



ANNUAL REPORT

June 2023 to May 2024

Empowering Linguistic Minorities to Become an Active Citizen of Bangladesh

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PARTNERSHIP

Council of Minorities and Namati are supporting the community-based paralegals to work in Urdu-speaking camps across five cities in Bangladesh. The paralegals are empowering their fellow Urdu-speakers to understand their rights as citizens and to obtain and use legal identity documents. Paralegals also track each case to build an empirical understanding of how relevant laws are implemented and community learning about the importance of civil documentation and the process of applying those documents.

Community history and context

Approximately 300,000 Bihari Urdu speaking camp dwellers have been living in 116 camps of 13 regions in urban settings across Bangladesh. In 1947, India was partitioned into two country-India and Pakistan. That partition forced the religious minorities of both countries to leave their ancestors' homes and take shelter in Pakistan or India to protect and promote their religion, culture, language and economic interests. The Urdu speaking Muslim minority of the Indian provinces of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orisha and West Bengal migrated to the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

In 1971, East Pakistan revolted against the rule of West Pakistan and fought a 9-month war of liberation, which resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh in 16th December 1971. A small section of the Urdu speaking community played an anti-liberation role by siding with the Pakistan army and therefore, at the end of the war Biharis became victims of the situation and were forced to abandon their homes, business, properties and employment. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) built large and small settlements Camps all over in Bangladesh and to provide shelter, food and medical support to the displaced Biharis. These settlements, approximately 116 in number, are commonly known as Bihari camps. Residents were in effect stateless, without identity documents to recognize citizenship in any country.

However, in 2008, the High Court of Bangladesh confirmed that the Urdu-speaking camp dwellers are Bangladeshi citizens, and this landmark verdict raises a hope among the young Urdu-speakers ending of decades-long struggle with statelessness. The landmark decision was the result of filing a writ petition by 11 camp residents on behalf of the whole community. After this 2008 verdict, the Election Commission complied with court orders to enroll camp residents in the national voter lists and issue national identity cards.

Due to lack of mass awareness on the High Court landmark verdict among the general people and government official, the camp dwellers have not only been deprived from their civil and political rights but also from their socioeconomic and cultural rights. The Urdu speaking camp dwellers are yet to enjoy the citizenship rights and have been facing difficulties to get their national identity card, enroll in voter list, passport and access to basic services provided by government and non-government service providers.

Considering their deprivation and sufferings to have full access to citizenship rights, since June 2013, in partnership with Namati Council of Minorities have been working to promote their citizenship rights.

Legal empowerment approach through community paralegal

In order to bridge between law and real life of the Urdu speaking communities in the country, we have been providing paralegal legal support through six community-based paralegal centers in Dhaka (Mirpur and Mohammadpur), Mymensingh, Khulna, Chittagong, and Saidpur. Through this project Camp dwellers and others who have questions or need on legal support and civil documentation come to our paralegal centers. 14 youths are assigned as community-based paralegals to provide knowledge on law and government information to the community people and providing skills like negotiation, community education, approach of organizing and advocacy to seek concrete solutions to instances of injustice.

In addition, they are serving as a dynamic “frontline” of justice service providers, paralegals focus on empowerment. They are not only working for resolving client’s legal issues but also building each client capacity that they can deal with problems related with access to justice in future. Paralegals do outreach, every day door to door visit, organize community group meeting and community advocacy. Setting in the paralegal centers, paralegals provide information about the law, prepare applications in the paralegal center, accompany the clients to government office to apply and they do follow up on delays and denials of the cases.

Project Goals and Objectives

The project’s goal is to promote effective citizenship for Bihari-Urdu-speaking Bangladeshi in Bangladesh. The primary objectives of the project are to:

- Build an effective model for using legal empowerment approaches, specifically community-based paralegals, to facilitate the acquisition and use of identity documents to gain access to rights and opportunities part of the core content of citizenship;
- Develop robust evidence on the relationship between identity documentation and statelessness, including current government practice and discrimination that may contribute to an ongoing lack of effective citizenship, despite the possession of identity documents;
- Encourage use of this evidence for advocacy efforts related to gaining access to effective citizenship rights, if necessary.

PARALEGAL ACTIVITIES AND ASSISTANCE

Door to Door Outreach

Every day paralegals are doing outreach inside the Camp. Every Paralegal are assigning at list visit 5 families daily and disseminate the 2008 High Court Judgment, importance and uses of civil documentations. Through the daily outreach paralegals reached 8,278 families and empowered 18,176 males and 18,578 females.

June-2023 to May-2024 (outreach)				
Area	Families	Male	Female	Total
Mirpur	2050	4269	5121	9390
Mohammadpur	1160	2026	2195	4221
Chittagong	2160	5123	5004	10127
Saidpur	1146	2612	2468	5080
Mymensingh	750	2110	1670	3780
Khulna	1012	2036	2120	4156
Total	8278	18176	18578	36754



Assist to the Camp dwellers to achieved civil documentations:

Paralegals are assisting to the Camp dwellers to successfully achieved civil documentations including birth and death certificates, commissioner certificate, national identity card, passport, trade license, old age allowance, disable allowance, general dairy in police station, opening the bank account, educational and health support and Covid-19 vaccine registration support.



Activities Summary table June-2023 to May-2024

Working Area's	Birth Certificate	Councilor Certificate	NID Card		Passport		Trade License		General Dairy	Adult Allowance	Bank Account	Disable Allowance	Health Support	Death Certificate	Education Support	Waris Certificate	Affidavit	Covid-19 Vaccine	Pregnancy allowance	Marriage Certificate	TIN	Total
			New	Re-New	New	Re-New	New	Re-new														
Mohammadpur	442	93	6	8	2	0	3	5	1	88	6	1	73	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	732
Mirpur	106	123	37	27	42	18	0	0	4	0	5	1	151	1	36	0	0	42	0	2	0	595
Saidpur	188	62	4	5	4	0	2	0	2	0	13	0	14	1	23	3	1	0	11	0	0	333
Chittagong	239	36	54	60	3	0	11	0	0	0	3	0	48	4	23	2	0	17	0	0	3	503
Mymensingh	105	33	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	1	0	8	2	0	0	0	0	3	6	0	167
Khulna	51	41	2	0	6	0	1	0	2	0	21	0	122	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	255
Total	1131	388	103	100	57	18	26	5	9	88	49	2	416	8	95	5	1	59	14	8	3	2585

Case Study

Name: Md. Pappu

Address: Community Center Camp, Mohammadpur

Contact: 01716355025

Health Support: Financial assistance for treatment from the Department of Social Welfare of Bangladesh

Paralegal: Fatema Akter



Mr. Mohammad Pappu a resident of Center Community Camp, Mohammadpur, Dhaka. He has four members in his family. He used to work as a Barber and earn USD 6 per day. In 2021 he was identified as kidney patient and doctor said that his both kidneys almost damaged and he needs regular treatment including regular dialysis.

After his illness he was unable to work and completely on the bed and family faced difficulties to manage daily expenses and his treatment cost, later on his son drop out from school and started a salesmen job in a shop and earn small amount USD 2 per day.

After a year, doctor suggested him to start twice dialysis in a week which was too expensive for his family. One day his wife discussed the matter with her brother-in-law and he advised her to meet Mrs. Fatema Akter community paralegal and then she met Fatema Paralegal and briefly described her husband health condition.

Paralegal Mrs. Fatema informed her about the Social Welfare support for the critical patient under “Support Services for vulnerable group” and paralegal promised her to get this support for her husband from Social Welfare office and for that paralegal collected all the documents of Mr. Mohammad Pappu and applied for the treatment support in Social welfare.

After verifying the documents, the Department of Social Welfare completed their investigation and in between, Paralegal Mrs. Fatema and Mr. Pappu's wife Mrs. Roksane visited the Department of Social Welfare several times to find out the current status of their application.

Finally after six month the Department of Social Welfare approved their application and provided financial assistance worth Tk.50,000/- (USD 431) in cash for his treatment which greatly contributed to the patient's medical expenses including dialysis cost.

Mr. Pappu's family is very happy to receive financial assistance and others support and advice from paralegal Mrs. Fatema.

Case Study

Name: Tania Akter

Address: Patgudam Camp, Mymensingh

Contact: 01955357176

Health Support: Disability Support

Paralegal: Nesear Ahmed



Tania Akter is an 8 years old girls child by born physically disabled a resident of Patgudam Camp Mymensingh. She can't sit, stand and move. Tania's father is unemployed and her mother is working as cook in a Madrasha and she earns very small amount as salary which is not enough to manage family expenses and for the treatment cost of Tania.

One day her mother attended a community group meeting organized by Paralegal Mr. Nesar Ahmed and after the meeting Tania's mother requested to paralegal to arrange a wheelchair for Tania. Paralegal drafted a story of Tania and attached a picture and submitted to an NGO named "Human Rights and Advocacy Forum" in Mymensingh.

The President of HRAF posted on his facebook and appeal to his friends and family members to provide a wheelchair to a physically challenge girl Tania. After posting the appeal post for the wheelchair a leady professor responded him and said to purchase a wheelchair for Tania and she (Professor) paid Taka 8,000/- USD 68 for the wheelchair.

Tania and his family are happy to get wheelchair and now paralegal is preparing documents of Tania for her birth certificate and after getting the birth certificate paralegal will apply for disable allowance for Tania in Social Welfare office.

Case Study

Name: Marjina Akter
Address: Islambag Camp, Saidpur
Contact: 01734994548
Health Support: NID Card & Health Support
and Pregnancy Allowance.
Paralegal: Md. Rubel



Mrs. Marjina Akhtar a resident of Islambagh Camp, Saidpur. One day she attended a community group meeting organized by paralegal Mr. Rubel in Islambagh Camp. After end of the meeting she informed to paralegal that her national identity card is blocked and the authority said she will not get the NID card. Several time she visited the government office and the authority said you can't get your NID card but they did not mention the reason however, outside the government office some brokers asked her a big amount of bribe which was not possible for her to pay bribe to the brokers so that she was assumed that she will not get her NID card ever.

Paralegal Mr. Rubel said to her, "don't worried I will help you to get your NID card" please come to our paralegal center with documents then I will go with you to government office.

Next day she came to center and submitted all relevant documents to paralegal and then on the other day paralegal and the client went to the government office. Paralegal introduce himself at office and wanted to know status of the NID card. The authority checked and found that she has applied her NID card twice so that her NID card process is blocked. The client first applied for NID card from her parents house before marriage and after marriage she applied again from her in laws house so that it has been blocked and now she has to withdraw her first application then her second application's process will be start.

Another day paralegal along with the client went to government office and mobilized the officer to find out the previous file and canceled it from server. After 2 hours of searching finally officer found the file and delete the data of first application and then on the same day started the second application process and after 3 months she got her NID card.

The client is pregnant and she has learned from paralegal group meeting regarding government health support for the pregnant women and she requested again to the paralegal to apply for her and after a week paralegal submitted her documents to the word councilor office to get health support for the client.

Community Group Meeting:

Paralegals organize community group meeting and invite 10-15 women, men, boys and girls to attend the community group meeting. In the group meeting they disseminate the message of 2008 high court judgment and realize them how Biharis have ended their statelessness through the high court. They also discuss about the importance and uses of the civil documentations in their daily life. In this project year from June 2023 to May 2024 paralegals organized 504 community group meetings in which 7,560 camp dwellers have



**Community group meeting on importance and uses of the civil documentations
June-2023 to May-2024**

Area	No. of GM	Beneficiaries				Total
		Male	Female	Boys	Girls	
Mohmmadpur	108	0	950	140	530	1,620
Mirpur	144	0	1520	120	520	2,160
Saidpur	72	120	615	90	255	1,080
Chittagong	108	105	935	180	400	1,620
Mymensingh	36	15	375	45	105	540
Khulna	36	0	425	30	85	540
Total	504	240	4,820	605	1,895	7,560



Community advocacy meeting on importance and usage of civil documentation

In June 2023 to May 2024 we have organized 24 advocacy meeting in 6 paralegal centers and invited 20 community members in each advocacy meeting consist of male, female, boy's and girl's together in each center. We have enhanced their knowledge about civil documentation themselves without anyone's help and inspired them to assist others to get these civil documentations. Community people expressed their gratitude to Council of Minorities and NAMATI for their initiative and hard work for the camp dwellers. They also requested intensely to continue this project because civil documentations are one of the key elements for the camp dwellers to claim them self as Bangladeshi Citizens. The paralegal services became the voice of their silence. Total 24 advocacy meetings were organized by paralegals.



Advocacy meeting June-2023 to May-2024

Area	No. of A.M.	Beneficiaries				Total
		Male	Female	Boys	Girls	
Mohammadpur	4	5	45	11	19	80
Mirpur	4	3	50	8	19	80
Chittagong	4	10	45	11	14	80
Saidpur	4	6	44	16	14	80
Mymensingh	4	3	47	15	15	80
Khulna	4	7	51	11	11	80
Total	24	34	282	72	92	480



Pro-bono Workshop for capacity building of the community

In June 2023 to May 2024 we have organized 24 Pro-bono workshops in 6 paralegal centers and invited 40 community members consist of 20 women and 20 boys & girls together in each center. We have educated them to learn the making of civil documentation themselves without anyone's help and inspired them to assist others to get these civil documentations. Community people expressed their gratitude to Council of Minorities and NAMATI for their initiative and hard work for the camp dwellers. They also requested intensely to continue this project because civil documentations are one of the key elements for the camp dwellers to claim them self as Bangladeshi Citizens. The paralegal services



Workshop on civil documentation and its usage June-2023 to May-2024

Area	No. of WS	Beneficiaries (Probono)			Total
		Women Group	Youth Group		
		Female	Boys	Girls	
Mohammadpur	4	40	15	25	80
Mirpur	4	40	17	23	80
Chittagong	4	40	19	21	80
Saidpur	4	40	20	20	80
Mymensingh	4	40	18	22	80
Khulna	4	40	20	20	80
Total	24	240	109	131	480



