



ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

BANGLADESH LEGAL AID & SERVICES TRUST
ANNUAL REPORT 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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(BLAST)

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

In 2017, BLAST continued to secure access to justice and provide legal assistance to the poor, in particular to women and children, and to marginalised groups including persons with disability across the country, and those living in areas where it is hard to reach justice mechanisms, including indigent prisoners, and people living in urban informal settlements and remote rural areas.

For example, our dedicated team of paralegals have conducted 1,475 legal aid sessions in prisons of the country reaching over 34,742 prisoners of whom a substantial 12,953 were women. They have intervened at the frontlines of the justice system through community and mobile legal clinics and in police stations and prisons. This year they have also organised three legal aid camps in the slum areas of Banani, Mirpur and Jatrabari in Dhaka.

Our network of staff and pro-bono lawyers facilitated mediations in resolving disputes, and have represented and supported litigants in courts across the country. A total of

2,130 cases were settled through mediation, resulting in the recovery of Taka 3,68,32,061 for claimants of dower, maintenance and workplace compensation. This has been a key support to them for rebuilding their lives.

BLAST has provided a full range of litigation services, from the lower courts to the Supreme Court on civil, criminal and constitutional matters. In 2017 we have dealt with 24,180 cases of which over 6,125 cases were to support women litigants. Through litigation support we have been able to resolve 107 cases upholding the rights of workers in the Ready Made Garments sector. We were also able to secure the release of 3,170 prisoners.

We have secured a landmark victory, this year, from the High Court which affirmed a lower court decision to compensate the family members of the 100 passengers who tragically died in the 2003 capsizing of the overloaded passenger launch, MV Nasrin. The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority sought to overturn the judgment on a procedural ground but the High Court upheld the judgment based on BLAST's appeal.

We have successfully challenged the inaction

Dealt with over
24180 cases

6125 cases to support
women litigants

of state agencies in responding to corporal punishment in schools and are currently seeking to implement court and government orders through campaigns in schools and monitoring of complaints to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Our advocacy work has resulted in the NHRC calling for reports from district administration and school authorities in 24 cases regarding physical and humiliating punishment on children in schools. We have highlighted the issue of cyber violence against women and girls and gaps in laws and policies in providing adequate protection for them. Dialogue and discussions were promoted among young women and men on issues of consent, choice and personal liberties relating to reproductive and sexual health and for the protection of gender diverse communities. As always BLAST continues to deliver its programmes in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, who include community leaders, local and international NGOs, trade unions, academic institutions, local government bodies, parliamentarians and policy makers. Through its wide network of lawyers, paralegals and rights advocates, BLAST has sought to uphold the rule

of law whilst maintaining values of equality and fairness.

BLAST's work in 2017 has reflected the need to continue working to generate greater awareness and knowledge of legal rights and discriminatory laws among citizens as well as service providers and government stakeholders, to particularly enable key stakeholders to better understand barriers in accessing justice within the current legal system and how these are amplified for people living across different communities, and to help build stronger mechanisms to effectively protect people's rights, because access to justice for all remains an unrealised dream while discriminatory social norms and practices remain pervasive.

Dr Kamal Hossain

Chairperson of the Trust



Highlighted the issue of **cyber violence** against women and girls and gaps in laws and policies in providing adequate protection

Recovered
BDT 3,68,32,061
through mediation



"Is My Life Actually My Right?"
Photo: Nidal Adnan Kibria

OUR STORY

The idea for a national organisation involving lawyers providing pro bono advice and representation to those unable to access justice due to poverty or disadvantage was first raised at a national conference of lawyers held by the Bangladesh Bar Council in 1992. BLAST was established in 1993 as an independent not for profit organisation, dedicated to providing free legal services for the poor, with

a Board of Trustees comprising eminent jurists, lawyers, and former judges of the Bangladesh Supreme Court. The founding lawyers strove to institutionalise, through BLAST, the tradition of legal aid, moving from individual cases involving political persecution, to addressing poverty, exclusion and social discrimination.

From the outset, BLAST was firmly established within the legal profession. It was designed to ensure local involvement, and decentralised leaderships, with elected leaders of each district Bar Association heading its district management committees, and respected members of civil society constituting its advisory committees, at district level and centrally.

Over time, BLAST moved from its initial focus on legal representation in the courts, to including a focus on alternative dispute resolution, and then to addressing systemic barriers to access to justice, by undertaking research and advocacy to press for legal, policy and institutional reforms. In recent years, it has extended its services to hard-to-reach areas, such as low-income groups and informal settlements in the cities, as well as hill and coastal areas, and to issues of exclusion and discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, race, language and disability, as well as displacement. Lawyers remain at the core of the organisation, working alongside paralegals, researchers and advocates.



BLAST was incorporated as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee on 29.05.1993 under the Companies Act, and registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (CTO 311 (23)/93). It is also separately registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau (786) on 19.12.1993 under the Foreign Donations (Registration and Control) Ordinance 1978, with its registration now renewed up to 19.12.2018.

OUR **ACHIEVEMENTS**

BLAST is the only organisation in the country which operates from the frontlines of the legal system (Village Courts and Magistrates' Courts) right up to the Supreme Court, providing comprehensive advice and assistance in criminal, family, civil, labour and land law as well as fundamental rights, based on a means and merits test. Beyond legal aid, its activities include alternative dispute resolution, public interest litigation, and advocacy for law, policy and institutional reform, providing a comprehensive approach to justice for marginalised and vulnerable persons.

Comprehensive Legal Services:

BLAST's main achievements have been providing legal services for individuals and communities living in poverty or facing discrimination, enabling access to justice through alternative dispute resolution and representation in courts to challenge arbitrary action or discrimination or denial of rights. Through its wide network of lawyers, paralegals and rights advocates, BLAST has sought to uphold the rule of law whilst maintaining values of equality and fairness.

BLAST has been able to ensure a measure of justice for its clients, most of whom are women in poverty, facing destitution on divorce or separation. The organisation has also enabled expedited resolution of disputes on property and labour disputes, receiving referrals from relevant organisations including trade unions. BLAST also provides criminal defense including advice and assistance for indigent prisoners.



Legal Cell at BLAST Head Office. Photo: Sibylle Hofter

Strengthening Justice Delivery:

BLAST has focused on strengthening institutional mechanisms, working alongside the National Legal Aid and Services Organisation (NLASO), and engaging other justice mechanisms, such as the National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh (NHRC) and the Information Commission. For example, it has supported the NLASO to activate legal aid committees in remote rural areas, through identifying the scope for, engaging paralegals, and establishing committees, to assist with providing legal aid in Chowki Courts. Across the country, it participates through its paralegals and lawyers, in Case Coordination Committees, led by District Magistrates, aimed at coordinating legal aid for

prisoners in need.

In urban areas, BLAST is a leading non-government legal service provider. Through its outreach work, including community legal clinics and a mobile legal clinic, it has pioneered frontline services to individuals in our densely populated cities unable to access justice due to poverty or discrimination.

Advocacy for Law Reform:

Using its knowledge on the barriers to access to justice, and the extensive experience across its lawyers' network, BLAST has been involved in successful advocacy for law reform, in particular on women's rights, workers' rights and children's rights, working closely on the special laws on violence against women, domestic violence, labour law and rules, the children act and policy, and the recent law on disability rights.

Strategic Litigation:

BLAST has undertaken significant public interest litigation on criminal justice, and the rights to fair trial and protection from torture or ill-treatment, winning landmark judgments curtailing arbitrary police powers of arrest without warrant, and securing guidelines on ensuring safeguards for detainees in police custody as well as striking down the mandatory death penalty. It successfully challenged the inaction of state agencies in responding to corporal punishment in schools and currently seeks to implement court and government orders through campaigns in schools and monitoring of complaints to the National Human Rights Commission. BLAST has won major judgments on ending gender discrimination in law and practice. It won a judgment outlawing the use of so called 'fatwas' to impose extra-judicial penalties and cruel and degrading treatment on women and girls by traditional dispute resolution bodies and is currently leading a challenge to the use of the 'two finger test', which is an obstacle to justice for rape victims.

One of the most significant areas of BLAST's work has been around economic and social rights, recently around access to emergency health care for road crash victims, and in particular the series of cases challenging arbitrary actions and forced evictions in informal settlements, with many emergency petitions resulting in protective orders, and directives from the courts requiring alternative rehabilitation measures to be undertaken.

OUR PURPOSE

MISSION

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

VISION

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

OBJECTIVES

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 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 responsibility for providing legal aid to disadvantaged persons, and to promote, establish and maintain national institutions for legal education;

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.



Client filing an application for legal services in SHOKHI hub, Korail. Photo: Md. Khalid Rahman

OUR **ACTIVITIES**

CASES

Information
Advice
Referral
Mediation
Litigation
Public Interest Litigation

CAPACITY BUILDING

Training on rights, duties, remedies
Judges
Magistrates
Lawyers
Government officials
Rights and Development Organisations
Students
Researchers
Community based organisations

CAMPAIGNS

Research
Advocacy for law, policy and institutional reform to ensure access to justice for all

OUR FOCUS

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Projects: Actions for Child Protection - Violence against Children (ACP) – Legal Reform for Ending Corporal Punishment in all Settings (ECP)

Target Groups: Children; Parents and Guardians; Teachers in Educational Institutions; Communities

Issues: Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children



A child from Korail, an informal settlement in Dhaka. Photo: Md. Khalid Rahman



Woman in SHOKHI campaign hangs up a poster on preventing child marriage. Photo: Md. Khalid Rahman

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Projects: Access to Justice for Realization of Human Rights and Advocacy for Empowerment of the Poor (A2J) – Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh II (AVCB-II) – Access to Legal Empowerment and Outreach (ALO) - Access to Justice for the Marginalized and Excluded through Community Legal Services (CLS) – Access to Justice for the Marginalized through Community Legal Services (CLS-YPSA) – Opening Pathways to Justice for the Poor (OPJP)

Target Groups: Women; Children; Men; Low Income Groups Living in Urban Informal Settlements; Rural Communities in Remote Areas; Indigenous People

Issues: Community Legal Services; Housing Rights; Institutional Reforms on Access to Justice

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Projects: Increasing Participation of Women in Establishing their Rights (PoWER) – Women's Health Rights and Choices (SHOKHI) – Increasing Protection of Women's Legal Rights Through Mobile Services (MLS)

Target Groups: Women; Girls; People living in Informal Settlements; Low-Income Groups; Women Lawyers; Law Students in Public Universities

Issues: Legal & Economic Empowerment of Women; Women's and Adolescents' Sexual and Reproductive Health; Mobile Legal Services; Making the Justice System More Women-Friendly; Women in Courts



"Where is My Reserved Seat?"
Photo: Fardin Rukhshad Oyan

Projects: Legal Empowerment of Gender Diverse Communities (LEGD) - Promoting Gender Rights and Equality in the Legal Environment (PGR) - Promoting Rights through Inclusion and Empowerment (PRiTE) - Recognizing Consent and Choice (RCC) - Right Here Right Now Bangladesh Platform (RHRN-BD)

Target Groups: Gender Diverse Communities; Hijra Communities; Young People; Students

Issues: Equality and Non-Discrimination; Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; Legal and Social Protection

An aerial photograph of a densely populated city, likely Dhaka, Bangladesh. The image shows a vast expanse of multi-story buildings, many of which appear to be in various stages of construction or are informal structures. The sky is filled with large, white, fluffy clouds, and the overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a clear day. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

HOUSING RIGHTS

Project: Action for Security and Rehabilitation Initiative (ASROI)

Target Groups: People Living in Informal Settlements; Low-Income Groups

Issues: Housing and Shelter for Low Income Groups in Cities; Forced Evictions; Rehabilitation



An elderly person with disability living in Korail, a poorly accessible informal settlement in Dhaka. Photo: Ehsanul Amin



"Justice Delayed, Justice Denied". Photo: Istiak Karim

DISABILITY RIGHTS

Projects: Expanding Participation of People with Disabilities (EPD) – Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Target Groups: Persons with Disabilities; Disabled People's Organisations

Issues: Making Systems for Inclusive for People With Disabilities

PRISONERS' RIGHTS

Project: Improving the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons in Bangladesh (IRSOP)

Target Groups: Prisoners, Women, Men, Children

Issues: Institutional Reforms on Access to Justice; Criminal Justice; Fair Trial

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Projects: Initiative to End Gender Based Violence in Garment Industry (EGV) - Worker Empowerment through Advocacy in the RMG Sector (WEARS)

Target Groups: Workers; Women Workers; Trade Unions; Factory Management

Issues: Legal Awareness; Capacity and Leadership Building; Policy and Institutional Reforms on Improved Working Conditions

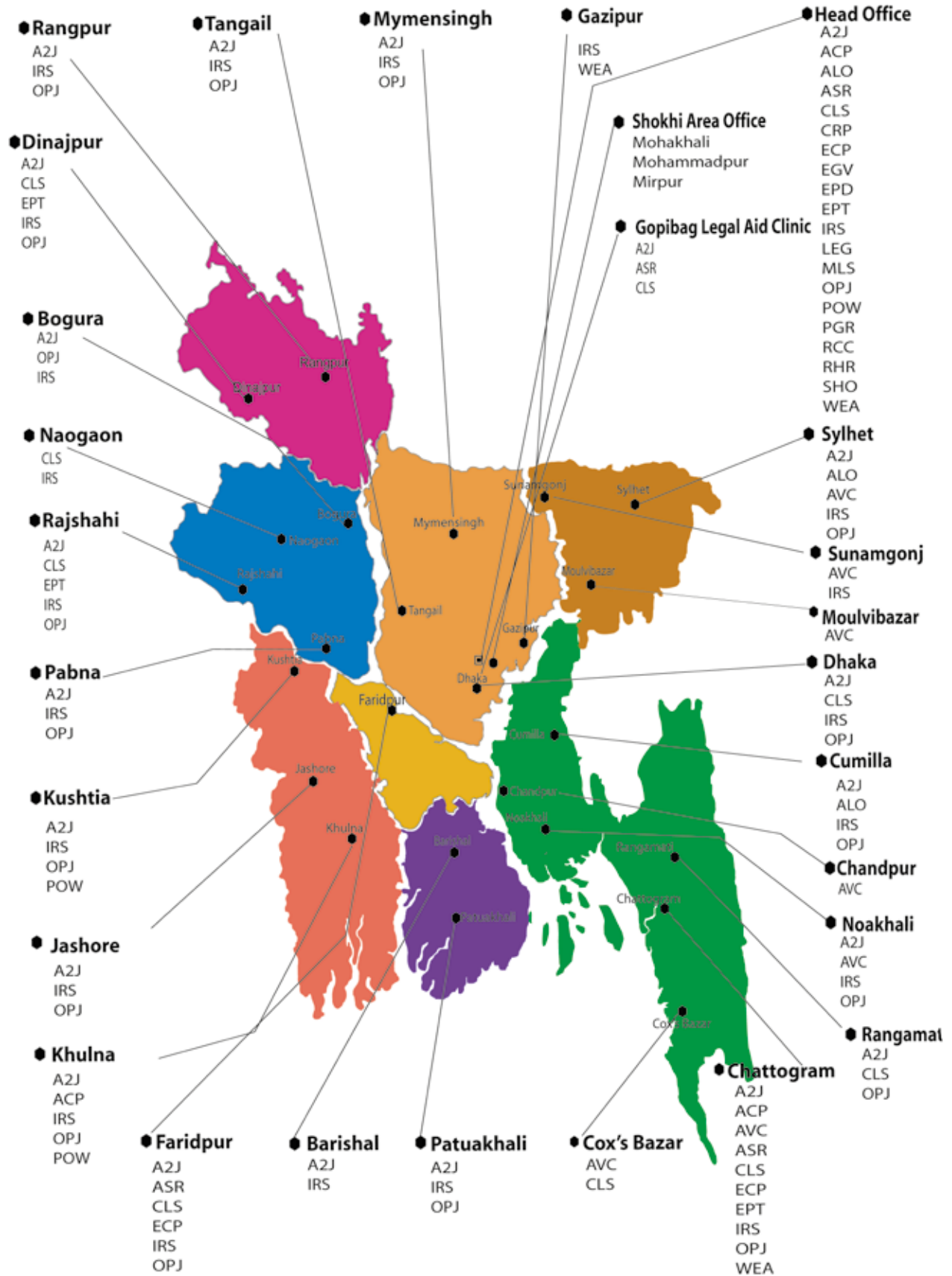
STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Project: Effective Participation for Transparent and Accountable Local Governance (EPT)

Target Groups: Women, Children and Men in Rural Areas, Union Parishad Representatives, Women Union Parishad Members

Issues: Increasing Participation of Women UP Members; Reform of Union Parishad Act and Rules; Legal Services

CURRENT WORK AREAS



BLAST works with 64 district Bar Associations, through its 2600+ pro bono panel of lawyers. It has 25 fully operational district offices, as well as University Clinics and community clinics, as below:

District Offices: Barishal, Bogura, Chandpur, Chattogram, Cumilla, Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Gazipur, Jashore, Khulna, Kushtia, Moulvibazar, Mymensingh, Naogaon, Noakhali, Pabna, Patuakhali, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Rangamati, Sunamganj, Sylhet and Tangail.

University law clinics: at four public universities – Chittagong, Dhaka, Jahangirnagar and Rajshahi Universities

Community based hubs/clinics: sixteen clinics in including fifteen community legal + health one stop clinics in low-income communities across Dhaka

BLAST'S GOVERNANCE

Board of Trustees: BLAST's policy directions are set and overall governance ensured by an eleven-member Board of Trustees composed of eminent lawyers, judges of the Supreme Court, and other professionals with a track record of contributing to the furtherance of human rights protection, enabling access to justice, or undertaking social service.

Board

Dr Kamal Hossain, Chairman
Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain
Justice Md Awlad Ali, Vice Chairman
Z.I. Khan
Fazlul Huq
Dr Shamsul Bari
M. Amir-ul Islam
Dr Rabia Bhuiyan
Tahmina Rahman
A Matin Chowdhury
Sara Hossain (ex-officio)

Executive Committee

Dr. Kamal Hossain, Chairman
Dr. Shamsul Bari
A Matin Chowdhury
Tahmina Rahman
Adeeb H. Khan
Sara Hossain

Senior Management Team

Justice Nizamul Huq, Chief Legal Adviser
S M Rezaul Karim, Legal Adviser and Executive Director, IRSOP Project
Shahriar Parveen, Senior Deputy Director, Administration
Advocate Md. Borkot Ali, Deputy Director, Legal
Md. Mostoza Zamil, Deputy Director, Programme
Mahbuba Akhter, Deputy Director, Advocacy
Md. Amzad Hossain, Deputy Director, Finance
Taposhi Rabaya, Assistant Director, Mediation & Awareness

Management Committee Presidents

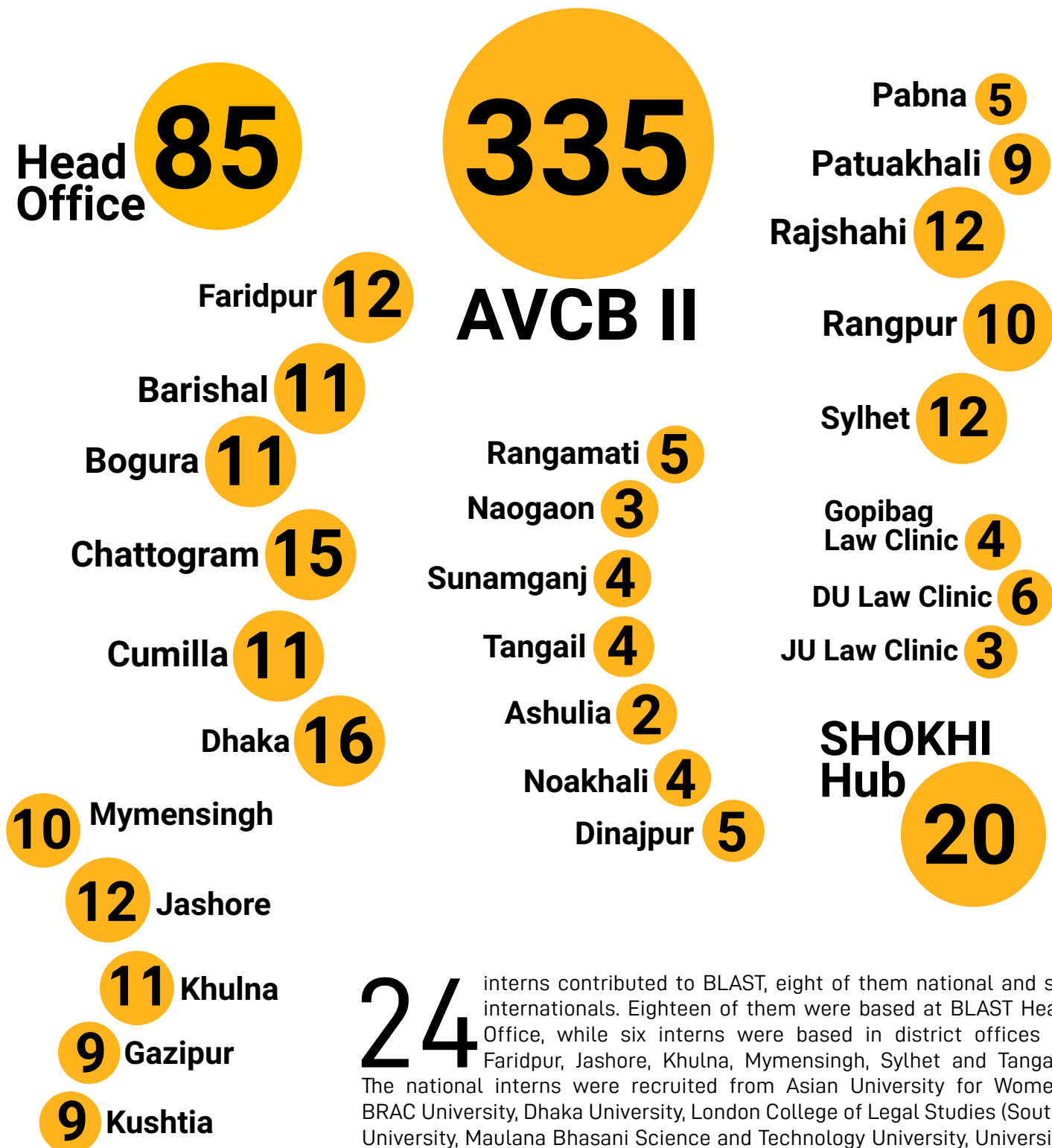
Barishal	Adv Abdul Goffar Khan
Bogura	Adv Abdul Motin
Chattogram	Adv Subash Chandra Lala
Cumilla	Adv Md. Mofizul Islam
Dhaka	Adv Syed Rezaul Rahman
Dinajpur	Adv Md Yusuf Ali
Faridpur	Adv Abdul Kader Mia
Jashore	Adv Sharif Abdur Rakib
Khulna	Adv Kazi Abu Shahin
Kushtia	Adv Siraj ul Islam
Mymensingh	Adv Badhan Kumar Goswami
Noakhali	Adv Abdur Rahim
Pabna	Adv Md. Shah Alam
Patuakhali	Adv Khandakar Abdul Hye
Rajshahi	Adv Alhaj Md Nazmus Saadat
Rangamati	Adv Inanendu Bikash Chakma
Rangpur	Adv Abdul Huq Pramanik
Sylhet	Adv Mohammad Lala
Tangail	Adv Md.Abdul Baki Miah

Unit Coordinators

Barishal	Adv Md. Khalilur Rahman
Bogura	Adv Ashrafun Nahar Swapna
Chattogram	Adv Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
Cumilla	Adv Shamima Akhter Jahan
Dhaka	Adv Khandakar Abdul Mannan
Dinajpur	Adv Serajum Munira
Faridpur	Adv Sipra Goswami
Jashore	Adv Md. Ishaq
Khulna	Adv Ashoke Kumar Saha
Kushtia	Adv Sankar Mazumder
Mymensingh	Adv Abul Kashem Musa
Noakhali	Adv Nuruzzaman
Pabna	Adv Md Alamgir Hossain
Patuakhali	Adv Nizam Uddin Ahmed
Rajshahi	Adv Abdus Samad Adv Samina Begum (In charge)
Rangamati	Adv Jewel Dewan
Rangpur	Adv Nasima Khanam
Sylhet	Adv Irfanuzzaman Chowdhury
Tangail	Adv Khandaker Amina Rahman

In 2017, the Board of Trustees and BLAST's Executive Committee met to review progress reports, take decisions regarding structural changes, and review strategies and organisational policies.

Total number of staff in **2017**



24 interns contributed to BLAST, eight of them national and six internationals. Eighteen of them were based at BLAST Head Office, while six interns were based in district offices in Faridpur, Jashore, Khulna, Mymensingh, Sylhet and Tangail. The national interns were recruited from Asian University for Women, BRAC University, Dhaka University, London College of Legal Studies (South) University, Maulana Bhasani Science and Technology University, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, National University and Leading University, Sylhet. The international interns came from New York University, University of California Berkeley and the University of Oxford.

PART A: HOW CAN WE LINK PEOPLE TO THEIR RIGHTS?

1. RAISING AWARENESS

BLAST, through its different projects, conducted awareness programmes across the country to educate women, men and young people about their legal rights and remedies in relation to issues such as sexual and gender based violence, domestic violence, child marriage, labour and family rights, and to empower them to seek help from the appropriate authorities. Through these programmes, BLAST has also reached prisoners to inform them of their legal rights and criminal procedures and the availability of legal aid, and increased people's access to community legal services.

PRISONER AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

Under the IRSOP project, paralegals have conducted 1,475 paralegal aid clinic sessions inside prisons with 34,742 prisoners, amongst whom 21,789 were men and 12,953 were women.

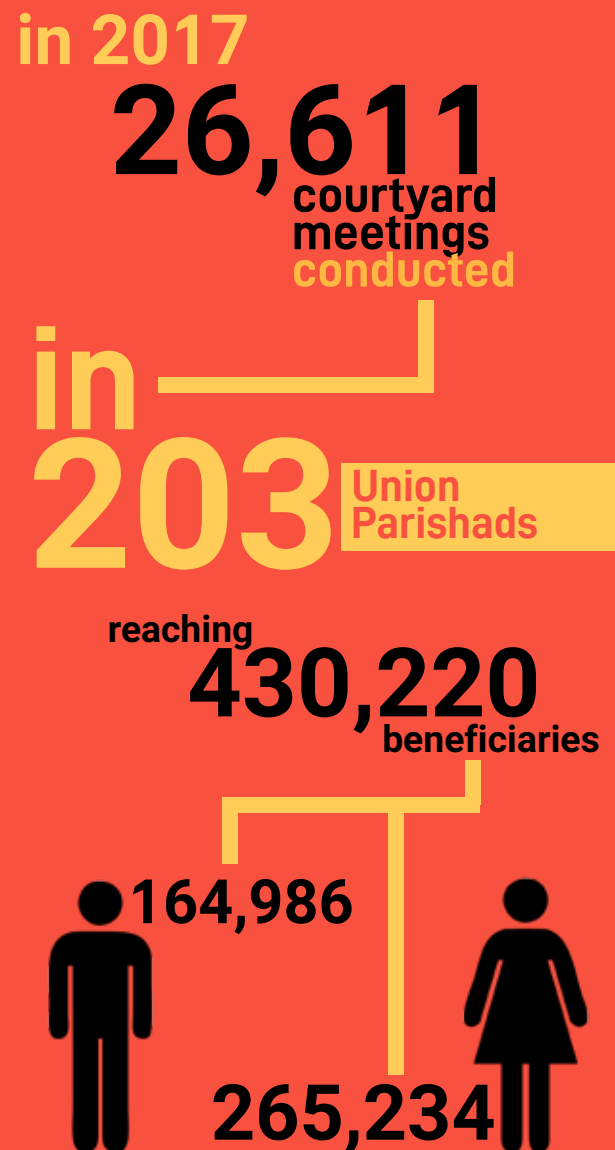
LEGAL AID CAMPS FOR THE URBAN POOR

BLAST organised three legal aid camps under its MLS project in informal settlements across Dhaka to provide legal advice to people living in hard to reach areas. The camps were visited by local people, among them teachers, as well as women social workers, and addressed by a former Supreme Court judge, and ward commissioners. BLAST's team of paralegals and a staff lawyer provided direct legal advice and information in response to queries and they received applications for legal aid mainly in relation to family disputes and gave information about existing legal aid services performing a drama and a traditional folk (jari) songs about how to secure legal aid. BLAST conducted legal awareness sessions in three districts to increase awareness among women, adolescents and

men in the community regarding their rights, the court system, domestic violence, gender based violence, and workers' rights.

ACTIVATING VILLAGE COURTS

In 2017, Village Court Assistants helped conduct courtyard meetings to provide information on accessing legal remedies through the Village Courts.



DISABILITY RIGHTS

BLAST celebrated the 26th International Day of Persons with Disabilities, by participating in a 'Disabilities Development Fair' organised by the National Foundation for Development of People with Disabilities, Bangladesh, from 03 to 07 December 2017. Through its Legal Aid Camp at the Fair, aimed at raising awareness about, and promoting, the rights of people with disabilities, BLAST provided legal information to 500 visitors, and individual legal assistance in 20 cases.



Lata Rani Das, Paralegal, conducting a legal awareness session in Jatrabari. Photo: Kumari Mollika Rani / BLAST

SHOKHI AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

BLAST also built and strengthened community awareness in urban slums in Dhaka with the help of Change Makers, paralegals, and members of self-help groups under its SHOKHI project, on issues such as adolescent health and hygiene and maternal health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, domestic violence, dowry, child marriage, workers' rights, and legal rights and remedies, through drama and cultural performances, video shows, courtyard meetings, rickshaw rallies, tea stall campaigns, health camps and couple fairs.

2. LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

MOBILE LEGAL SERVICES

BLAST has been operating mobile legal clinics in three urban slums in Dhaka, providing legal information and advice to individuals who live far away from any legal aid office. Paralegals who run the mobile clinic have conducted legal awareness sessions for women in these areas about their legal rights, remedies and available services.



Kumari Mollika Rani, Paralegal, providing legal advice to women in Banani. Photo: Lata Rani Das / BLAST

3. LEGAL CELL SERVICES 2017

As part of its legal service provision, BLAST provided in 2017 legal advice, mediation, litigation and referrals services to members of the poor and marginalised communities, prioritising services to women, children and persons with disabilities. It dealt with a total of 12,514 applications on various issues, out of which 8,398 have been received in 2017 through its Head Office, 22 Unit Offices and one Legal Aid Clinic and a further 4,116 applications had been pending for disposal from 2016.

ADVICE

BLAST provided legal advice mostly on family law, domestic violence, civil (land issue) and labour rights to 2,055 persons (1,238 women, 817 men).

MEDIATION

BLAST settled 2,138 mediations (for 1,868 women and 270 men) out of 4,380 mediations in total, which resulted in the recovery of BDT 3,68,32,061 [\$ 443,231.53] for 562 clients (483 women, 79 men), who sought remedies against various issues like claims for dower, maintenance, workplace compensation and others. The money recovered was used by the beneficiaries to rebuild their lives, become financially self-dependent and assist their dependents.

LITIGATION

BLAST continued to provide a full range of litigation services, from the lower courts to the Supreme Court on civil, criminal and constitutional matters. In 2017, BLAST dealt with 24,180 cases. A total of 4,373 cases (3,189 for women and 1,184 for men) were disposed of during the reporting period and BLAST had over 6,125 women clients (74.5% of the total 8,219 clients benefited by BLAST's litigation services in 2017).



1,829 family-related disputes
107 cases in RMG factories

Recovering **BDT 89,758,361**
[\$1,081,206.45] for 1,135 cases.

BLAST reached about 2,138 direct beneficiaries (mostly women) and 10,690 indirect beneficiaries (including children and other family members) through its mediation services. These services were also used by workers in the RMG sector, which resulted in the settlement of labour disputes relating to 57 workers (1 woman, 56 men) recovering BDT 1,147,432 [\$ 13,808.25] as their arrears of wages, service benefits and compensation. Women clients and workers gradually appear to be gaining confidence in BLAST's services as the majority of service seekers in 2017 were women.

2,138
direct beneficiaries
(mostly women)

Recovering through mediation
BDT 3,68,32,061
\$ 443,231.53

LEGAL ASSISTANCE IN POLICE STATIONS AND COURTS

In court, paralegals assisted 52,134 persons (34,952 men, 17,178 women and four children). 4,060 persons (3,124 men, 935 women and one child) were assisted by paralegals in police stations. 1,772 prisoners (1,318 men, 454 women) were identified for skill development in prison, 1,654 prisoners (1,551 men, 103 women) were identified for drug referral.

INTERVENTIONS AT PRISONS

Of the 147,656 interventions taken by the IRSOP paralegals, 141,742 were taken in prisons.

PRISONERS RELEASED

In 2017, a total number of 3,170 prisoners (3,045 men, 122 women, and three children) were released through paralegal interventions under BLAST's IRSOP project.

REFERRALS

In the reporting period, BLAST referred 972 clients to DLACs and Police Stations; women and children survivors of violence to the Victim Support Centres, and the One Stop Crisis Centre; complaints of discrimination or arbitrary action to the National Human Rights Commission and the Information Commission, and to MoU partner organisations for support (eg. emergency medical support, shelter, counselling and legal support) and received clients referred from Panel Lawyers, other NGOs, MoU partners, law enforcement agencies, lawyers, Judges, UP representatives, Trade Union and previous beneficiaries from various projects which are and were implemented by BLAST.

CASE MANAGEMENT

BLAST operates a web-based case management system (CMS) which enables the Legal Team at BLAST Head Office to centrally track and monitor the number and status of legal services

provided across all district offices of BLAST, keep track of hearing dates and deadlines, organise and compile case documents, and store and easily access client information.



A snapshot of the CMS dashboard from 3 January 2018. Photo: Md. Rafiqul Islam

CASE COORDINATION

As part of its ongoing activity since 2015 of reviewing sensitive cases under the IRSOP project, BLAST's own Case Coordination Committee (CCC), during the reporting period, has reviewed 101 new cases and held discussions for their speedy disposal, and held 68 CCC meetings. These cases include Jail Appeals, arbitrary arrests, rape and pornography.

PARTNERSHIPS

To increase outreach to justice seekers, BLAST held coalition meetings with NGOs and the media in its working districts. To develop and broaden its own services, BLAST continued its partnerships across the country with NGOs, Trade Unions, local and international Universities and local elected bodies, enabling cross-referral of services, and now has in place a total of 175 Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in 22 districts. BLAST also led a consortium partnership to provide health and legal services under the SHOKHI project during the reporting period, with three partner organisations, Marie Stopes Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition and the We Can Alliance.

4. CASE STUDIES FROM PROJECTS AND LEGAL CELL AT BLAST HEAD OFFICE

Sonia escapes child marriage

Legal Cell at BLAST HO

In January 2017, Sonia, 14, an 8th grade school student, was due to get married at a community center in Old Dhaka. One day before the wedding, BLAST received an email about the intended child marriage, and asked its Dhaka Unit to investigate. With the cooperation of a Magistrate appointed by the District Administration, BLAST contacted the school which identified the student. On the scheduled wedding day, BLAST involved the police who visited the girl's family and urged them to stop the imminent child marriage. BLAST was able to confirm that the family had cancelled the wedding and agreed that they would wait for Sonia to pass her HSC exams before taking further steps regarding her marriage.

Arti's struggle for compensation

Project: Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh II (AVCB)

Arti Bali, 50, who lives in a village in Noakhali, is a domestic worker. Her son Mohan is an apprentice at a hair salon in the local market. The family's total monthly income is around BDT 5,000.

In October 2017, around 12:00 pm one day, Mohan and a neighbour, Bikash, 20, were going to the market together. They started an argument, Bikash accused Mohan of spitting on him and beat him up badly. Mohan needed to get treatment for his wounds which cost BDT 3,000. Arti struggled to bear these costs with the help of relatives and neighbours. It took more than ten days for Mohan to regain his health. Having no idea about legal remedies or court procedures and also lacking the financial means, Arti was unable to take any legal steps. Mohan's uncle who has a shop in the local

market learnt about the Village Court through activities such as video shows and rallies which BLAST organised (under a government project on Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh). He informed Arti about this Court and she went to file a case there. She paid a fee of BDT 10, and filed a case within the week against Bikash, seeking BDT 3,000 as compensation.

On receiving a summons, Bikash appeared in the Village Court at the scheduled time. In the presence of the applicant and the Chairman, he acknowledged the incident, apologised and paid damages of BDT 3,000 while promising not to repeat this action in the future. Arti's case was settled in just five days. Arti used the money she received as damages to repay her debt and bear her day-to-day expenses. The total expense of conducting the case including transportation cost was BDT 90.

Munia recovered her land

Project: Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh (AVCB)

Munia, 35, a homemaker in Noakhali, lives with her husband Aslam, her children, sister-in-law and mother-in-law in a house on 5.5 decimals of land which she inherited. Aslam's meagre earnings as a farmhand are the only source of the family's income. Munia and her family suffer severe hardship as her neighbour, Zakir, had been unlawfully occupying part of her land for a very long time despite her having legal documents to prove her ownership of the house and the land. Munia and Aslam had attempted time and again to regain possession of the only piece of property they own, by taking part in at least a hundred local shalish sessions. Zakir, who is wealthy and influential, refused to comply with any decisions taken in the shalish. The family then had no choice but to file a case with the District Court. Since they lacked the means to pursue a case

All names used in case studies have been changed to protect the confidentiality of parties involved.

in the higher courts and did not understand the technicalities of the court system, they faced new challenges every step of the way. Aslam spent 30-45 days simply waiting in the court premises, which cost him his daily income. The costs of pursuing the case in the district court rose to about 200 – 250,000 BDT in the past two to three years, far exceeding the value of the land itself.

Eventually, since the Mouza rate for the occupied land was 33,000 BDT, Aslam applied for the case to be transferred from the higher court to the Village Court. In July 2017, the Village Court Assistant filed the case, and explained the court procedures to Munia. The VC summoned the respondent, Zakir, ordering him and Munia to appear before the court. In July 2017, the Court confirmed Munia's ownership of 3.5 decimals of her land, while the remaining two decimals were given to form part of a road extension. Munia said that her family would have become destitute, losing everything all over again in their fight to secure justice, without the village court's intervention. She now encourages everyone to go to the village court for all cases it can hear and resolve.

Saiful loses his eyesight


Project: Legal Reform for Ending Corporal Punishment in all Settings (ECP)

On 29 July 2017, a teacher at the BEPZA Public School and College in Chattogram, allegedly beat Saiful, 14, a student, for failing to complete his homework, and also threw a duster at him, injuring his eye. According to news reports published in the Daily Jugantar, Dhaka Tribune and on bdnews24.com on 8-9 August 2017, Saiful subsequently lost his eyesight as a result of the injury. BLAST filed a complaint with the NHRC regarding the incident, seeking immediate action. On 23 October 2017, the NHRC requested DC Chattogram to investigate the matter, expecting an investigation report on 15 November 2017, which it never received.

Ali's tragic death

Project: Legal Reform for Ending Corporal Punishment in all Settings (ECP)

On 27 August 2017, Ali, a student of grade six at a school in Chattogram, was allegedly forced by his physical education teacher to hold his ears and do 18 squats. Ali later became unconscious and consequently died. The news was published online on Banglanews24.com on 27 August 2017. Local police went to Ali's house to investigate, but his parents refused to file a case against the teacher. BLAST filed a complaint with the NHRC to seek immediate action regarding the degrading punishment which resulted in Ali's death. On 19 October 2017, NHRC requested DC Chattogram to look into the matter and submit an investigation report by 04 December 2017. When the DC failed to do this, NHRC again made a request for an investigation report to be submitted by 28 January 2018.

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Joba gets her job back

Project: Worker Empowerment and Advocacy in the RMG Sector

Joba worked as a helper in the trimming section of a garment factory in Ashulia. On 12 June 2017 she was called into the office of the production manager, Hamim, who attempted to rape her. Fearing his threats and in addition the disapproval from society, Joba did not disclose the incident at the time to anybody.

Six weeks later Joba learned that Hamim had raped another young worker. Subsequently, three more women came up to say that they too had been raped. Finally, Joba, together with a co-worker, gathered the courage to file a complaint at the factory head office. The head office responded by immediately firing Joba and her colleague with two months wages as compensation. Furthermore, the head office forced an eight-day leave on all workers who had claimed rape and threatened to fire them if they went to the police or media. When outsiders

heard about the matter, Joba and other victims were harassed and even threatened to leave their homes.


On behalf of Joba, BLAST requested the factory to grant the arrears and other benefits Joba was entitled to. The factory authorities agreed to BLAST's request and paid the arrears and offered Joba an operator position at a different trimming section of the factory. Joba was satisfied to hear that Hamim got arrested and came under trial. BLAST helped Joba and her mother to trust in legal remedies and inspired them to help others seek legal assistance in the future. Joba hopes to be able to leave the past behind and to start afresh.

Shahana receives maternity welfare benefits

Project: Worker Empowerment and Advocacy in the RMG Sector

Shahana was working at a garment factory when she became pregnant in 2017. The social welfare officer told her she could only work until 20 October 2017, and she was not entitled to any wages or benefits. Shahana was left feeling lost and helpless, and did not know whom she could turn to until a co-worker suggested to contact BLAST. On 22 September 2017, Shahana went to the BLAST Tongi office and was assisted in drafting an application to the factory for maternity leave. The factory wanted to grant her four months unpaid leave. Shahana informed them that she would seek legal redress with BLAST if she did not receive the full benefits in her application. The factory authorities subsequently changed their minds, approved her leave and paid her two months' wages. She was also told to get in contact after the birth and asked to rejoin on 20 March 2018.

Shahana had not been aware of her rights to maternity leave and benefits were it not for BLAST and she would just had been fired without wages or benefits like many other women. With the help of BLAST, Shahana is now able to support her growing family. She started to share her experiences with others so they too can receive the benefits entitled to them.



The factory authorities agreed to pay the arrears and offered **Joba an operator position** at a different trimming section of the factory.

The power of many: 47 garment workers fight together for their rights

Legal Cell at BLAST HO

On 1 December 2016, workers of a garment factory were forced into a month-long unpaid leave, which was extended for another month by the factory authorities despite the workers' expressed demand to return to work. Without any source of income, the workers struggled to survive and demanded their wages. In response, the factory authorities announced that the factory had been closed, asking the workers to resign and to take the severance package of fourteen days' wages. The workers refused, but were forced to leave the factory.

On 17 March 2017, 47 workers sought legal assistance from BLAST. BLAST proposed mediation to the factory authorities who were represented by BGMEA. Convincing both parties to engage in mediation was not easy, but eventually BLAST convinced both parties successfully of the benefit of mediation. On 24 March 2017, after three sessions of arduous mediation, the workers obtained the promise of compensation, at a total of 818,019 BDT, which they had rightfully demanded from the factory authorities. Within the next five days, all 47 workers recovered their arrears as promised. The mediation effort by BLAST not only left the workers very content to have recovered significantly more compensation than they would have through the BGMEA arbitration process, but also satisfied the garment factory because of the efficiency and relative ease of the process. BLAST's role in the dispute settlement was appreciated by workers, authorities, and trade unions in equal measure.

Monisha rescues her marriage and her family

Project: Increasing Protection of Women's Legal Rights through Mobile Services (MLS)

Monisha and Hasib were happily married and all went well for the first year, but when Hasib started demanding dowry from Monisha, he became physically violent with her. The problems led to Hasib leaving Monisha when she was two months pregnant with their first child.

Independence
Equality
Autonomy
Choice
Remedy
Liberty

After two years Hasib came suddenly back to the family and asked for forgiveness. Monisha decided to accept his plea and after a local shalish, they started living together again. However on 30 October 2016, Hasib demanded huge amount of dowry (BDT 200,000) once more. As Monisha was unable to provide the dowry amount, he threw her and their child out of their home and cut off all contact with them.

In May 2017, Monisha's mother attended a legal awareness meeting when BLAST mobile legal services clinic came to her area. She brought her daughter's problems to their attention. BLAST sent a letter to Hasib, inviting him to resolve the matter through mediation; the session was scheduled in July 2017. After a long discussion with Monisha and Hasib, they concluded that they wanted to resume their conjugal life for the sake of their children and their future. Monisha agreed that she would initially stay in Mirpur for the sake of the children's education and Hasib committed to pay BDT 5,000 as maintenance through the BLAST Head Office. Monisha and Hasib promised each other that they would take family decisions together after discussions with one another. When contacted by BLAST, Monisha confirmed that she had been receiving maintenance from Hasib regularly. Because of the legal awareness meeting and the mobile services that BLAST provided, she was able to stand up for herself and her children.

Faria's choice

Project: Participation of Women in Establishing their Rights (PoWER)

Faria wanted to start practice as a lawyer but her husband vehemently discouraged her. He was threatening her with divorce telling her "good wives" do not work in court premises, but stay home. She continued practicing and later separated from him. She had support from other family members to overcome the challenges. She wants to help other young women lawyers who face the same barriers and believes development sessions to advance professional skills and knowledge will be helpful for her.

Robina's path to independence

Project: Women's Health Rights and Choices (SHOKHI)

Robina lives in Korail in Dhaka city. Her father left her family and married again in 2010. Her mother works as a domestic worker. Robina completed Class 8 but could not continue her studies due to financial constraints. Robina was involved with SHOKHI since the beginning of the project in 2013. She started to work as a community change maker and set up a group of 11 members. Initially, she received a three days training from SHOKHI's project team, and in 2017 she attended the six month long IGA training where she got training on electronic repairs. There were only two women among the 20 training participants; Robina passed the training with a score of 4.8 out of 5. She was employed at an electric shop for three months earning almost 10,000 BDT salary from there. As she faced an unfriendly environment at the work place she decided to leave the job. She decided to drop her CV at UCEP and her trainer referred her to Phillips Mohakhali warehouse section. Robina went for the interview and got the job at Phillips on a monthly salary of 7,000 BDT. Though her salary is less than she received before, this job with a renowned company has created a new opportunity. She receives appraisal for her good work, and is respected by her colleagues. She believes SHOKHI made her journey easier, since it created links between the community and potential employers, and enabled her and others to find livelihoods and move a step closer to financial independence.

**In 2017,**
Robina
was one of two women
that attended the six
month long IGA training
where she learned
electronic repairs.
Robina passed the
training with a score of
4.8 out of 5.

5. COMPLAINTS TO THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NHRC)

In 2017, BLAST sent 24 complaints to the NHRC, mainly regarding allegations of corporal punishment against children in educational institutions. The complaints involved both boys and girls studying between 4th to 9th grades, and also children in madrasas, aged six years and above, who were subjected to corporal punishment such as physical and/or verbal abuse, forcible cutting of hair/shaving of head, being forced to take their pants off in class as punishment, severe injuries of eyes on account of being hit with different objects, being mentally abused to the point of committing suicide, being forced to drink dirty pond water as punishment, being tied to a pole and beaten, being beaten due to not sitting according to the seating plan during exams, and on one occasion, a school cleaner/janitor grabbing a student by the hair and beating her. These incidents were reported in Barguna, Chattogram, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Feni, Gazipur, Jashore, Jhenaidah, Laxmipur, Magura, Manikganj, Meherpur, Moulvibazar, Narayanganj, Natore, Nilphamari, Pabna, Rangpur, Shariyatpur and Tangail.

Based on BLAST's complaints, the NHRC sought investigation reports from the relevant Deputy Commissioners and District Education Officers and received some responses.

6. PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION CASES

PROTECTION OF SLUM DWELLERS FROM EVICTION

After BLAST filed a case regarding the protection of slum dwellers from forced eviction in a Dhaka slum, the High Court issued a rule on the City Corporation and other government authorities directing them to ensure that people living in the Bijli Bosti in Mohammadpur area of Dhaka would not be evicted without prior resettlement.

CHALLENGE TO THE TWO FINGER TEST (TFT)

In 2013, BLAST with other rights and development organisations and health experts, challenged the legal validity of the TFT, an unscientific and demeaning test used on victims of rape. In 2017, forensic experts gave evidence before the courts to the effect that the TFT was unnecessary to determine the occurrence of rape, and BLAST also submitted information on changing practices in

neighbouring countries.

ACTIVATING EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

In 2016, BLAST filed a case following the death of a young man who was turned away by three private hospitals after being hit by a bus. The High Court directed the Ministry of Health to provide guidelines for ensuring emergency medical services and for protection of 'good Samaritans'. The draft guidelines were submitted by the Ministry in 2017, after the Court directed it to indicate the progress made in respect of preparing the guidelines.

EVICTION IN KORAIL BOSTI

BLAST filed a writ petition challenging the arbitrary and forceful eviction of Korail Bosti residents in 2012, which resulted in the

displacement of people and destruction of 2,000 structures. In 2017, the Ministry of Housing informed the Court that it will reserve five acres of land outside Dhaka for the rehabilitation of slum dwellers once evicted, and the Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority informed that it will provide housing to evicted slum dwellers on seven acres of land. However, neither authority specified an exact location for the rehabilitation, the groups of people to be rehabilitated, the number of flats/houses that will accommodate these people, or submitted any housing plans. BLAST responded by requesting a copy of the layout, a quantum of financial compensation for the rehabilitation of slum dweller, and the developers' plan in respect of rehabilitation from the Hi-Tech Park Authority, and a copy of the master plan for government housing in the slum area, the estimated costs for this housing project and a copy of invitation to tender for the project from the Ministry. Both authorities were directed to respond by November 2017, but failed. Subsequently the Ministry provided information on its plan to rehabilitate the evicted slum-dwellers on 5 acres of land in the outskirts of Dhaka, but did not specify which area, or which group of people would be rehabilitated.

WORKERS' RIGHTS INFRINGEMENT IN JASHORE AND KHULNA

Different jute mills breached their duty as employers by publicising permanent work position offers while having over 600 workers already appointed to those positions on a temporary basis. Aggrieved by this decision, the workers as petitioners filed a writ to stay the circular and demand that they be regularized as employees for the jute mills in permanent positions. BLAST offered legal support to the workers to file the petition. The High Court held that the workers had the right to be reabsorbed in the respective companies, and directed the jute mill authorities to give them permanent positions.

EXTRAJUDICIAL PUNISHMENT BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

A video went viral showing a local government elected official, the Laxmipur UP Chairman, beating a man and a woman who had been brought before a local shalish. BLAST filed a writ petition, challenging this action as a failure to comply with the Court's earlier prohibition on extra-judicial punishments. The High Court issued a Suo Motu order and after hearings, the Chairman ultimately sought unconditional apology in person before the Court.

HANDCUFFING BY THE POLICE

BLAST drew the High Court's attention to a news report which stated that the police had arrested and handcuffed a student of Jahangir Nagar University to a hospital bed. The High Court issued a Suo Motu order asking the authorities to explain their actions. BLAST intervened in the matter, after the order was issued. Following the Court's orders, the police removed the handcuffs, and the four police officers involved appeared before the Court to seek an unconditional apology.



LANDMARK JUDGMENT ON COMPENSATION FOR RIVER TRANSPORT DEATHS

BLAST won a landmark judgment in the Dhaka District Court awarding compensation of BDT 171 million to the families of 100 persons killed in the 2004 capsizing of the passenger launch MV Nasrin-1 after overloading. The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority sought to overturn this judgment on a procedural ground. BLAST contested the case, and the High Court upheld the judgment.

BDT 171 million

PART B: MAKING THE LAW FAIRER

Our communities

Women, children and men in rural areas and urban informal settlements;
RMG workers; people with disabilities; Adibashis; Dalits; Hijras

CAMPAIGNS FOR LAW REFORM

Consultations on: Section 97 of State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950 for stronger protection of the land rights of Plain Land Indigenous Peoples; Use of Character Evidence in Rape Prosecutions in Bangladesh; Comparisons between International Labour Standards and Bangladeshi Labour Laws in relation to women RMG workers; Provision of

Emergency Medical Services
'Law in Practice' Seminars on: Protecting Freedom of Expression; Legal Aid for the Urban Poor; Mental Health Law in Bangladesh
Roundtable Discussions on: Right to Shelter and Livelihood; Making an Inclusive City
Rallies on: Banning the 'Special Circumstances' Provision under the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017



Human chain organised by BLAST on prevention of violence against women. Photo: Ehsanul Amin/BLAST

LEGAL AID FOR THE URBAN POOR

On 7 December, BLAST hosted a Law in Practice Seminar on 'Legal Aid for the Urban Poor'. Dr. Hans-Otto Sano, Research Director, Danish Institute for Human Rights, presented findings of a research study carried out in two informal settlements in Dhaka, with researchers Emraan Azad, Lecturer, Bangladesh University of Professionals and Naureen Rahim, Research Associate, Liberation War Museum, Bangladesh.

those applications, BLAST filed one on Access to Justice, six on Housing Rights, sixteen on Physical Humiliating Punishment, one on Adibashi, two on Women Worker Rights. 21 authorities responded within the scheduled time, one application is in appeal stage and BLAST is waiting to receive information from four more authorities.



RIGHT TO INFORMATION

BLAST hosted the 'Regional Experts' Meeting on Assessing the Use of Right to Information Laws in South Asia and Africa' on 26 - 27 October 2017, in collaboration with The Social Architects (TSA) and Research Initiative Bangladesh (RIB). Members and staff of Information Commissions, along with lawyers, journalists and civil society members, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Kenya and South Africa, shared opinions and experiences of strengthening processes to ensure the right to information for all persons, and for ensuring integrity of the Commissions. cRTI experts from the region.

In 2017 BLAST has requested information from 26 authorities on five different issues under the Right to Information Act, 2009. Among

“All Governments in South Asia must demonstrate their commitment to transparency and accountability by taking immediate steps to effectively implement right to information laws”

HOUSING RIGHTS

In 2017, BLAST used the Right to Information (RTI) mechanism as a tool to ensure housing rights for the urban poor, by requesting information under the Right to Information Act 2009, from:

The Ministry of Railways, the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK), and the Deputy Collector, Dhaka, on the number of slum evictions carried out in the city over the past five years;

Response: No slum evictions had been carried out in Dhaka in the last five years.

The Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, on the number of criminal cases filed at Banani police station against residents of the Sat Tola slum in Dhaka's Mohakhali the past five years, and on steps taken by the police station to ensure the security of the slum dwellers;

Response: 94 cases had been filed against residents of the Sat Tola slum in the last five years. A list of the cases was provided.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, and the Office of the District Commissioner, Dhaka on the relocation of the Urdu-speaking community from Dhaka to selected Khas land to be allocated to the community by the Deputy Commissioners of Dhaka and Gazipur.

Response: No initiatives had been taken to relocate the Urdu-speaking community.

Meetings with Experts on Housing Rights

A National Conference titled "Inclusion City Planning: Protection of Right to Life and Shelter" at BRAC center, Dhaka, on 18 March 2017.

A round table discussion with the national newspaper Prothom Alo on "Planned City: Housing Right" on 28 March 2017.

A sharing meeting on 18 July 2017 with experts who reviewed the recommendations of the national housing rights conference and determined next actions to ensure the implementation of the recommendations. The experts' opinion was taken for the creation of a common platform to protect the housing rights of slum dwellers as well as to develop a website regarding this issue.

RTIS ON EVICTION OF SLUM DWELLERS AND THE STATUS OF THE URDU SPEAKING COMMUNITY

In response to RTI applications, BLAST found that the Ministry of Railway, RAJUK and the Deputy Collector, Dhaka had not been involved in any slum evictions in the past five years; received information on the number, and details, of cases filed against residents of the Sat Tola slum in Mohakhali; and found that no suitable Khas land had been selected to relocate the Urdu speaking community from Dhaka, for a better environment, and no initiatives had been made for the community to be covered by the health and social safety net programmes.

PHYSICAL AND HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT

In response to RTI applications made to the Bangladesh Railways and the Ministries of Education and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs inquiring about the present application of certain existing legal provisions that allowed for physical and humiliating punishment of children, BLAST was informed that these authorities no longer apply these laws. From 13 applications to schools and institutions, it was established that many schools and offices strictly follow the six-point guidelines to prevent physical and mental punishment of students, which was issued by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education.

RIGHTS OF ADIBASHIS

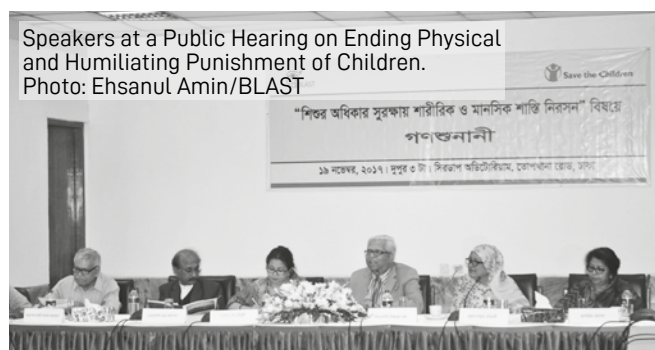
Following an RTI application by BLAST, the Bangladesh Public Service Commission was directed by the Information Commission to provide information regarding the recruitment process of Assistant Thana Education Officers, including ethnic minority quotas.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police were unable to provide information regarding cases of custodial death and death by torture, as they claimed to not have any relation with these incidents.

ENDING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT (ECP)

Aiming to protect children from physical and humiliating punishment in all settings the project "Legal Reform and Ending Corporal Punishment (2017-2021)" is being implemented by BLAST with Save the Children International. The main target of the project is to contribute to a law banning PHP in all settings by 2021.



Following a Public Interest Litigation filed by BLAST and ASK against the Ministry of Education in 2010 seeking a ban on such punishments in educational institutions, the High Court Division in a milestone judgment in 2011 declared imposition of corporal punishment on children unlawful and unconstitutional. The Ministry of Education consequently issued a circular prohibiting corporal punishment in all educational institutions. Under the ECP project complaints regarding

physical and humiliating punishment in schools are sent to the NHRC for taking action. Advocacy and research work is conducted with regard to banning PHP.

In 2017, five awareness raising meetings were arranged in Chattogram and Faridpur with local community members on physical and humiliating punishment and a district level community fair was organised in Patiya of Chattogram.

BLAST held a Public Hearing with judges, lawyers, teachers, human rights activists, members of the NHRC and civil society on 19 November 2017, to highlight the limits of the existing laws to protect children from physical or humiliating punishment in schools and madrasas, and urged amendments to the law to improve the situation.



AMENDING BANGLADESH LABOUR ACT

Advocates, NGO representatives, domestic workers, and a member of the Standing Committee of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, BLAST and Safety and Rights Society (SRS) framed and sent a series of proposed amendments to the current Labour Law, regarding alternative dispute resolution and the insurance of minimum compensation and workplace safety, to the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

IMPROVING DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS

DOMESTIC WORKERS CODE

As part of the Domestic Workers' Rights Network (DWRN), BLAST participated 2017 in a month long campaign alongside domestic workers, with Trade Union Federations, human rights and labour rights organisations, to raise awareness of the new Domestic Workers' Protection and Welfare Policy 2015, design recommendations on how to activate it, and how to ensure its implementation. We also held consultations on the implementation of the Policy, with domestic workers, NGOs and trade unions affiliated with DWRN, media persons and representatives of the Central Monitoring Cell formed under the Policy, in Gazipur and Mymensingh.

Under the SHOKHI Project, two orientation meetings and two experience sharing meetings were organised in 2017 on the subject of the domestic workers' code. In addition, three networking and advocacy meetings have been held with different stakeholders regarding the code.

ILO AND WOMEN WORKERS' RIGHTS

BLAST in a joint venture with the SHOKHI project and the National Women Domestic Worker Union organised a Consultation Meeting on 15 June 2017 at the VIP Lounge, National Press

Club, in Dhaka. The meeting was titled "ILO Convention and Law for Domestic Workers: Current Situation and Ways Forward" and it aimed at drafting laws for domestic workers in the light of the ILO Convention 189, concerning "decent work for domestic workers" with regard to the workers' rights, dignity, protection and welfare. The meeting was attended by members of parliament, lawyers, NGO representatives and domestic workers. The process of ratification of ILO Convention is in progress.



Main key recommendations

- Raising mass awareness of this issue.
- All participants need to be united and well-organised.
- All participants have a role to play, both individually and together.
- Proper implementation of laws and policies needs to be ensured.
- The attitudes and mentality of people need to be changed.
- Sensitivity towards domestic workers needs to be established.
- Monitoring cells should be activated at district level and in upazilas.
- Bangladesh government must take necessary steps to regulate the migration of workers from the country.

PROTECTING LAND RIGHTS

BLAST completed a study on the application of Section 97 of the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950, which regulates the sale and purchase of land, and contains measures which, if activated, would protect plains Adibashis from dispossession. It then framed and presented recommendations to the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs on how to reactivate institutional structures to ensure effective application of the law to protect vulnerable communities from loss of their property rights.

BLAST organised a Roundtable Discussion in March on the issue and sent a memorandum to the Ministry of Law in this regard.

BLAST's SDG achievements:

GOAL 5: Gender Equality

GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality

GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

CONTRIBUTING TO SDGs

BLAST participated in the first ever Citizen's Conference on SDGs in Bangladesh held in December 2017 at the Krishibid Institution in Dhaka, and organised by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh.

The day-long Conference was a public event, centred on the theme of "Leave No One Behind". BLAST participated in the exhibition to present BLAST's achievements related to the SDGs (GOAL 5: Gender Equality, GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality, GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, and GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions), and was able to exchange ideas, information and working experiences with other organisations.

The conference resulted in greater understanding of SDGs and commitments to ensure implementation at national and local levels along with long term partnerships among different state and non-state stakeholders.

MAKING ROADS SAFER

BLAST continued advocacy on its recommendations on the 'Road Transport Bill-2017' through participation in meetings of the Safe Roads and Transport Alliance (SROTA). On 9 February 2017 the Cabinet approved the Bill. In August 2017 BLAST contributed further recommendations to the SROTA Alliance on the draft 'Road Transport Act 2017' focusing on issues of investigation, prosecution and remedies, in particular to ensure prompt, adequate and effective compensation.

REFORMING THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT

In April 2017, BLAST organised a Law in Practice seminar on "Mental Health Law: English Experiences and Bangladesh Perspectives" at the Muktijuddho Jadughar, Dhaka. Barrister Najrul Khasru, a British Bangladeshi Mental Health Tribunal judge, gave the keynote focusing on opportunities for strengthening the laws on mental health in Bangladesh.

This was followed by a Consultation Meeting on the Draft Mental Health Act 2016 at the Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, Dhaka, focused on identifying the gaps in the current draft Act and making recommendations for reform.

IMPLEMENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT GUIDELINES

BLAST found that the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) did not issue any notice to implement the Supreme Court directives in the form of guidelines in Writ no 5916/2008 for safeguards to sexual abuse and harassment of women at workplaces and educational institutions. BLAST subsequently

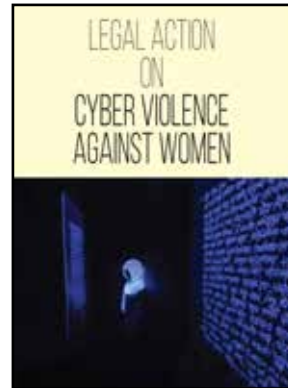
engaged in dialogue with DIFE about steps it can take to address sexual harassment in RMG factories, and DIFE expressed an interest in receiving orientation trainings on sexual harassment and violence, as these would help DIFE inspectors to be sensitised on the issue and motivate them to take steps to liaise with the factory authorities to set up sexual harassment complaint committees in respective factories.

ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

BLAST submitted its recommendations on the Cabinet approved 'Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2017' in March 2017. These suggested measures for community action and prevention, and setting out duties of marriage registrars and expressed concerns regarding the discriminatory age of marriage, discharge of the accused person on bond and the 'special

provision' allowing certain cases of child marriage to be treated as exceptions. In August 2017, BLAST submitted recommendations on the Draft Rules framed under the 'Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017'. In December 2017 the 'Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017' was published in the official gazette.

ADDRESSING CYBER VIOLENCE



A new policy brief illustrates challenges in securing legal protection for women and girls from cyber violence and sets out policy recommendations for addressing existing gaps in the law and developing effective safeguards.

PROTECTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In March 2017, BLAST organised a Law in Practice seminar on 'Protecting Freedom of Expression' at the University of Dhaka. Tahmina Rahman, Regional Director, Bangladesh and South Asia at ARTICLE 19, spoke about the implications of the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information, for the protection of journalists, media freedoms and citizens who wish to exercise this fundamental right, and how it is fettered by Article 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006.



PART C: A RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE JUSTICE SYSTEM

WOMEN IN THE LAW

Student Dialogues

Experience sharing sessions in two public universities - the Islamic University, Kushtia and Khulna University - enabled women law students to learn more about careers as lawyers or judges, and the dynamics and challenges of legal practice.

A panel of women judges, lawyers, and legal service providers took part in an interactive dialogue with students, giving insights into their experiences, responding to career-themed questions, and how

to navigate the courtroom and chambers' environment, and engaged with students' questions, concerns, and ideas.

Professional Development Sessions

Professional Development Sessions provided training for young women lawyers and graduates on civil and criminal proceedings and client communication skills.

They also resulted in mentoring relationships with experienced women lawyers and teachers, aimed to encourage women's leadership in the profession and among teachers.

Capacity Building for Staff Lawyers and Paralegals

BLAST held a "Staff Training on Awareness building session on Rights and Laws" in September on how to design and conduct programmes on legal awareness, and the content of new laws.



CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PARALEGALS

IRSOP

BLAST held two 'Trainings on Basic Criminal Laws for Paralegals' in Noakhali and Tangail in January; two 'Trainings on Paralegal Aid Clinic' in Mymensingh and Noakhali in February; and two 'Trainings on Paralegal Aid Clinic' in Adabor, Dhaka in June 2017.

SHOKHI

BLAST held one 'Refresher Training for Paralegals' in Rangamati and one 'Paralegal Training for Potential Changemakers' in Dhaka, in February 2017, and one 'Paralegal Training for Changemakers' at BLAST HO, Dhaka in September 2017.

WEARS

BLAST conducted one 'Paralegal Training for Project Staff and Selected Members of Trade Unions and Self-Help Groups' in Dhaka in July 2017; and one 'Paralegal Training for SHG Members' at BLAST HO, Dhaka in September 2017.

TRAINING FOR JUDGES

BLAST, in collaboration with the Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI), organised four sharing sessions in 2017 on the probation system and relevant laws (including the Children Act 2013, the Probation of Offenders Ordinance 1960 and the Special Privileges of Women Prisoners Act 2006), for newly appointed assistant judges and additional District and Sessions Judges/ equivalent officers from across the country. The discussions focused on how the justice system can be made more child-friendly and how to improve the use of probation as an alternative to custody.



Trained IRSOP Paralegals at an awareness-raising session. Photo: BLAST Team/Chattogram



SHOKHI Change Makers at the Paralegal Training for Change Makers. Photo: Amir Khasru Emon/BLAST



Judges at a Sharing Session on the Probation System and the Children Act 2013 at JATI. Photo : BLAST

PART D: USING TECHNOLOGY TO ACCESS JUSTICE

MOBILE APPS

A Mobile App was developed to promote women's empowerment and prevent gender-based violence in 15 hubs across urban slums of Dhaka. The new technology enabled staff to monitor real time progress in achieving targets, and coordinating service provision to the local community.

VIDEO SHOWCASES

Through the SHOKHI project, BLAST has successfully used video showcases to educate and empower communities in slums and informal settlements in areas within Mirpur, Mohammadpur and Mohakhali. For instance, 30 video shows about women's rights were arranged for these communities, focusing on domestic violence against women (including dowry demands and child marriage), sexual harassment and stalking, the impact of violence on women's physical and mental health. A total of 3,726 individuals saw these shows, of whom 1,645 were women and 2,081 men.

Further, four years of the success stories achieved through SHOKHI were portrayed in a video documentary entitled "Shokhir Kotha" ('SHOKHI's Stories' or The Companion's Stories).

LIVE RADIO – 'THE LAW AND US'

In June, BLAST started hosting a weekly radio show, Ain O Amra ('The Law and Us), on Colours FM to bring discussions on women's rights to the public. Listeners, mainly women, sought legal advice from an expert panelist and BLAST lawyers on where and how to seek protection against domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape, and how to resolve family and land disputes and to assert the rights of people with disabilities.





SHORT FILM COMPETITION

The Short Film Competition “My Choice, My Rights” 2017 was organised by BLAST and the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), BRAC University. It was open to young people (16-30 years) and aimed to focus attention on current issues and concerns regarding the rights to consent and choice with regard to marriage, personal liberty, and freedom of expression and the threats resulting from gender-based violence or discrimination, in particular those affecting young people.

At a ceremony at Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka, Sayma Farzana was awarded for her short film “Sajj”, Umme Ayesha for her film “Ami Anika” (I am Anika) and Md. Ashraf Ali for “Korimon Bibi”.



BaSHA BLOG

BLAST developed an online archive as a publicly accessible repository of information and resources on housing in Bangladesh, sharing research papers, reports, news articles, data visualisation, and other related materials to contribute to popular education, advocacy, and organising for housing rights, laws and policies.



Photo: Mou Akter Surovy
1st prize winner

PHOTO COMPETITION

BLAST held an online photography competition titled “My Life, My Rights” for young people aged 14-30 across the country. An exhibition of the award-winning photographs was held at the Drik Gallery, Dhaka.

The photos showcased reflected on the themes of consent and choice in personal and professional relationships, and threats to personal freedom and security in the form of child marriage, sexual harassment, gender-based violence and discrimination, cyber violence and limitations on freedom of speech and expression.

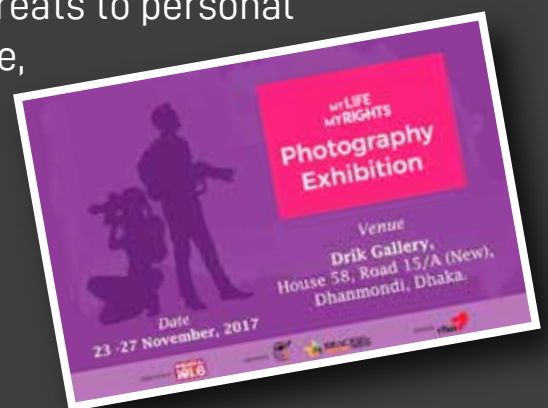




Photo: Ayman Nakib



Photo: Ashfak Islam



Photo: Ahmad Asif Sami



Photo: Jotirmoy Deb
2nd Prize winner



Photo: Md. Arifur Rahman



Photo: Md. Nihal Nahyan

BLAST IN THE MEDIA

The Daily Star – 07 March 2017

'Ensure protection of journalists'

The Daily Star Staff Correspondent

"The National Human Rights Commission should play a robust role in ensuring protection of journalists", Tahmina Rahman, ARTICLE 19 director for Bangladesh and South Asia region yesterday said. She also urged the government to ensure speedy trial for 51 journalists and online activists killed since 1995, says a press release. She was speaking as key note speaker at a seminar titled "Protecting Freedom of Expression" organized by BLAST at RC Majumdar Auditorium of Dhaka University."

Dhaka Tribune – 21 August 2017

Rape prosecution: Rights activists demand

revoking character evidence provision

Afroze Jahan Chaity

"Raising concerns over adversarial courtroom proceedings in rape case, rights activists have demanded the government revoke the character evidence provision in the Evidence Act-1872, which allows the defence in a rape case to show that the victim was of generally immoral character in order to impeach her creditworthiness in a court. They raised the demand at a meeting styled "Use of Character Evidence in Rape Prosecutions in Bangladesh," organised by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) at the Daily Star centre in Dhaka on Sunday."

"The activists also urged the government to formulate a "rape shield" law to prevent disclosure of information about victims' morality and sexual history during trial and to protect privacy of complainants in the court."



The Daily Star – 29 September 2017

'Seizing the opportunity?'

Sara Hossain

Redressing divorce inequality and injustice for Hindu women

"At BLAST, given the opportunity to assist the Court, we sought to add our voices to this muted if robust

chorus. We prepared a review of the relevant laws across South Asia." "We found that of all the SAARC countries, only Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, have laws in place that allow Hindu women to divorce." "This means that a Hindu woman in Bangladesh in fact not only has fewer marriage rights—to equality and to freedom from family violence—than other Bangladeshi women, but also women in other South Asian countries. "

"Given that Bangladesh is so far ahead of our neighbours in achievement of so many socio-economic indicators on gender equality, why are we lagging so far behind in ensuring formal legal equality for women? Is it simply that no one in power is interested in hearing the voices of Hindu women, particularly those who are powerless and living trapped inside a violent and abusive marriage, with no access to remedy or support? "

The Daily Star - 21 August 2017

[Use of character evidence in rape trials](#) [Experts urged the immediate repeal of Section 155\(4\) of the Evidence Act, 1872](#)

The event was covered by the Daily Star Law Desk.

"On 20 August, 2017 at Azimur Rahman Hall, The Daily Star Centre, BLAST with the support of SHOKHI project organised a consultation meeting on the use of character evidence in rape prosecutions in Bangladesh. The speakers unanimously agreed to the demand to repeal the discriminatory provision, Section 155(4) Evidence Act of 1872, and urged the government to take necessary initiative in this regard."

"Section 155(4) provides that "[...] when a man is prosecuted for rape or an attempt to ravish, it may be shown that the prosecutrix was of

generally immoral character." Here prosecutrix is generally considered to be a female victim of a crime on whose behalf the State is prosecuting a suspect/accused."

"Justice Nizamul Haque, Former Judge at the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, said that "We are all agreed on the fact that Section 155(4) should be repealed. The judges in court can play a vital role to protect a rape survivor from being asked humiliating questions during rape trials."



Dhaka Tribune - 11 December 2017

[‘Corporal punishment is rooted in Bangladesh’s culture’](#)

[Mahadi Al Hasnat](#)

"Following a petition filed by public interest groups, BLAST and Ain o Shalish Kendra, the High Court said in a January 2011 judgment that 'corporal punishment is a violation of children's rights and ordered that the practice be prohibited not only in schools, but across all settings.'"

"Despite the ban on corporal punishment in Bangladesh, an astonishing 67% of parents in Bangladesh endorse the use of physical

punishment in school to discipline their children, and 79% have admitted to hitting them at home, according to a recent survey. Only 1% of guardians surveyed thought that hitting a child without a very specific reason is a violation of their rights. BLAST with support from Save the Children (SCI) has conducted a survey titled "Corporal Punishment on Children in Schools: Present Scenario and Preventive Responsibilities," participated by a total of 126 people from both urban and rural areas in Dhaka and Chittagong. In addition to the survey, the organizations conducted interviews and discussions with teachers, children and their guardians."



Photo: Rajib Dhar/Dhaka Tribune

Dhaka Tribune – 04 December 2017

[What kind of precedent will the Tareque Masud verdict set?](#) [Shohel Mamun and Nawaz Farhin](#)

"Victims may now become aware about the legal process because Masud's case has made an example," Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of BLAST told the Dhaka Tribune. "People have learned that if anyone pursues the legal process they will have a chance to get compensation. This exemplary case will inspire victims and hopefully the number of cases will increase."

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS 2017

1

Legal Action for Ending Corporal Punishment

Type: Policy Brief

Issue: Legal Awareness

2

Access to Justice for Women:
Women's Economic Rights After Separation or Divorce

Type: Policy Brief

Issue: Legal Awareness

3

সর্বস্তরে আইন সহায়তা: চৌকি আদালত সক্রিয়করণ
Legal Aid at the Frontlines: Activating Chowki Courts

Type: Booklet

Issue: Awareness

4

সিডও সাধারণ সুপারিশমালা: নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতায় ন্যায়বিচার প্রাপ্যতা নিশ্চিতকরণ
CEDAW General Recommendations: Securing Justice for Violence against Women

Type: Booklet

Issue: Legal Awareness

5

বাংলাদেশে প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তির অধিকার: তৃণমূল সুপারিশসমূহ
Grassroots Recommendations: Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Type: Booklet

Issue: Legal Awareness

6

Legal Action on Cyber Violence against Women

Type: Policy Brief

Issue: Legal Awareness

7

প্রান্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীর বিচারগম্যতা নিশ্চিতকরণ: সমতা ও কমিউনিটি জাস্টিস ফেলোশিপ কর্মসূচী
Increasing Access to Justice for the Marginalized and Socially Excluded: Equality
and Community Justice Fellowships

Type: Booklet

Issue: Research Publication

FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2017

A. QASEM & Co.

Chartered Accountants Since 1953

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
Consolidated Statement of Financial Position
As at 30 June 2017

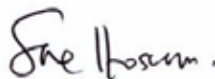
	Notes	30 June 2017 BDT	30 June 2016 BDT (Restated ¹)
Assets			
Non-Current Assets			
Property, Plant and Equipment	4.00	12,253,435	10,513,975
Total Non-Current Assets		12,253,435	10,513,975
Current Assets			
Cash and Cash equivalents	5.00	185,582,121	124,229,215
Receivables, Advances and Pre-payments	7.00	20,381,240	7,187,993
Investment in FDR	6.00	16,516,131	15,770,740
Total Current Assets		222,479,492	147,187,948
Total Assets		234,732,927	157,701,923
Fund and Liabilities			
Fund Account	8.00	168,975,400	111,168,423
Liabilities for Expenses/Payments	9.00	65,757,527	46,533,500
Total Fund and Liabilities		234,732,927	157,701,923

Footnotes:

1. Auditors' report in page-01
2. These financial statements be read in conjunction with the annexed notes.
3. Refer to Note 2.03



Deputy Director (Finance)
BLAST



Honorary Executive Director
BLAST



Chairman/Vice Chairman
Board of Trustees, BLAST

Dated, Dhaka
November 26, 2017



A. Qasem & Co.
Chartered Accountants

**Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
Consolidated Income and Expenditure Account
For the year ended 30 June 2017**

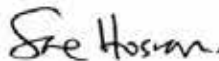
	Notes	For the year ended	For the period ended
		30 June 2017	30 June 2016 (Restated ¹)
		BDT	BDT
Income			
Donation Received	10.00	308,190,026	202,139,044
Bank Interest	11.00	5,119,773	1,948,738
Total income		313,309,799	204,087,782
Expenditure			
Program Cost			
Awareness and Advocacy	14.00	5,243,628	6,164,416
Beneficiary and Staff Capacity Building /Workshop	15.00	8,645,409	5,866,757
Meeting ,Seminar and Networking	16.00	8,142,883	4,528,374
Case/Legal/Litigation Support Cost	17.00	31,563,439	6,317,159
Research Program Cost	18.00	16,444,397	3,603,923
Monitoring and Evaluation	19.00	3,956,343	3,869,443
Staff salary and benefit/Honorarium/Consultant	20.00	137,636,480	58,136,677
		211,632,579	88,486,749
Program support cost			
Office Rent	21.00	9,471,950	3,883,732
Traveling Allowance & Conveyance	22.00	4,492,340	2,662,789
Paper and Periodicals	23.00	71,532	25,630
Audit Fee	24.00	270,000	25,000
Other Operating Expenses	25.00	16,124,004	200,284
Renewal Fees, Charges, Insurance and Subscription and Income Tax	26.00	168,117	788,993
Equipment Operational Cost (Servicing Charge, Toner etc.)	27.00	678,214	977,639
Vehicle Operational Cost (Servicing, Repair, Fuel etc.)	28.00	123,570	207,634
Maintenance Cost	29.00	666,098	253,672
Overhead Cost	30.00	8,411,717	4,061,297
Recruitment Expenses	31.00	12,455	34,618
Photostat cost	32.00	133,914	314,977
Refreshment	33.00	216,056	138,936
Utilities (Electricity, Telephone & Water)	34.00	3,789,377	1,843,346
Fuel Cost	35.00	911,791	342,953
Communication Cost	36.00	271,083	550,335
Stationery Items	37.00	3,504,867	1,309,955
Office Expense	38.00	45,547	1,213,115
Bank Charge/AIT	39.00	453,608	253,005
Office Decoration Cost	48.00	2,019,224	2,355,083
		51,835,464	21,442,993
Others			
Fund in transit	40.00	59,662,634	33,052,593
Provision and Accruals	41.00	29,400	-
Depreciation	42.00	3,044,647	-
Unspent fund refund to donor	43.00	388,119	188,935
		63,124,800	33,241,528
Total Expenditure		326,592,843	143,171,270
Excess/(deficit) of Income over Expenditure		(13,283,044)	60,916,512

Footnotes:

1. Auditors' report in page-01
2. These financial statements be read in conjunction with the annexed notes.
3. Refer to Note 2.03



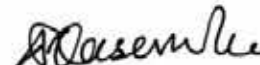
Deputy Director (Finance)
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BLAST



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Board of Trustees, BLAST



A. Qasem & Co.
Chartered Accountants

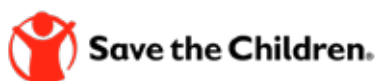
Dated, Dhaka
November 26, 2017

LIST OF DONORS



C&A Foundation

- Bandhu (Rutgers)
- Blue Law International
- C & A Foundation
- Christian Aid
- Diakonia
- Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- FPAB
- Manusher Jonno Foundation
- Maxwell Stamp
- Naripokkhko (GFW)
- NGDO (Disability Rights Fund)
- Porticus Foundation
- RFSU Swedish Association for Sexuality Education
- Royal Danish Embassy
- Save the Children International
- The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
- UNDP
- US Department of State
- US Embassy



LIST OF NETWORKS AND PARTNERS

BLAST is part of the following regional networks:

Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development

Clean Clothes Campaign

International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-NET)

Network on Improvement of Policing in South Asia (Secretariat, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative)

One Billion Rising

South Asians for Human Rights

WORKING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Alliance to End Domestic Violence (We Can):

This alliance is similar to campaigns operating in a number of countries involving national, international and local organisations, representatives of civil society, and the women's rights movement, journalists, cultural activists and other individuals. BLAST has partnered with, and continues to collaborate with We Can to implement different project activities.

Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF):

BLAST is a member of the Legal Advisory Committee and of the Sexual Harassment Complaint Committee.

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) [Child Rights Forum]:

BLAST is a member of BSAF which monitors the status of child rights and engages in advocacy on cases and specific issues.

Campaign for Right to Food and Social Security (Secretariat at Nagorik Uddyog):

BLAST has been a member of the Campaign for Right to Food and Social Security (RtF&SS) which aims to ensure participation of concerned organisations and individuals committed to work towards establishing people's fundamental entitlements including the right to food and social security as intrinsic for establishing a life free from hunger, malnutrition and poverty, and essential for human dignity.

Citizen's Initiative to Address Domestic Violence (Secretariat at CARE):

BLAST is a member of this coalition which has been operating since 2005 and was instrumental in advocacy on adoption of the law providing remedies for domestic violence.

Citizen's Initiatives on CEDAW (Secretariat at Steps Towards Development):

BLAST is a member of this alliance which works on preparing shadow reports to monitor state implementation of CEDAW.

Coalition for the Urban Poor:

BLAST is a member of this coalition which work for the rights of the urban poor specially slum dwellers.

Domestic Workers' Rights Network (Secretariat at BILS):

BLAST is part of the DWRN and provides legal advice and assistance to domestic workers and takes part in advocacy to implementing the Domestic Workers Code.

Girls Not Brides (Secretariat at BRAC):

BLAST is active in the network focused on ending child marriage.

Human Rights Forum – Bangladesh (Secretariat at ASK):

BLAST is represented on both the general body and Steering Committee of the Forum, which is a coalition of 20 organisations involved in monitoring the Universal Periodic Review process.

Right Here Right Now (RHRN) Bangladesh (Host at Bandhu Social Welfare Society):

BLAST is a member of the RHRN Bangladesh Platform, a country platform comprising 9 national level organisations, 1 network and 1 alliance, which aims to work on young people's SRHR irrespective of their sexual orientation and gender identity, and focuses on creating stigma, discrimination and violence free access

to comprehensive youth-friendly services; comprehensive SRH information and space for young people's voices.

Right to Food Campaign (Secretariat at WAVE):

BLAST is a member of this network.

Shamajik Protirodh Committee (Social Resistance Committee) (Secretariat at Bangladesh Mahila Parishad):

BLAST actively participates in this platform of 70 women's rights, human rights and development organisations.

Sromik Nirapotta Forum (SNF) (Secretariat at BILS):

BLAST is a member of SNF, a coalition of 20 organisations involved in providing assistance to victims of workplace disasters and advocacy on workers' safety.

Safe Roads and Transport Alliances (SROTA) (Secretariat at BRAC):

BLAST is a member of this network focused on road safety.

Vested Property Return Act Implementation Coalition (Secretariat at Association for Land Reform and Development):

BLAST is a member of this coalition involved in advocacy for effective implementation of the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Act 2011 and Rules on return of properties expropriated from minorities.

WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT

National Legal Aid and Services Organisation (NLASO) under the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (BLAST has earlier served as an NGO member of the NLASO at central level, and staff or panel lawyers serve or have served as members of the District Legal Aid Committees in district Units (eg Barishal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Pabna, Patuakhali, Rangpur, Rangamati, Tangail), or as Advisory Committee members (Cumilla) or Observers (Bogura, Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia, Mymensingh, Noakhali, Rajshahi and Sylhet).

BLAST is a member of the District Task Force Committee headed by the DC to identify child prisoners, in Cumilla, and Kushtia jails.

BLAST is a Member of the District Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Protirodh Committee headed by the DC in Kushtia.

As part of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Law Project on Improving the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons in Bangladesh, supported by GIZ, BLAST engages paralegals to provide support and services to vulnerable prisoners, and takes part in the district level Case Coordination Committees, led by the District Judge and DC, in many districts including Barishal, Bogura, Chattogram, Cumilla, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Gazipur, Jashore, Khulna, Kushtia, Mymensingh, Pabna, Patuakhali, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet.

As part of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development's project on Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh II, BLAST is involved as an implementer in 7 districts.

BLAST representatives are serving as a Member of the Complaint Committee of both public and private sector bodies, (eg Ministry of Law, Grameenphone) established following the High Court Guidelines on Prevention and Protection against Sexual Harassment.

BLAST is an active contributor in 5 districts to the Victim Support Centres set up by the police in Barishal, Dhaka, Khulna, Sylhet and Rangamati, counselling victims/survivors weekly, and participating in Steering Committee Meetings.

BLAST regularly collaborates with JATI to organise training sessions for judges and legal practitioners on the probation system and relevant laws (including the Children Act 2013, the Probation of Offenders Ordinance 1960 and the Special Privileges of Women Prisoners Act 2006).



Sustainable Development Goal 16

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

FOR FREE LEGAL ADVICE
BLAST'S HOTLINE
01715 220220

109
1098
16430

National Helpline Numbers
National Helpline on Violence against Women
Child Protection Helpline
National Legal Aid Helpline