate legal interventions. During January- December, 2011 BLAST's activities under the IRSOP project resulted in a total of 191 prisoners being released on bail, discharged and/or acquitted through the 3420 steps of legal interventions taken to provide prisoners with legal assistance through collection of documents and information from courts, prisons and police stations; assistance with release from safe custody; referral of cases to DLAC or panel/staff lawyers; relay information to 'On Call' prisoners; and conducting various bail-related services, such as finding sureties, contacting family members, pre- and post- bail counselling and follow-up after release

Six paralegals based in BLAST's Bogra Unit Office have been providing free legal assistance and advice to prisoners and their families, in addition to assisting lawyers, police, and the Courts in case-related matters. Their work focuses on accelerating the release of prisoners whose imprisonment was excessive or unlawful, particularly in the case of women and children. A significant innovation of the project includes the fact that paralegals being given access by the Prison Authorities to gather information on the legal status of the vulnerable prisoners in prisons. They also conduct Paralegal Aid Clinics (PLCs) to educate prisoners on criminal laws and procedures and assist those prisoners without any legal representation and/or no contact with their families.

The project also utilizes Case-Coordination Committees that create a platform for monthly dialogue between relevant actors in the criminal justice system, to review ongoing cases involving vulnerable prisoners, and tackle the case backlog, as well as monitor project implementation. Jointly chaired by the Deputy Commissioner and the District and Sessions Judge, the CCC includes the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Civil Surgeon, Public Prosecutor, President and Secretary of District Bar Association, representatives from the police, prison authorities, social services, community leaders and civil society.

ENDING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT (CP)

With support from Save the Children, BLAST has undertaken a series of initiatives to implement a recent PIL judgment banning corporal punishment in educational institutions and towards ending corporal punishment in all settings.

Despite various Government initiatives, such as the National Children Policy, the Children Bill, and particularly post-judgment acts of issuing a circular prohibiting corporal punishment in all educational institutions, and the Guidelines for the prohibition of corporal and mental punishment of students in educational institutions, corporal punishment remains a widespread reality.

BLAST aims to create a legislative framework that consistently prohibits corporal punishment in all settings; to

enforce the High Court judgment banning corporal punishment through collaboration with the Ministry of Education and increase public awareness on corporal punishment and its harmful impact on children.

Through sustained advocacy, it was possible to secure commitments from key actors, such as the Law Commission and the National Human Rights Commission towards a legislative ban. The Minister of Education also stated that such a law was under consideration at a BLAST Consultation Workshop in December 2011. Key government agencies, including the Ministry of Education and the Directorate General of Primary Education affirmed commitments to pursue action against perpetrators.

BLAST has also engaged civil society and children in this advocacy campaign, through organising debate competitions in schools, involving NGOs, stakeholders and alternative educational institutions in designing proposals for action, and through release of publication materials and media advocacy to ensure greater coverage. BLAST has taken several follow-up actions communicating with school management committees and other authorities to demand action following reported allegations of corporal punishment.

BLAST combines its focus on the enforcement of existing laws, with campaigns for law reform, engaging expert opinions to address psychological corporal punishment, and the need for positive discipline in schools.

Following newsreports regarding incidents of corporal punishment over the years, and particularly a 2010 news report regarding a young boy who had committed suicide after a vicious act of corporal punishment, BLAST and ASK filed a public interest litigation (Writ Petition No. 5884 of 2010) in the High Court. As a result of repeated continued pressure by the petitioners, on January 2011, the High Court gave a judgment declaring illegal and unconstitutional all kinds of corporal punishment of students, such as caning, beating, chaining, forced haircutting, and confinement, in primary/ secondary schools and madrasas.



Education Minister Mural Islam Nahid speaking at a National Consultation on ending corporal punishment in educational institutions, organized by BLAST.
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GROWING UP SAFE AND HEALTHY (SAFE)

The SAFE Project, supported by Embassy of Netherlands, addresses sexual and reproductive rights of, and violence against, adolescent girls and women in three urban slums in Dhaka (Moakhali, Jatrahari and Gopibagh).

Despite considerable improvements in a range of gender equality indicators, child marriage and gender-based violence remain significant impediments to achieving gender equity, with more than 60% of girls being married under the legal age of 18, and less than 2% of married women experiencing violence seeking any remedy or service. This situation is considerably worse for women living in urban slums where dire poverty, insecure living arrangements, frequent squatter evictions, weak social networks and absence of public services compound the vulnerability of women.

The project began preparations for commencing integrated sessions and services in the One-Stop Service Centres operating near the slums, through its implementing partners, with Marie Stopes providing health services, BLAST providing legal services, Nari Maitree assisting in community mobilization, and iccdr,b and Population Council conducting action research. The project seeks to raise awareness about women's rights through a combination of messages on prevention, service provision and advocacy for legal and policy reforms. Prevention messages focus on bodily integrity and decision-making in intimate life, including issues of choice and consent.

In addition to undertaking community legal awareness, BLAST has provided training to its own lawyers on the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010.

It has also begun research on the barriers to justice in cases of violence against women. One research study involved collecting data on 62 rape cases in order to analyse the difficulties of obtaining and relying on medical evidence.

BLAST Protocol for Legal Service Providers in Cases of Violence against Women

BLAST worked on drafting a protocol to act as a reference tool for best practice and also promote understanding of violence against women for legal service providers. It covers areas of pre-litigation, litigation and mediation support. In particular, it provides for the following :

1. Role of the State mechanisms that are in place, including the Police, the One-Stop Crisis Centre and the availability of legal aid services, and how to utilise them
2. Co-ordinating responses with other non-legal support providers, such as for medical, shelter or counseling services, for the clients
3. Guidelines on how to effectively communicate with client, including maintaining confidentiality, maintaining cultural and situational sensitivity, and respecting client's autonomy.
4. Conducting risk assessment and safety planning for the client and her children,
5. Guidelines on mediation and litigation support, including explaining to client the procedures, maintaining protocols, knowing when to terminate mediation, evidence gathering, record-keeping, and adhering to general BLAST guidelines.

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROJECT ON DISABILITY (HPDD)

BLAST is collaborating with the Harvard Law School Project on Disability (HPDD) in order to lay the groundwork for establishing a more viable disability law practice in Bangladesh, which includes the collection of data in relation to access to justice for persons with disabilities (PWD); the production and dissemination of information, education and communications (IEC) materials; awareness-raising, capacity-building and relationship-building amongst district-level lawyers and disabled people's organisations; and advocacy to promote and protect the rights of PWDs to access justice.

BLAST conducts litigation and provides legal aid to the marginalised and vulnerable, with a particular focus on PWDs. Currently, BLAST is conducting litigation on the rights of PWDs to public employment, particularly in the judicial and civil services (*Shapan Chowkider Case*, see Annual Report 2010), rights of freedom from discrimination, and the rights of PWDs to be free from harassment at educational institutions. The recognition of such rights through the judicial process is particularly important because the Constitution of Bangladesh does not recognise persons with disabilities as a special group needing constitutional protection in the guarantees of fundamental rights.

Additionally, BLAST promoted best practices amongst lawyers through capacity building programmes and the publishing of a Practitioner's Guide, which compiled effective approaches to protect and promote the rights of PWDs through the justice system. In connection with a number of disabled person's organisations, such as the National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW) and Action for Disability and Development (ADD), BLAST is actively advocating for the rights of PWDs, through key law reform initiatives focusing around the implementation of affirmative action provisions in the Constitution and the Disability Welfare Act 2001.



Training for lawyers on Disability Rights Law in Maryanganj
© Jahangir Alam

ACTIVATING VILLAGE COURTS IN BANGLADESH (AVCB)

The Local Government Division (LGD), UNDP and the European Commission have jointly undertaken a programme titled 'Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh' to provide support for the overloaded justice system through the activation of village courts. BLAST has been an implementing partner within the Chittagong and Cox's Bazar districts since April 2011.

Community Mobilization: BLAST conducted courtyard meetings at the union level to disseminate information on legal rights and the benefits of using local village court and mediation systems. It also assisted in the formation and training of Community-based organisations (CBO) to enable them to play a supportive role in activating VCs, to increase local awareness of VCs and increase scope of justice seeking within the community. BLAST also organised cultural programs, including essay-writing, rallies, and debate competitions, involving college students, school children, teachers, social leaders, and others during observations of three international days.

Advocacy and Communications: BLAST conducts sensitization workshops (aimed at local government representatives, local civil society groups, NGOs, and media persons) workshops for youth groups, and community-level workshops to create platforms for information sharing about the VC, its benefits and processes. BLAST also utilised rallies, campaigns, street dramas and folk songs for wider dissemination to general public about the VC.

Capacity Building: BLAST provided training to relevant actors on the VC and the documentation process, skills development training to UP representatives and CBO members. Further issue-based training sessions were also directed at religious leaders, village police and women leaders, CBO members and UP members. These training sessions facilitated knowledge of the VC and skills to carry out their duties for effective implementation of VC. BLAST also facilitated training-for-trainers for UP members and project staff for independent facilitation of various processes in relation to the VC.

Case study 12 : RAJIB HUQ REOCCUPIES HIS LAND

Rajib Huq, aged 65, lives in Middle Shokpura of Shokpura Union in Baulkhal Upazila under Chittagong District. One of his five decimals of land was occupied by his cousin, Motiur Iqbal. Rajib's attempts at recovering possession of the land through various means had failed. It wasn't until he was invited to a CBO Formation meeting, being organised by BLAST, that he learnt about the VC and its related laws and procedures. In particular, he was able to find out that the VC is empowered to resolve both civil and criminal disputes of up to Tk 25,000 (Taka twenty-five thousand). Following the meeting, he sought to recover his land through the VC system and made an application to the Shokpura Union Chairman. The Chairman took cognizance of the case, a VC hearing was subsequently held and a unanimous decision (5 :0) was given for Motiur to surrender his possession to Rajib Huq.

Rajib Huq currently has possession of the land and has stated that 'No one can harm the poor if the Village Court plays its roles effectively and neutrally like it did in the Shokpura UP Village Court'.



Photo credit: Local Government Division, Bangladesh (April 2011)
© National Human Rights Commission

Discussion on "Two Years of RTI in Bangladesh: A “বাংলাদেশে তথ্য অধিকার আইনের দুই বছর: এ

Venue: VIP Lounge, National Press Club

Date: 18th September, 2017

Time: 10am - 1pm

Organised by:



BLAST has an effective information and communications system which not only enables it to integrate and disseminate data about its activities within the organisation but also serves as a useful resource for researchers and scholars interested in legal aid and human rights issues.

COMMUNICATION
AND
INFORMATION

(from left) Ambassador (retd) Muhammad Zamir (Chairman, Information Commission), Dr. Shamsul Bari (Trustee, BLAST),
Me Khushi Kabir (Co-ordinator, Nijera Kori), at Press Club on 2nd Anniversary of Right to Information Act
© Jahangir Alam

Website Development

BLAST's website continued to be developed during the year, and has increasingly become a must-see site for researchers and advocates interested in developments on human rights law and access to justice in Bangladesh, in the absence of any comprehensive online legal database in Bangladesh. The website contains full text of key human rights judgments and orders obtained by BLAST, press statements, case summaries and outcomes, and a growing resources section, linking and updating to new developments in human rights law and practice nationally and internationally.

Communications

Press Releases: BLAST issues regular press releases including updated information in relation to the ongoing court proceedings. These press releases are available online on the BLAST website. BLAST also maintains a stock of news articles related to its activities.

Publications: BLAST occasionally publishes information manuals and short handbooks on relevant legal issues. For a full list of publications, please see the Annex below, or visit our website: <http://www.blast.org.bd/publications/occasionalpublications>.





Recognising the importance of capacity building to the over all growth of an organisation, BLAST staff undertook training and skill development activities, both at the national and regional level. In addition, BLAST was involved in comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of its activities in order to improve service provision and delivery.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Participants at a Legal Awareness session in Gopibaghi Legal Aid Clinic, Dhaka
© Tawheed Raza Noor

TRAINING

BLAST staff attended four national training sessions (on working with victims; right to information; using ADRs; and economic, social and cultural rights) and two international training sessions (on sexuality, gender and rights; and gender, sustainable livelihoods, human rights and peace). In addition to these, BLAST attended 35 seminars/workshops organised by the NGOs or the Government, and covering a range of topics including legal aid provision, slum-dwellers rights, gender issues and VAW, human rights and international law, disability rights, access to justice, health rights, etc.

BLAST organised four Workshops/Meetings focusing on improvement of service-delivery by panel lawyers and unit co-ordinators and staff, covering gender discriminatory personal laws, training for lawyers on disability rights in collaboration with HPOD (Harvard Law School Project on Disability), and PIL reviews and possible interventions. BLAST also organised Training Sessions for BLAST staff on specific rights, which are detailed below.

Securing Human Rights and Remedies in Bangladesh

BLAST organised three two-day long workshops titled Securing Human Rights and Remedies in Bangladesh on 14th-15th, 21st-22nd and 28th-29th December in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi respectively. The participants were all members of grassroots and community based organizations, selected from among partners of Diakonia, one of BLAST's core donors. The workshops were designed aimed to increase awareness of core human rights issues and the scope for accessing remedies and advocacy towards ensuring equality and equal protection. The workshops covered various topics such as the right to equality and non-discrimination; PIL on women's rights; legal protection against VAW, domestic violence, and sexual harassment; social media and networking issues; campaigning to end corporal punishment; International human rights systems; and the right to information.

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010

BLAST organised six advocacy workshops during the year on the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010. Participants included lawyers from BLAST's Units, alongside Panel Lawyers, Chief Judicial Magistrates, Judicial Magistrates, member of the respective Management Committees and Advisory Committees, NGOs and District Women's Affairs Officers. The workshops focused on the scope and extent of the DV Act, the definition of domestic violence, the availability of new remedies (such as the protection order, compensation order, residence order and custody order), responsibilities of enforcement officers, service providers, the police and health care providers, as well as on relevant court procedures.

Addressing Discrimination against People Living with HIV/AIDs (PLHA)

As part of its efforts to support and secure the rights of people living with HIV/AIDs, BLAST engaged a consultant in order to identify key areas of discrimination and priority areas for possible legal intervention, to undertake orientations for BLAST personnel, and to develop a set of guiding principles for any intervention. report. These exchanges identified the huge prevalence of stigma and discrimination against PLHAs, in relation to education and livelihood, and that they often face violence and are deprived of health services and shelter. Sexual minorities face similar discrimination, being subjected to sexual harassment, psychological trauma, forced marriages and deprivation of entitlements. Sex-workers in particular face

severe violence, including rape, from clients and mastans and are subjected to harassment, beating and frequent arrests from law enforcement agencies. In light of this situation, BLAST organised a day-long

workshop in December 2011 for all its Unit Coordinators and Head Office staff, which was a culmination of a series of consultations/discussions held with service providers to identify the needs of PLHAs. The workshop covered the acknowledgement and recognition of PLHAs as a special preference group, promoted the need for high levels of trust and confidentiality, the adoption of a workplace PLHA policy, and the importance of upholding their dignity during the provisions of such services.

Training on Gender

BLAST, with the assistance from Naripokkho, organised a three day Training for Trainers (ToT) for all Unit Coordinators and Head Office staff, followed by four gender trainings for Members of the Management Committee, Advisory Committee, Panel Lawyers and staff of all nineteen Units. The training focused on gender-sensitization of BLAST personnel at all levels, and included clear analysis on the distinction between sex and gender, the condition and status of men and women, the notions of gender equality and equity, the analysis of the causes of gender discrimination, gender and development, the practice of women's rights and the scope for ensuring more effective enforcement of national and international laws for women.

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

Internal Coordination Meetings: To review and monitor progress in the conduct of its planned activities, BLAST held a total of 352 meetings at unit offices and the head office.

Workshops/Meetings: BLAST organised the following workshops in 2011:

- Consultation Meeting on Gender Discriminatory Personal Laws and their Impact on Women's Rights to Shelter, Housing, Matrimonial Property and Inheritance, with Aruna Kashyap, Researcher, Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch
- Three-day Training for Lawyers on Disability Rights, in collaboration with the Harvard Law School Project on Disability (HPOD)
- Consultation Meeting with High Court lawyers to review pending litigation and interventions that could be made in PIL cases
- PIL Review Workshop in Sylhet in December, in collaboration with ASK and ALRD

CASE MANAGEMENT

Case Management Systems (CMS) improve information sharing amongst staff, increase efficiency in work processes and ensure better client services. BLAST is introducing a CMS in order to better manage case-related information, to monitor case progress, to do quality checks on cases and prepare quick multi-dimensional reports. This will provide a centralised repository of all its applications and cases, providing staff and management with quick access to case details and a big-picture perspective on trends and caseloads.

Once operational, the CMS will provide quick numerical and qualitative reports, access to case-related information, including search functions, case tracking mechanisms and alerts for lawyers when a new case has been allocated to them, and a database of all cases conducted by or on behalf of BLAST.



The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Cell of BLAST monitors all activities and progress of its projects and program, and also defines the achievements and shortfall of its activities at all levels. The main objectives of impact assessment are to observe directly changes in the overall socio-economic conditions and life style of BLAST beneficiaries and to evaluate the effectiveness of our service delivery. The M&E Cell observes BLAST activities, undertakes documentation review and conducts interviews of beneficiaries.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Tahera Yusrin (Development Consultant) shares her views on improved project management with BLAST.
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MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

BLAST monitors the impact of its activities in order to improve its services, measure satisfaction with BLAST's legal services, and assess the long-term impact of mediation and dispute settlement. From January to December 2011, BLAST carried out an impact assessment of the legal aid services provided in the 18 unit offices, through in-depth interviews with clients and lawyers and review of office documents.

In 2011, 206 mediation beneficiaries (mostly in family matters) were interviewed and the following outcomes were achieved:

- 82 % of clients who took part in mediation were reconciled,
- 31.07% of clients who underwent mediation also went through a divorce and realized payment of the outstanding amount of dower owed to them.

In litigation, out of 218 clients:

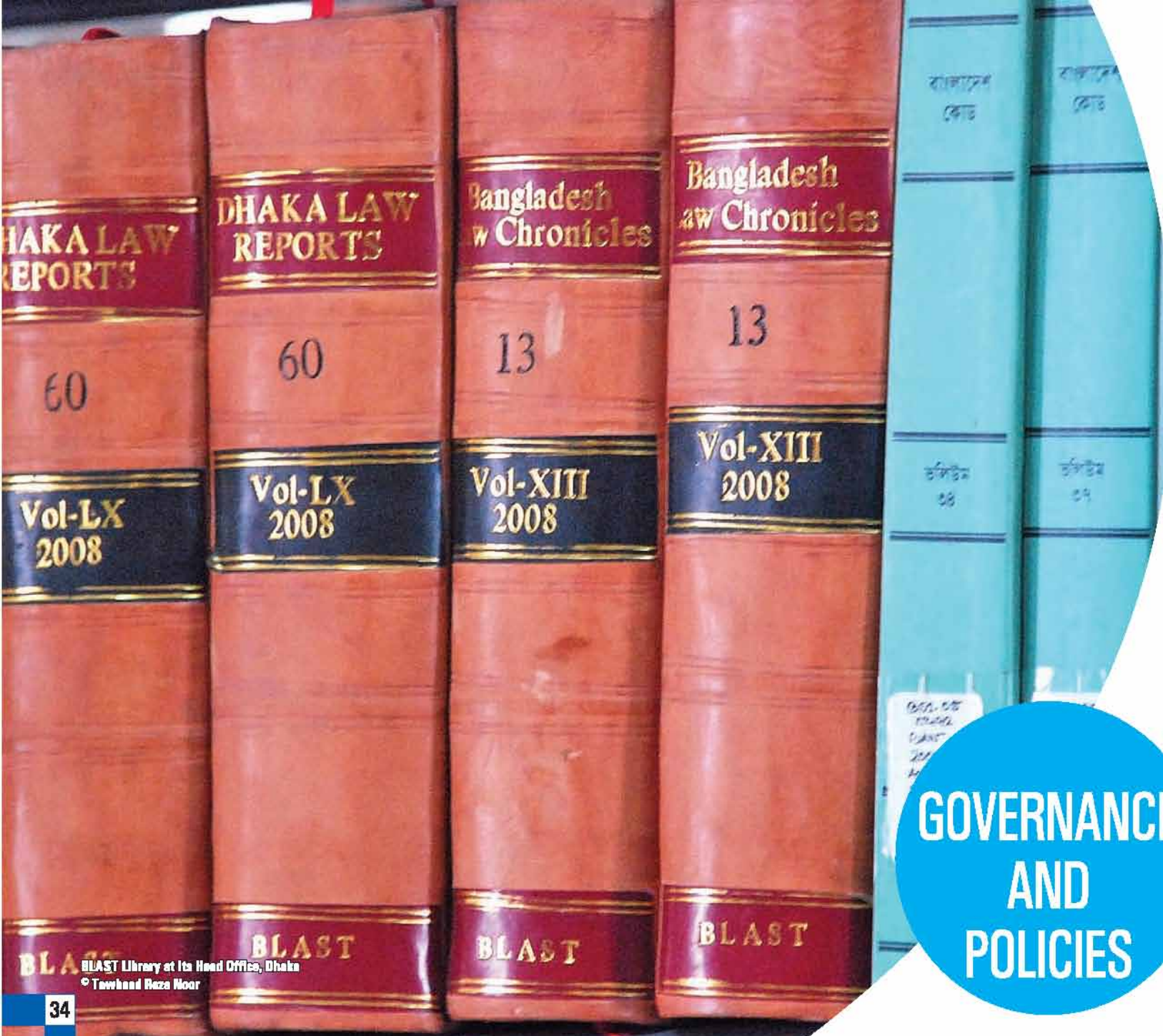
- 45.83% had resolved their dispute and were reconciled,
- 39.81% underwent a divorce and recovered their dower,
- 9.72% were able to obtain bail and release from prison.

In terms of the broader impact of BLAST's services, it appears that:

- Some 382 clients out of 422 claimed that they had experienced an improvement in their lives due to BLAST's assistance.
- Some 205 out of 229 women clients resolved matrimonial disputes and are now living with their husbands and regularly receiving maintenance. But another 24 women stated that their husbands had violated the agreements earlier reached.
- 95% women were living free from violence after their family conflicts were settled through mediation and 98% women were living free from violence after successful litigation.
- 21 persons (including eleven women) were able to secure bail and release from incarceration through BLAST's intervention and are now able to earn and support their families.



A client recovered money she is entitled to through the legal services provided by BLAST
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REPORTS

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2008

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BLAST Library at its Head Office, Dhaka
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GOVERNANCE
AND
POLICIES

STRATEGIC MEETINGS

AGM: The Annual General Meeting of BLAST was held on 18 September 2011.

Board of Trustee Meetings: Two meetings of the Board of Trustees were held on 11 April and 18 September respectively.

EC Meetings: Five meetings of the Executive Committee (EC) were held on 16 March, 20 July, 15 September, 4 November and 15 December respectively.

Consultative Group meeting: One meeting was held with members of the consultative group on 27 September, in addition to separate bilateral discussions with individual members as and when required.

Coordination meeting with Unit Coordinators: Three coordination meetings with Unit Coordinators were held on 12 February, 30 September-01 October, and 13 December respectively.

Staff meetings at HO: In order to share information regarding ongoing and planned activities, and to enable more effective coordination among the cells of BLAST at HO level, 27 regular staff meetings were held at the HO upto December.

Staff meetings at UOs: 218 staff meetings were held at the unit level.

Meetings with Development Partners: Eleven meetings were held with our development partners in the course of the year.

RULES AND POLICIES

The following Rules/ Policies were applied across the organization, following their adoption by the Board of Trustees:

- Case Rules (1995, last revised 2007)
- Contributory Provident Fund Rules (2005)
- Daily Allowance/ Travel Allowance Rules (1996, last revised 2006)
- Financial Benefits Rules (1996)
- Financial Manual (2006) (revised 2011)
- Gender Policy (2007)
- Human Resources Policy (2006)
- Non-Unit Management Committee and Panel Lawyers (1999, 2004)
- Service Rules (2001)
- Sexual Harassment Policy (2010)
- Unit Advisory Committee Rules (1999, revised 2006)
- Unit Management Committee Rules (1995, last revised 2004)
- Unit Management Committees' Roles and Responsibilities (1999)



FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)

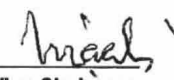
Consolidated Balance Sheet

As at 31 December 2011

Particulars	Notes	December 31	December 31
		2011	2010
		BDT	BDT
ASSETS			
Non-Current Assets			
Property and Equipment	3.00	4,967,779	3,516,900
Total Non Current Assets		4,967,779	3,516,900
Current Assets			
Cash and Bank Balance	4.00	40,026,847	46,622,410
Advance and Prepayments	5.00	6,345,138	1,185,385
Fund Receivable	6.00	17,958,242	193,581
Total Current Assets		64,330,227	48,001,376
Less: Current Liabilities			
Liabilities for Expenses	7.00	30,984,253	27,360,996
Total Current Liabilities		30,984,253	27,360,996
Net Current Assets		33,345,974	20,640,380
Net Assets		38,313,753	24,157,280
FUND AND LIABILITIES:			
Fund Account	9.00	38,313,753	24,157,280
Total Fund and Liabilities		38,313,753	24,157,280


Deputy Director (Finance)
BLAST


Honorary/Executive Director
BLAST


Chairman/Vice Chairman
Board of Trustees, BLAST

As per our annexed report of same date


A. Qasem & Co.
Chartered Accountants

Dated: Dhaka
June 24, 2012

ANNEXES

WHO WE ARE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Dr. Kamal Hossain

Chairman of the Trust

Senior Advocate, Barrister

Former Minister, Energy, Law, Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh

Former Vice-Chairman, Bangladesh Bar Council

Former President, Supreme Court Bar Association

Former UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan

Mr. Shaikh Razzaque Ali

Senior Advocate

Former Speaker, Bangladesh Jatiyo Sangsad

Mr. M. Amir-ul Islam

Senior Advocate, Barrister

Former President, Supreme Court Bar Association

Former Vice-Chairman, Bangladesh Bar Council

Mr. Shafique Ahmed

Senior Advocate, Barrister

Minister, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Bangladesh

Former Vice-Chairman, Bangladesh Bar Council

Former President, Supreme Court Bar Association

Dr. Shamsul Bari

Barrister

Chairperson, Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB)

Former Senior Director of United Nations (UN)

UN Special Rapporteur on Somalia

Justice Awlad Ali

Former Judge of the High Court Division

Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Dr. Rabia Bhuiyan

Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Former Minister, Women's & Children's Affairs, Government of Bangladesh

Raja Devasish Roy

Advocate, Supreme Court,

Barrister

Chakma Chief

Member United Nations (UN) Permanent Forum on Indigenous People

Mr. Fazlul Huq

Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Secretary, Madaripur Legal Aid Association

Mr. Z.I. Khan

Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Chairman, Legal Aid and Human Rights Committee, Bangladesh Bar Council

Mr. Ayub Chowdhury, FCA

Chartered Accountant, Ayub & Mahmood

CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Mr. Asif Saleh
Director
BRAC (Communications)

Ms. Catherine Masud
Film-maker

Dr. Imran Matin
Head of Research
Research and Development Division
BRAC

Mr. Kamal Quadir
CEO
B-Kash

Dr. Mirza M. Hassan
Lead Researcher
BRAC Development Institute
BRAC University

Dr. Simeen Mahmud
Lead Researcher
BRAC Development Institute,
BRAC University

Dr. Shahdeen Malik
Advocate
Supreme Court of Bangladesh
Honorary Director
Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs

Mr. Tanjib-ul Alam
Barrister-at-Law
Advocate
Supreme Court of Bangladesh

STAFF HEAD OFFICE

Executive Director

Mr Mohsin Ali Khan (till Feb 2011)

Honorary Director

Ms. Sara Hossain (from Feb 2011- present)

Legal Cell

Ms. Farida Yeasmin, Deputy Director
Mr. Mr. Md. Borkot Ali, Asst. Director
Ms. Taposhi Rabeya, Asst. Coord. Mediation
Ms. Kaniz Tania Rupa, Jr. Staff Lawyer (Labour)
Mr. Rasedul Islam, Jr. Staff Lawyer (Labour)
Mr. Atut Areng, Jr. Staff Lawyer (Labour)
Mr. Khandoker Ali Amzad, Programme Assistant

High Court

Ms. Shahnaz Babli, Senior Staff Lawyer (HC)
Ms. Bulbul Rabeya Banu, Staff Lawyer (HC)

PIL & Advocacy

Ms. Mahbuba Akhter, Coordinator, Communications and Advocacy
Mr. Taufiqul Islam, Staff Lawyer (PIL)
Mr. Masuduzzaman, Research Lawyer (PIL)
Ms. Susmita Karmaker, Staff Lawyer (PIL)
Mr. Md. Ali Mortuza, Programme Assistant
Mr. Amir Hamja Khan, Law Clerk
Mr. Khandoker Mahmud Alam, Support Staff

Administration

Mr. Rezaul Karim, Legal Advisor (from Sept 2011)
Ms. Shahriar Parveen, Asst. Director (Admin)
Mr. Md. Ali Akbar, Admin Officer
Mr. Md. Saidur Rahman, Store Officer
Mr. Shahin Akon, Vehicle Operator
Mr. Ali Akbar Hawlader, Vehicle Operator
Mr. Emdadul Haque, Programme Support Staff
Mr. Shibu Das, Programme Support Staff

Accounts

Ms. Karmel Kabita Samadder, Sr. Finance Officer
Mr. Md. Asafuddoula, Sr. Finance Officer
Mr. Md. Mahbubul Alam Sikder, Finance Officer
Mr. Mohammad Mostofa Kamal, Jr. Acc Officer

Rights to Worker and Consumer Safety and Public Accountability in Bangladesh Project

Ms. Mahbuba Akhter, Coordinator
Ms. Rito Mahfuza, Jr. Monitoring Officer
Ms Foujia Akhter, Intern

Investigation, Monitoring & Evaluation Cell

Mr. Abdul Malek, Coordinator
Mr. Imtiaz Hossain Nafiz, Sr. Monitoring Officer
Mr. Rashed Shekh, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer
Mr. Jahangir Alam, Deputy Coordinator, IT
Mr. Md. Zakir Hossain, Jr. IT Officer
Mr. Istak Mahfuz, Jr. Monitoring Officer
Mr. Faruk Mia, Programme Support Staff

Information Technology

Mr. Md. Jahangir Alam, Dep Coordinator IT

Improvement of the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons (IRSOP) Project

Ms Husne Noor Rashid Rupali, Junior Staff Lawyer & Focal Person (IRSOP)
Mr Md. Shahadat Ali, Paralegal
Mr Md. Masum Miah, Paralegal
Mr Md. Abdul Hannan, Paralegal
Mr Md. Mohabbat Ali, Paralegal
Mr Md. Nur Alam, Paralegal
Ms. Bayezida Nahar, Paralegal

BARISAL UNIT

Mr Khalilur Rahman, Coordinator
Ms Sabina Nazneen, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Ms Shahida Talukder, Staff Lawyer
Md. Mostofa Kamal, Programme Support Staff

BOGRA UNIT

Ms. Ashrafunnahar Swapna, Coordinator
Mr Enamul Kabir, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Sahar Ali, Programme Support Staff

CHITTAGONG UNIT

Mr Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Coordinator
Mr Nasrat Ullah Chowdhury, Staff Lawyer
Ms. Halima Begum, Staff Lawyer
Mr Md. Ferdous, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Shahed, Court Clerk
Mr Sajal Kanti Acharjee, Programme Support Staff

COMILLA UNIT

Ms Shamima Akhter Jahan, Coordinator
Mr Jafarullah Bhuiyan, Staff Lawyer
Mr Billal Hossain, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Nazrul Islam, Law Clerk

DHAKA UNIT

Mr Khandakar Abdul Mannan, Coordinator
Mr. Md. Moshir Rahman, Assistant Coordinator
Mr Kamrul Islam, Staff Lawyer
Mr Md. Zakaria Mollah, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Sahjahan, Programme Support Staff

DINAJPUR UNIT

Ms Serajum Munira, Coordinator
Mr Pinak Pani Roy, Junior Staff Lawyer
Mr Mobinul Islam, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Obaidullah, Law Clerk

JESSORE UNIT

Mr Md. Ishaq, Coordinator
Mr Mostofa Humayun Kabir, Staff Lawyer
Mr Md. Bodruddoza, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Ashanurzaman, Programme Support Staff

KUSHTIA UNIT

Mr Shanker Mazumder, Coordinator
Mr A. S. M. Asaduzzaman, Staff Lawyer
Mr Shushanta Kumer Dey, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Sk. Istiak Baksha, Law Clerk

NOAKHALI UNIT

Mr Md. Nuruzzaman, Coordinator
Ms Kalpana Rani Das, Junior Staff Lawyer
Mr Shahid Ullah, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Abul Hossain, Programme Support Staff

PATUAKHALI UNIT

Mr Nizam Uddin Ahmed, Coordinator
Mr Md. Javidul Huq Khan, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Hafizur Rahman, Programme Support Staff

FARIDPUR UNIT

Ms Sipra Goswami, Coordinator
Ms Sukla Acharya, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Ayub Ali Biswas, Programme Support Staff

KHULNA UNIT

Mr Ashok Kumar Saha, Coordinator
Mr Faruq Hossain Sheikh, Assistant Coordinator
Ms. Fatema Khondokar Rima, Staff Lawyer
Mr Sheikh Azmal Hossain, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr S.M. Ali Akram Hossain, Law Clerk

MYMENSINGH UNIT

Mr A. H. Habib Khan, Coordinator
Mr Md. Rezaul Karim, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Shahidul Islam, Programme Support Staff

PABNA UNIT

Mr Alamgir Hossain, Coordinator
Mr Monirul Islam, Jr. Staff Lawyer
Mr Md. Shahinur Rahman, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Ratan Kumar Kundu, Law Clerk

RAJSHAHI UNIT

Mr Md. Abdus Samad, Coordinator
Ms. Samina Begum, Staff Lawyer
Mr Md. Aminul Islam, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr. Ataur Rahman, Mediation Officer
Mr Md. Muzahid-Al-Azad, Law Clerk

RANGPUR UNIT

Ms Nasima Khanam, Coordinator
Ms Dilruba Rahman, Staff Lawyer
Mr Md. Azizul Islam, Accounts and Programme Support Officer
Mr Nirmal Chandra Barman, Law Clerk

RANGAMATI UNIT

Mr Jewel Dewan, Coordinator
Mr Sourav Dewan, Staff Lawyer
Mr Nantu Marma, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Ms. Runi Chakma, Paralegal
Mr Ripon Joti Chakma, Programme Support Staff

SYLHET UNIT

Mr Irfanuzzaman Chowdhury, Coordinator
Ms Sorifa Khaton, Staff Lawyer
Mr Sanju Bir Roy, Accounts & Programme Support Officer
Mr Md. Foyasal Ahmed, Programme Support Staff

TANGAIL UNIT

Mr M. A. Karim, Coordinator
Mr Rashed Khan Menon, Accounts & Programme Support Officer

RESEARCH FELLOWS

Mr Amirul Islam Tuhin, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
Ms. Maimuna Ahmad, Graduate of the American University of Washington D.C.
Ms Taslima Yasmin, Lecturer II, School of Law, BRAC University, Dhaka

INTERNS

Head Office

Ms. Janina Anne Valeska Hammer, Germany
Ms. Valerie Scott, New York University, New York City, USA
Ms. Sylvie McCallum Rougerie, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

Mr. Ahnaf Chowdhury, London School of Economics, London, UK
Ms. Zaiba Tahyya, University of Essex, Colchester, UK
Md. Raisul Islam Sourav, Northern University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Ms. Farhana Khan, University of Dhaka
Ms. Ananya Paul Powshi, Asian University for Women, Chittagong Bangladesh,
Ms. Nawra Mehrin, Asian University for Women, Chittagong, Bangladesh
Ms. Nilufar Yasmin, Dhaka University

Unit Offices

Barisal, Zakir Hossain
Bogra, Nurul Islam
Chittagong, Kamrul Hasan
Comilla, Halima Akter
Dhaka, Parvin Sultana
Dinajpur, Indrojit Kumar Roy
Faridpur, Syeda Parvin
Jessore, Md. Abdullah
Khulna, Pronomy Bala Roy
Kushtia, Antora Mojumder
Mymensingh, Mofakharul Islam
Noakhali, Saha Monjurul Hasan
Pabna, Md. Asaduzzaman
Patuakhali, Shyamol Chandra
Rajshahi, Md. Ataur Rahman
Rangamati, Sudip Panchanya
Rangpur, Sabrina Nasrin
Sylhet, Geeta Rani Modok
Tangail, Samsunnaher

Special Thanks to Our Management Committees and Panel Lawyers

Each BLAST Unit Office is supervised by a Management Committee composed of elected former and current Presidents and Secretaries of the local Bar Association, along with five to seven other prominent members of the local Bar.

More than 2300 panel lawyers across Bangladesh effectively provide pro bono legal advice and representation to BLAST's clients, on the basis of only a nominal fee to cover their time and the costs of litigation.

LIST OF PARTNERS

BARISAL UNIT

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
Bangladesh Manabadhikar Bastabayan Sangstha
Barisal NGO Development Network (BNDN)
ISDA
Marie Stopes
Speed Trust CPSP

CHITTAGONG UNIT

Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA)
CWFD
Institute of Environment and Development (IED)
Integrated Social Development Effort (ISDE)
Mamata

DHAKA HEAD OFFICE

Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF)
CARE Bangladesh
Marie Stopes Clinic Society
Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB)
Solidarity Centre, AFL-ICO Bangladesh
Safety and Rights
Technological Assistance of Rural Advancement (TARA)

DINAJPUR UNIT

Lok Unnayan Kendra (LUK)
Mahila Bahumukhi Shikkha Kendra (MBSK)
New Ideal Social Sensing and Creative Organisation (NISSCO)
Uddog
SCDF
SUPK

BOGRA UNIT

ADHR
Bogra Reporters Forum
Dusta Manabadhikar Sheba Sangstha
Esho Kaj Kari Mahila Unnayan Sangstha (EKOK)
GBS
Light House
Mathurapara Mahila Unnayan Sangstha (MMUS)

COMILLA UNIT

Dristi
FPAB
Marie Stopes
Nari Dipita Comilla
Prottoy Unnayan Sangstha
Shurjadoy Mahila Kalyan
Samiti

DHAKA UNIT

Bangladesh Mahila Samity
Bangladesh Manabadhikar Sangstha
Church of Bangladesh Ekota Mahila Unnayan Project
Human Rights Development Center
People's Organisation of Orb Land (POOL)

FARIDPUR UNIT

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
Mahila Unnayan Foundation (MUF)
Pathokali Shangstha
RACINE
Voluntary Paribar Kalyan Association (VPKA)

JESSORE UNIT

Barinagar Shamaj Kalyan Shangstha (BIVA)
Chittra Development Centre, Khandakar
Jhikargacha Development Organization (JDO)
Mahila o Shishu Unnayan Babasthapon Shangstha
Proshikhita Jubo Kalyan Shangstha

KUSHTIA UNIT

Bodhodoy
Mukti Nari o Shishu Unnayan
NIKUSHIMAZ
POLOK
RELATED

NOAKHALI UNIT

Ananya Bahumukhi Kalyan Sangstha
CARE Bangladesh
Codec
Dishari Legal Aid and Social Development Organisation
Upama

PATUAKHALI UNIT

Adarsha Mahila Shangstha
Anirban Samaj Unnayan Shangstha
CODEC
Shaplaful Social Development Organization (SSDO)
Society Development Agency (SDA)

RAJSHAHI UNIT

Adibashi Unnayan Sangstha
Center for Capacity Building of Voluntary Organization (CCBVO)
FPAB
RULFAO
Samata Nari Kalyan Sangstha

KHULNA UNIT

Asroy (Shelter)
Banaful
BIVA
Let us Progress
Nobolok
Niz Adhikar
Paritran
People's Development Foundation (PDF)
Rupantar
SAFE
Unnayan Khulna

MYMENSINGH UNIT

Alokito Manush (CWFD)
FPAB
Rural Development Sangstha (RDS)
Social Association for Rural Advancement (SARA)

PABNA UNIT

Bachte Chai Samaj Kalyan Sangstha (BCSKS)
Dulai Janakalyan Sangstha (DJS)
Kalyani Samaj Kalyan Sanhstha (KSKS)
SOPAN

RANGPUR UNIT

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
Gana Pragati Sangstha (GPUS)
LIFE
Ramnathpur Bahumukhi Nabayan Sangstha (RBNS)
Samakal Shamaj Unnayan Sangstha

SYLHET UNIT

Jaintia Shinnomul Sangstha (JASHISH)
 Marie Stopes Clinic
 Newham Bengali Community Trust (NBCT)
 Organization for Mother and Infant (NBCT)
 Reliant Women Development Organisation
 Resource Integration Organization

TANGAIL UNIT

BWHC
 CWFD
 Manabik Unnayan Shahayak Karjakram (DHAW)
 Pashashik Parshad
 RPDO

DONORS

DONOR	PROJECT
DANIDA (Royal Danish Embassy)	Access to Justice for the Realisation of Human Rights and Advocacy for the Empowerment of the Poor
DIAKONIA	Access to Justice for the Realisation of Human Rights and Advocacy for the Empowerment of the Poor
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH	Improvement of the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons (IRSOP)
Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands, through iccdr,b	Growing up Safe and Healthy: Addressing Sexual Rights and Violence against Adolescent Girls and Women in Urban Bangladesh
Government of Bangladesh, Local Government Division; UNDP; and European Union	Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh (AVCB)
Harvard Law School Project on Disability	Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
Oxfam Novib	Access to Justice for the Realisation of Human Rights and Advocacy for the Empowerment of the Poor
Save the Children International (SCI)	Legal Reform for Ending Corporal Punishment in All Settings

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Publications in English

- Legislative Advocacy for the Establishment of a Human Rights Commission in Bangladesh (1997)
- Legislative Advocacy for the Establishment of the Office of Ombudsman in Bangladesh (1998)
- Towards a Human Rights Commission for Bangladesh (1999)
- Good Prison Management (A workshop report), (10-13 September 2000)
- Good Prison Management for Prison Personnel of Bangladesh (Training Guide) (2000)
- Alternative Dispute Resolution - Community-Based Mediation as an Auxiliary to Formal Justice in Bangladesh: the Madaripur Model of Mediation (2003)
- Land Rights and Poverty Alleviation (2005)
- Regional Conference on Cross Border Migration and Protection of Human Rights Among Close Neighbours in South Asia (Report of a Conference held in December 2005)
- Rights of Slum Dwellers: Permanent Settlement for the Urban Poor (2005)
- Role of Media in PIL and Advocacy (2005)
- Seeking Effective Remedies: Prevention of Arbitrary Arrests and Freedom from Torture and Custodial Violence (2005, reprinted 2008)
- Food Security in Bangladesh: Legal Obligation (2006)
- Separation of the Judiciary: What to Do in the Present Context (2006)
- Strengthening Family Courts: An Analysis of the Confusions and Uncertainties Thwarting Family Courts in Bangladesh (2006)
- Advocacy Programme on the Use of Sections 54 and 167 of the Cr.P.C. by Police Officers (2007)
- Reviewing the Family Courts Ordinance 1985 (2008)
- Legislative Initiatives and Reforms in the Family Laws (2009)
- Regional Seminar on Human Rights and Gender: Core Concepts, Major Debates and Emerging Issues (Report of a Seminar held in October 2009)
- (with Save the Children) Ending Corporal Punishment in Educational Institutions (2011)

Publications In Bangla

- বাংলাদেশজাতীয় মানবাধিকার কমিশনঃ আবেদন (Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission: An Appeal) (1997)
- আমাদের তথ্য জানার অধিকার (Our Right to Know) (1999)
- বাংলাদেশে ন্যায়পাল নিয়োগ (Appointment of an Ombudsman in Bangladesh) (1999)
- কারাজীবন কারাব্যবস্থা করাবিদ্ভোহ (Prison Life, Prison Management, Prison Protests) (2000)
- এসোআইন জানি (Let's Learn the Law) 2nd edition (2005)
- আইন সহায়িকা কতিপয় পারিবারিক ও ফৌজদারী বিষয় (Legal Aid: Some Family and Criminal Matters (2005, 2006, 2008))
- “নিপীড়িত অধিকার: মানবাধিকার লঙ্ঘনে বন্সাস্টের কয়েকটি তথ্যানুসন্ধান ভিত্তিক প্রতিবেদন সংকলন ২০০৩-২০০৮” (Deprived Rights: Compilation of Reports based on Inquiries regarding violation of human rights) (2008)
- মহা মান্য হাই কোর্টের রায়ে আলোকে গ্রেফতার ও রিম্যান্ডের ক্ষেত্রে পুলিশ ও ম্যাজিস্ট্রেটঅবশ্য পালনীয় কর্তব্য সমূহ (The Obligations of the Police and Magistrates in Cases of Arrest and Remand in light of the High Court's Directives) (2008)
- শ্রমিকদের জন্য আইন সহায়ক (Legal Handbook for Workers) (2007, 2008, republished 2009)
- পুলিশসম্পর্কে ১০১ প্রশ্নোত্তর (101 Questions about the Police) (2010)
- শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানে শারীরিক শাস্তি প্রদান প্রতিরোধ (Ending Corporal Punishment in Educational Institutions) (2011)

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)

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E-mail: bograunit@blast.org.bd

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Chittagong Unit

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