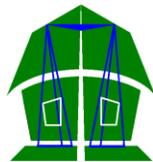


# **Activity Report**

**Reporting Period:**

**July 2024 - June 2025**



**Madaripur Legal Aid Association**  
**Madaripur.**

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## Introduction:

Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) is a right based organization in the legal and human rights sector of Bangladesh, with a vision for establishing peace, justice and harmony in the community through various initiatives. MLAA upholds the philosophy that justice must be easily and equally accessible to every citizen in a society governed by the rule of law. MLAA believes in integrity, justice, governance, and accountability in the way it works with oppressed, vulnerable and deprived people.

Since its inception in the year 1978, MLAA has traversed a long way to minimize gross social injustices that have gripped the poor and marginalized sections of the society of our country. For establishing a just society where rule of law and human rights are upheld MLAA has been providing free legal assistance to the poor, activating UP judicial systems (Village Courts & Arbitration Council), replicating Madaripur Mediation Model (MMM) involving community participation to resolve civil and compoundable criminal disputes locally and implement a wide range of awareness and capacity building activity for raising awareness of community people. MLAA strives to ensure access to justice and human rights for all people irrespective of sex, cast, creed, religion, race through informal justice process and formal justice system.

MLAA initiate advocacy for reforming policies in formal and informal judicial system to stir the sensibility of the policy makers and duty bearers with the assistance of other right based organizations.

For strengthening institutional capacity MLAA has developed different policies, manuals & modules and also enhanced its capacity in technical and managerial aspects. MLAA has a well-equipped Training Centre to transfer knowledge and skills to the local community and other stakeholders. MLAA has been working for implementing its access to justice and human rights program in Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalganj district and replicating the same program in other parts of the country.

## **1) Progress of the Objective:**

Access to Justice and empowerment of disadvantaged people, particularly women & Children is the main objective of the organization with a vision to create a just society where rule of law and human rights is upheld. The projects of MLAA have been complementing to improve quality of life of the disadvantaged people through establishing their human, legal and women rights, for peaceful coexistence. MLAA upholds the philosophy that justice must be easily and equally accessible to every citizen in a society governed by the rule of law. If access to justice is limited to the rich, the poor and disadvantaged segments of the people, particularly women, would not have any stake in the rule of law. The project strives to extend benefits to the disadvantaged, particularly women in the rural communities to ensure their access to justice and establish human rights.

Through effective implementation of various activities of different projects a positive change has been coming out to make justice easily and equally accessible for its target communities through increase accountability of the duty bearers, accessing justice for the poor marginalized and vulnerable people through well functioned local justice systems, establish legal rights of disadvantaged and empower women to raise voice against the rights violations and to functional effective judicial system for protect the human, legal and women rights of the disadvantaged. The overall result of the above initiatives has been contributing for a just society which has been complementing the objective of the project.

MLAA's main concern goes mostly on ensuring accessibility for the underprivileged within the formal justice system. At the same time, the organization sets its concentration to the non-formal dispute resolving criterions also. It is to mention that the organization's thematic and strategic focus is on to resolve disputes through reformed *shalish* at local level and the other UP judicial systems, like activating Village Court (VC) & Arbitration Council (AC), which is an initiative to promote justice at the grass root level. We know that, the main purpose of the project is to develop and support the major stakeholders to achieve the project objective. MLAA has been working to policy advocacy and lobbying to create access to the formal and informal justice system for the poor and disadvantaged people specially women. MLAA had keen eyes on its target and achievements. The activities organized were not merely for fulfilling the target. MLAA strived to ensure quality to all of those beside quantity. Furthermore, MLAA kept continuing scrutinizing the achievements against the objective.

## **Values**

MLAA believes in integrity, justice, governance, and accountability in the way it works with oppressed, vulnerable and deprived people. MLAA recognizes respects and upholds equality and equity among women and men.

## **Vision**

A just society where rule of law and human rights is upheld.

## **Mission**

MLAA will strive to ensure access to justice and legal rights for all people irrespective of sex, cast, creed, religion, sexual orientation, race and those affected by HIV/AIDs through the informal justice processes and formal justice system.

## **Main Objective:**

Access to Justice increased empowerment of disadvantaged people, particularly women & Children.

## **Brief Overview of achievement:**

### **The Core Program:**

Providing legal service through formal and informal and justice sector and restore human rights is the main approach of MLAA. In formal justice sector MLAA provide legal advice, assist poor, especially women and children to get justice in formal courts and refer justice seekers to Govt. Legal Aid offices. As alternative, through core project MLAA has been continuing its efforts to active informal justice sector, such as, enhance mediation system, activate Village Courts, Arbitration Council to resolve dispute locally. Also undertaking advocacy initiatives to reform law and policy in formal and informal judicial system involving key players, such as lawyers, local administration, local government and UP representatives to discuss common problems and develop a common strategy for addressing the issues. Particularly through the advocacy unit of MLAA has been working to reform Conciliation of Disputes (Municipal area) Board Act 2004 to create opportunity to resolve petty disputes of Municipality area. Awareness and capacity building of community people is also an important activity of MLAA.

Through the Free Legal Aid program, a total of 8 cases are pending from previous years in Madaripur. No any case is pending in Shariatpur and Gopalganj districts. Among

these 8 cases almost all are civil cases and it has been taking long time for disposing. During the reporting period 6 cases were referred to the DLAC. These cases are under supervision of MLAA.

During the reporting period under the local justice program MLAA facilitated to resolve 123 disputes through mediation. A total of Tk. 40,19,500/- was recovered as maintenance and *Denmohor* (dower), compensation for damage of crops, compensation against injuries and price (approximate) of recovered land.

During the reporting period MLAA received 163 applications in Madaripur Powrashava. Out of total applications 84 disputes were resolved and at present 78 disputes are pending.

To enhance the capacity of duty bearers MLAA conducted different meetings and workshops for CBO members, activists and College students. Through these meetings participants are encouraged to enhance local disputes resolution system of their own.

MLAA arranged a workshop on Mediation for local mediators (CBO members) on 28/6/2025 with a participation of 48 mediators from 3 Union Parishad of Madaripur Sadar Upazilla.

MLAA also arranged a workshop on Conciliation of Dispute(Municipality Area) Board Act-2004 and Mediation for local mediators (CBO members) of Madaripur Powrashava on 27/02/ 2025 with a participation of 41 members from 9 Wards of Madaripur Powrashava.

MLAA organized a human rights workshop with 45 college students from 5 colleges as a part of celebration of human rights day on 10 December 2024. In workshop with college students participants shared about Human and Women Rights and increase them to act as a human rights activist to assist rights victims with the assistance of MLAA.

MLAA arranged coordination meetings to create awareness among the staff and stakeholders on local justice system, human rights and gender issues. In the reporting period MLAA organized 12 central meetings with its staff to review the performance, sharing the achievement and problem faced.

To ensure proper implementation of on-going activities MLAA has a Monitoring cell working with specific responsibility. The cell monitors the performance of the activities done under the projects of MLAA. It was found that, in the decision making process 85.5% mediation decision made through party's opinion, 9.25 % decision taken by the board which was made by the parties' opinion and 5.25 % decision was imposed. It has also seen that Madaripur Mediation Model (MMM) has been adopted and implemented in maximum mediation sessions. In the mediation session 31.50% women has been

taken part as president of those sessions. 92% beneficiaries have been satisfied over the decision taken in the mediation.

### **Supplementary Project:**

The project “Access to Justice” is an important and effective initiative to provide legal assistance to the poor, helpless, and marginalized communities in four districts of southern Bangladesh, which are .Madaripur, Shahriatpur, Faridpur and Gopalganj. The aim of the project is to improve the Govt. legal Aid service and other justice service providers would be responsible and accountable for providing legal services. In addition the project will build capacity of justice providers for providing legal aid services, especially for vulnerable and marginalized sectors.

## **Description of project performance**

### **Core Program: Access to Justice and Human Rights**

#### **Project Description:**

Increase access to justice to empower disadvantaged people, particularly ‘women’ and protect human rights for all is the objective of the project ‘Access to Justice and Human Rights’. To achieve the objective the project has accommodated different activities to make justice accessible for the poor and vulnerable group.

Through effective implementation of various activities of the project ‘Access to Justice and Human Rights’ a positive change has been coming out to make justice easily and equally accessible for its target communities through increase accountability of the duty bearers, accessing justice for the poor marginalized and vulnerable people through well functioned local justice systems, establish legal rights of disadvantaged and empower women to raise voice against the rights violations and to functional effective judicial system for protect the human, legal and women rights of the disadvantaged. The overall result of the above initiatives has been contributing for a just society which has been complementing the objective of the project.

The major components of the project are: 1) enabling people to access formal courts through free legal aid, 2) empower people to resolve their disputes at the community level through the Madaripur Mediation Model (MMM), 3) empowering local government to activate local justice through the Village Court (VC) and Arbitration Counsel (AC), 4) awareness raising on legal aid and human rights to aware people, particularly women.

#### **Activity Area:**

Districts : 3 (Madaripur, Gopalganj, Shariatpur)  
Upazilas : 15 (all Upazilas of Madaripur, Gopalganj, Shariatpur districts)

**Stakeholders:**

The disadvantaged rural people, the poor, particularly women and children are the main stakeholder. Secondary stakeholders are UP representatives (chairmen and members), village leaders, panel lawyers and their associates, journalists, government officials and NGO activists.

**Description of the Performance****Advocacy**

MLAA's advocacy unit have been taking some initiatives and have been gathering recommendations from grass root level to convey these up to policy level to influence policymakers with an aim to change essential policies on legal issues. To create a positive change in the policy level, the advocacy unit of MLAA has been continuing its advocacy initiatives to reform law and policy in formal and informal judicial system. MLAA facilitates advocacy by inviting key players in the justice system, such as lawyers, local administration, local government and UP representatives, CBO members to discuss common problems and develop a common strategy for addressing the issues. MLAA has been working to reform Conciliation of Disputes (Municipal area) Board Act 2004, and prepared a new draft of law 'Nagar Adalot' to create opportunity to resolve petty disputes of City Corporations.

**Result achieved**

During the reporting period MLAA had arranged local level workshops with Mayors, Councillors to identify the loophole of the Conciliation of Disputes (Municipal area) Board Act 2004 and which will be placed in policy level to reform the law with an aim to increase its pecuniary jurisdiction and other identified issues. MLAA prepared a draft law on Conciliation of Dispute (municipality area) Act-2004 with necessary reform. MLAA also prepared a new draft of law 'Nagar Adalot' to create opportunity to resolved petty disputes of City Corporations. MLAA has been working to draw attention of policy makers for amending Arbitration Council Law under local govt. to minimize gaps and limitations identified from different seminars & workshops.

**Access to formal and informal justice system****Free Legal Assistance**

MLAA provides legal aid services to the disadvantaged, in particular the poor women and children, to establish their rights with positive impact of change their socio-economic status.

MLAA have a panel of Lawyers who are experience and knowledge of law. MLAA provide a Lawyer if necessary clients need to file case in Court. In addition to providing a lawyer, MLAA engages advocate's clerk who is responsible for liaising between the clients and also assists the lawyer with basic tasks. MLAA also provides transportation facilities (for both the client and witnesses) and assist for collection of necessary documents and medical support if necessary. To enhance services of Govt. Legal Aid, MLAA also referring cases and been assisting DLAC.

At present the project has been assisting justice seekers referring cases to the Govt. Legal Aid offices with an aim to strengthen Govt. Legal Aid and widely accommodate people and inform them with the service of Govt. Legal Aid. During the reporting period, through the Free Legal Aid program of MLAA, a total of 8 cases are pending from previous years in Madaripur. These cases were filed before few years. No any case is pending in Shariatpur and Gopalganj districts. Among these 8 cases almost all are civil cases and it has been taking long time for disposing. During the reporting period 6 cases were referred to the DLAC. These cases are under supervision of MLAA.

### **Court Case**

Duration	Previous Pending	Case field	Total	Case disposed	Present pending	New cases referred to DLAC
July 2024 to June 2025	8	0	8	0	8	6

### **Disputes resolution through Mediation**

Madaripur Mediation Model (MMM) is known as MLAA's mediation model as because MLAA modernized the traditional "Salish" into an unbiased, participatory, and rights sensitive approach to conflict resolution. The MMM enables disputant parties to resolve family conflicts, community disputes, land disputes and minor criminal offences at a nominal cost and with minimal delay. In each Union parishad of Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalganj districts MLAA formed Community Based Organization (CBO). Members of CBOs were provided training on Mediation technique. MLAA have no direct worker in Union level, but trained CBO members are assisting disputants to resolve disputes. Disputants usually prefer MMM method for CBO members followed the methods, taking technical assistance from MLAA.

During the reporting period under the local justice program MLAA facilitated to resolve 123 disputes through mediation. A total of Tk. 40,19,500/- was recovered as maintenance and *Denmohor* (dower), recovery of money, compensation for damage of crops, compensation against injuries and price (approximate) of recovered land. In dispute resolution systems (mediation), 90% applicants, were directly benefited most of them are women.

## Mediation

Duration	Previous Pending	Application received	Total	Mediation done	Ref. to court through DLAC	Dropped	Total	Present pending
Jul 2024 to Jun 2025	20	147	167	123	6	5	134	33

### Application received (Nature wise)

Family matter	Torture (Minor)	Second Marriage	Dowry	Social Dispute	Financial Dispute	Land Dispute	Miscellanies	Total
40	02	01	75	01	09	11	08	147

### Mediation done (Nature wise)

Family matter	Torture (Minor)	Second Marriage	Dowry	Social Dispute	Financial Dispute	Land Dispute	Misc.	Total	Remarks
35	02	00	60	01	08	10	07	123	

### Benefit of resolved disputes through Mediation

Result of Disputes		Amount in Taka
Total Disputes Resolved	123	0
No, of Beneficiaries	1103	
Marriage Continued	80	
Divorce executed	15	
Recovered of Maintenance & Denmohor / Divorce Executed including.		29,79,500/-/-
Compensation Recovered	02	1,40,000/-
Land Recovered	03/18 dcm	
Money Recover in replace of Land		9,00,000/-
<b>Total</b>		<b>40,19,500/-</b>

## Dispute Resolve by Arbitration Council of Pourashava

The Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961 empowers each Union Parishad, Municipality and City Corporation to constitute an Arbitration Council to resolve family disputes relating to divorce, polygamy and maintenance. The Arbitration Council consists of Chairman/Mayor and two members. Each party nominates one member. The Chairman of UP/Mayor of the Pourashava and City Corporation acts as the Chairman of the Arbitration Council. If impartiality of UP Chairman/Mayor is challenged by any party, if the UP Chairman/Mayor belongs to any religion other than Islam, if the UP Chairman/Mayor is a party and if UP CVhairman/Mayor is unable to chair the Council, another Member/Councilor of the Union Parishad/Pourashava/City Corporation will be appointed to chair the Council.

During the reporting period MLAA received 163 applications in Madaripur Powrashava. Out of total applications 84 disputes were resolved and at present 78 disputes are pending.

Previous Pending		Application Received		Total		Resolve		Reject		Total		Remaining	
F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0	0	135	28	135	28	67	17	1	0	68	17	67	11
0		163		163		84		1		85		78	

## Capacity Building

Access to Justice for all is the main focus of MLAA. To contribute for providing assistance to access to justice, awareness of all agencies of justice providers including justice seekers is essential. Capacity building is a continuous process, which is achieved through enhancement of organizational skills and expertise and the ability to adapt to changing needs of time and circumstances. MLAA conducts training for its own staffs. Similarly, it organizes trainings and workshops for the advanced community people, CBOs, UP Chairmen and members, UP Secretaries, Paralegals, Panel Lawyers, Court staffs, Judges and police authorities. The above individuals are brought under various types of trainings so that the community people may enjoy a positive result regarding their rights issues get justice. Other organizations frequently request MLAA to provide them with training.

MLAA formed Community Based Organizations (CBO) at Unions from the rural civil society members of the community which include UP representatives, teachers, women health workers, religious leaders, social activists, NGO workers, women group leaders and other social leaders from the wards and unions. There are two fold of CBO committee: ward level CBO and central level CBO. MLAA has been keeping regular

conduct and follow-up with CBO members who are the main working force in the community.

MLAA conducted one workshop for CBO members from 3 Union Parishad of Madaripur Sadar Upazilla. 48 CBO members participated from different Union Parishad. Of them 24 were female and 24 were male. The workshop was a forum to exchange views among the participants on problem identified to conduct and resolve disputes through mediation. In the workshop the technic of mediation was discussed and also shared the responsibilities of CBO members to well conduct mediation.

MLAA also arranged a workshop on Conciliation of Dispute (Municipality Area) Board Act-2004 and Mediation for local mediators (CBO members) of Madaripur Powrashava on 27/02/ 2025 with a participation of 41 members from 9 Wards of Madaripur Powrashava. The main discussion was to activate Powra Board law and how to make it more useful for the citizen of Powrashava. In addition to this, technic of mediation was discussed in the workshop.

MLAA organized a human rights workshop with 45 college students from 5 colleges as a part of celebration of human rights day on 10 December 2024. Out of total participants 25 were female and 20 were male.

In the reporting period MLAA organized 12 central meetings with its staff to review the performance, sharing the achievement and problem faced.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring provides feedback to the program and its management. The monitoring cell of MLAA has taken significant steps to monitor and assess project progress in relation to the indicators set in the project log frame. It conducts sample survey to assess project progress and identifies issues related to project context and factors. MLAA applies various techniques for survey and analysis. It was found that, in the decision making process 85.5% mediation decision made through party's opinion, 9.25 % decision taken by the board which was made by the parties' opinion and 5.25 % decision was imposed. It has also seen that Madaripur Mediation Model (MMM) has been adopted and implemented in maximum mediation sessions. In the mediation session 31.50% women has been taken part as president of those sessions. 92% beneficiaries have been satisfied over the decision taken in the mediation.

### **Lesson learned**

- Equity and equality of women still is a social taboos though women are taking social space than earlier and in dispute resolution process they (women) involving themselves as a part of raising voice.
- Use of mediation services is a well mechanics to resolve petty dispute and reduce the levels of fatwabaji deterring local religious fundamentals from administering their own brand of justice. But still it is difficult to increase involvement of people of good manner and women in mediation.

- Proper and frequent monitoring from Government side to oversee the legal activities of Union Parishad, such as, Village Courts and Arbitration Council.
- Due to the lengthy process of the existing laws, Complex legal framework and overall absence of congenial court environment for the poor and women in particular delayed in disposing cases.
- A long time is needed to see the reflection of local level advocacy at the national level.

### **Impact**

It is difficult to assess the multidimensional impact of the activities of a right-based organization on the target group such as in their economic, social, political and cultural rights. The economic impacts on the beneficiaries were discussed earlier. However, discussing the socio-cultural impacts of the project is far more difficult as there are multiple indicators and the experts in the field have not formally used the applications of these indicators.

MLAA has also been advocating for reformation and new enactment identifying limitations and short-fall of laws focused the issues at national level in collaboration with other likeminded organizations. As a result of the relentless MLAA awareness campaign and advocacy initiatives in collaboration with other organizations, there was an expansion of pecuniary jurisdiction of the VC, and the shalish gaining institutional form through the Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Act 2003, which now mandates an option of settling civil disputes through mediation. In 2006 MLAA organized a national seminar on 'Village Courts (VC): its viability & limitation' at Press Club, Dhaka to draw the attention of policy makers towards necessary reforms for overcoming obstacles. As a part of that initiative Bangladesh government revised the Village Courts Ordinance 1976 and enacted Village Court Act in 2006 and the financial jurisdiction of the courts was increased from Tk.5000 to Tk.25000. Afterward financial jurisdiction was increased Tk.75000 according to the amended act in 2013.

MLAA has been working to reform Conciliation of Disputes (Municipal area) Board Act 2004, which will be placed in policy level to reform the law with an aim to increase its pecuniary jurisdiction and other identified issues. MLAA prepared a new draft of law 'Nagar Adalat' to create opportunity to resolve petty disputes of City Corporations to resolve petty disputes of City Corporations. MLAA has been working to draw policy makers for amending Arbitration Council Law under local govt. to minimize gaps and limitations identified from different seminars & workshops and necessary recommendations will be placed to the policy makers to overcome these gaps.

Tackling issues of poverty reduction, gender equality and women's empowerment: Through MLAA's work both women's awareness of their own rights and the attitude towards women during participation in the social activities has changed for the better. Women are better placed to raise their voices in defending their rights and dignity, through increased participation in the local justice systems, strong and consistent participation in CBOs, and in AC/VC related activities.

Domestic violence is the most pervasive violation of rights of women and children. Due to MLAA's intervention, incidents of domestic violence have decreased considerably. Poor people, particular women, feel safer and secure as they are able to access justice at formal courts.

Through the courts, justice seekers receive their economic and property entitlements without costs, and gain redress in dowry, divorce and polygamy related cases. MLAA also refer cases to Govt. Legal Aid office and collaborating DLACs to improve their services, particularly in Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalganj districts.

Measuring Mediation Successes: Mediation avoids the negative impacts of litigation in cases of minor disputes and utilizes participatory roles to solve problems, which ensures social harmony and enhanced confidence of the parties. Resources and time saved by rural people through mediation are utilized to better their economic conditions.

Use of mediation services has reduced the levels of fatwabaji deterring local religious fundamentals from administering their own brand of justice. In fact, MLAA has succeeded in penetrating the corrupt and imbalanced rural power dynamics through facilitating spontaneous participation of the rural people.

As a result of various trainings and workshops, CBO members and UP representatives are confident in carrying out their duties and obligations efficiently, rural people have increased awareness of local justice systems, and the Judicial authority, Upazila and District-level administration are cooperative towards MLAA's service. The rural locals, particularly the poor sections, prefer to appear before UP for getting legal redress on minor disputes with minimum efforts, time and expenses.

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## **Other project**

### **Name of the project:**

Access to Justice

### **Goal:**

To improve the Govt. legal Aid service and other justice service providers be responsible and accountable for providing legal service.

### **Objectives:**

Objective # 1: To aware people about their rights and make them conscious about enforcement their rights.

Objective #2: To strengthen and expand different pathways of justice available at local level.

Objective #3: To build capacity of justice providers for providing legal aid services, especially for vulnerable and marginalized sectors

## **Activities:**

a) Project inauguration Meeting, b) Form Community Based organization (CBO), c) Workshop with CBO members about their role and legal aid service. d) Courtyard meetings on Govt. Legal Aid Services and basic entitlement of poor, e) Public Hearing with beneficiaries of legal aid service, f) Observation of National Legal Aid Day at District Level, g) Observation of National Legal Aid Day at Upazila Level, h) Prepare and distribute leaflet and pamphlet on Basic rights & Legal Aid Services on Govt. Legal Aid, i) Facilitation of Bi-monthly Meeting of UZLAC, j) Facilitation of Bi-monthly Meeting of UPLAC, k) Facilitation of Six monthly coordination mechanism between DLAC-UZLAC-UPLAC, l) Workshop on necessary law & Mediation with DLAC, UZLAC & UPLAC Member, m) Training on necessary law & Mediation with CBO Members, n) Refresher Training for CBO members on Mediation, o) Gender training for staff of the project, DLAC Members, UP representatives and Advanced women CBO members, p) Disputes Resolution through Mediation, r) Coordination Meeting with Justice Provider (Judges, DLAC Member, Court Staffs, Lawyer and Medical Officer) for providing legal services, s) Workshop with Panel Lawyers of DLAC, s) Workshop with Clerks of DLAC Panel Lawyer. t) Quarterly meeting with DLAO and Legal Aid Clients.

### **Primary beneficiaries:**

Disadvantaged & poor, particularly women and children, minority communities (Hindu, Christian), Dalits, Shelter home households, disable and marginalized groups.

Others are elected representatives of local govt., Civil Society members, CSOs, Lawyers, Lawyers Clerks, Journalists, Teachers, Students, Religious Leaders, CBO Members, Women leaders, Judges, members of DLAC, UZLAC, UPLAC etc.

## **Project Area**

District: 04:

Faridpur, Gopalganj, Madaripur and Shahriatpur Madaripur,

Upazila: 12:

Faridpur District: Faridpur sadar, Sadarpur, Nagarkanda

Madaripur District: Madaripur Sadar, Rajoir, Kalini.

Gopalganj District: Gopalganj Sadar, Kotwalipara, Muksudpur.

Shahriatpur District: Shariatpur Sadar, Naria, Janjira

Union: 80

## **Activity description:**

### **1. Project Inauguration Meeting at District Level**

During the project period, three inauguration meetings were organized at the district level in three districts. The purpose of these meetings was to inform relevant

stakeholders, particularly justice provider agencies about the project's objectives, activities and expected results, as well as the roles and responsibilities of justice providers.

The meetings were held in the conference rooms of the respective District Judges. Participants included Judges, Lawyers, District Magistrates (DM), DLAC members, and representatives from civil society.

A total of 66 participants attended: 53 male and 13 female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Project Inauguration Meeting at District Level	53	13	66	

## 2. Formation and Orientation of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

In collaboration with local communities, Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) facilitated the formation of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in 80 Union Parishads under 12 Upazilas within four districts. Each Union formed one CBO with elected representatives who were not members of UPLAC, along with women leaders, local elites, teachers, NGOs, shelter home residents, and members of marginalized communities (such as Dalits).

A total of 67 orientation meetings were conducted. Project staff discussed the goals and objectives of the project, the purpose of forming CBOs, and roles and responsibilities of CBO members. They also provided information on the formation and functions of the Union Parishad Legal Aid Committee (UPLAC).

A total of 1,945 participants attended: 1,291 male and 654 female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Community Based organization (CBO) formation and Orientation meeting	1291	654	1945	

## 3. Workshops with CBO Members on Their Roles & Legal Aid Services

The aim of these workshops was to increase CBO members' awareness on government legal aid services and key laws. It also enables them to: Support community members in accessing legal aid, Refer cases to DLAC, Assist in resolving compoundable disputes locally, Organize courtyard meetings to raise awareness.

During the project period, three workshops were organized with CBO members. A total of 80 participants attended: 59 male and 21 female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
3 Workshops with CBO Member about their role & Legal Aid Services	59	21	80	

#### 4. Courtyard Meetings with Villagers & Shelter Home Members

The objective of the courtyard meetings was to raise awareness about women's legal rights and access to legal aid at the grassroots level. A total of 80 courtyard meetings were conducted at Union level.

Using flipcharts, discussions covered human rights, women's rights, ways to protect rights, MLAA's role in legal aid and alternative dispute resolution (ADR), such as mediation, Village Courts, and Arbitration Councils, Services of UPLAC, UZLAC, and DLAC were also highlighted.

A total of 1,594 participants attended: 8 male and 1586 female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Courtyard meetings with Member of Different Villagers & Shelter homes on Basic rights & Legal Aid Services at UP level	8	1586	1594	

#### 5. Facilitation of Bi-Monthly UPLAC Meetings

The objective was to activate Union Legal Aid Committees (UPLAC) and strengthen their motivation to ensure better service delivery, particularly for poor and marginalized women.

During the project period, 18 bi-monthly meetings were held within 18 Union Parishads, with 248 participants in total: 130 male and 118 female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Facilitation of Bi-monthly Meeting of UPLAC	130	118	248	

## 6. Workshop with Panel Lawyer of DLAC

The objective of the workshop was to encourage the lawyers about the services of DLAC and ensure the access to justice of poor justice seekers. During the project period 01 meeting was organized with 20 Lawyers in Goplagonj district. Through these meeting Panel Lawyer of DLAC motivated and inspire for providing better services for the poor and women of the targeted community.

Total 20 participants attended in said workshops. Out of them 18 were male 02 were female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Workshop with Panel Lawyer of DLAC	18	02	20	

## 7. Workshop with Court Clerks of DLAC Panel Lawyer:

To encourage the clerks of panel lawyers about the services of DLAC and ensure the access to justice of poor justice seekers is the aim of these meeting. Most of the clients of govt. legal aid service receivers are poor, particularly women. They are unaware and are not familiar about the complex procedure of the court. Role of Lawyer's clerk is very important to run a case in the court. This workshop is forum to motivate them and make empathic to the poor clients to provide case clients proper guidance.

During the project period the project arranged 02 workshops with clerk of DLAC panel lawyer of Madaripur and Gopalganj district Judge Court. Total 40 participants attended in said workshop. Out of them 39 were male and 1 was female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Workshop with Court Clerks of DLAC Panel Lawyer	39	1	40	

## 8. Meeting with DLAC Officer and Legal Aid Clients:

Clients who come to receive govt. legal aid services have to face lot of problem due to unaware about legal procedure and atmosphere of court campus. Sometimes it needs to share the problems with DLAO. With an aim to enhance satisfaction of the clients and build strong bridge with DLAO and justice receivers the event is to create an open space to share the problems of the clients to the DLAO. The forum is also a platform of open discussion how justice seeker can get more assistance from DLAC, how DLAO can solve the problems & can provide more intensive assistance and how clients can get proper assistance from Court Assistance.

During the project period project organized 05 meetings with DLAC Officer and Legal Aid Clients. The meetings were held at the Gopalganj District Legal Aid Office rooms. District Legal Aid Officer (DLAO) also preside the meetings. These meetings were an avenue to raise the problems and address the problems to get proper solution.

A total of 05 meetings were arranged and a total of 50 clients were participated in these meetings. Out of them 11 were male and 39 were female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Meeting with DLAC Officer and Legal Aid Clients	11	39	50	

### 9. Staff orientation

The project organized a day long staff orientation program at head office of MLAA with all project staffs. Senior officer of MLAA and project Coordinator facilitated the orientation program. Goal, objective, project area, activities of the project were discussed in the orientation meeting. Total 17 staff members attended in this workshop. Out of them 14 were male and 4 were female.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
Staff orientation	14	4	18	

### 10. Monthly Progress Meetings on Govt. Legal Aid activities with project staffs: District Meeting:

#### a) District level Monthly Staff Meeting

The project organized 16 monthly Meetings within project period. Senior Management of MLAA and all project staffs were participated in these meetings.

Project activities, target and achievement, legal issue, identify the problems and way to solution, budget and implementation process were discussed in these meetings. A total of 14 participants participated in the meetings.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
a) District level Monthly Staff Meeting	10	4	14	

## **b) Central level Monthly Staff Meeting**

The project organized 04 monthly Meetings in central level within project period. Senior Management of MLAA and all project staffs were participated in these meetings.

The main issues of the meeting were project activities, target and achievement, legal issue, identify the problems and way to solution, budget and implementation process. A total of 14 participants participated in the meetings.

Name of activity	Total Participants			Remarks
	Male	Female	Total	
b) Central level Monthly Staff Meeting	10	4	14	

## **Key Achievements**

1. Legal Protection Groups (LPGs) were formed and networks established with community members.
2. CBO orientation programs created opportunities for dialogue on project objectives, roles and responsibilities of CBO members, enhancing their knowledge and capacity to assist victims.
3. Strong relationships were built with District Judges, DLAC officers and other justice stakeholders.
4. Community members became more aware of project activities and justice-seekers have increased their approach to Upazila Managers and asked project staffs to get greater utilization of DLAC services.
5. Client-DLAC officer meetings generated valuable feedback and raised recommendations to improve legal aid services.
6. Collaboration with DLAC officers enhanced their engagement in delivering legal aid services.
7. Marginalized people accessed justice through DLAC services without cost or harassment.

## **Conclusion**

The Access to Justice Project proved a valuable and effective initiative to protect human rights and provide legal assistance to the poor, helpless, and marginalized communities in four districts of southern Bangladesh.

The project started in October 2024 and quickly gained support of service receivers and Legal Aid officials. It was unfortunately discontinued in January 2025 due to geopolitical factors, specifically a circular issued under the direction of U.S. President Donald Trump regarding USAID assistance.

Despite this setback, the project successfully established important networks and awareness within a short time. It is hoped that in the future, other donor organizations will continue such initiatives to ensure that vulnerable communities can access justice and enjoy the protection of their legal rights.

