



Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project

Interim Report

(January 2020 – March 2021)

DCI-ASIE/2015/372-228



Local Government Division
Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page No.
1. Summary and context of the action	5
1.1 Description	5
1.2 Background and area of the project intervention	6
Executive summary	9
2. Activities carried out during the reporting period	12
<u>Activity Result 1.1</u> Capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level improved and key skills strengthened to enable Village Courts in new target Unions to function effectively by the end of project implementation	12
<u>Activity Result 1.2</u> Legal and policy framework revised to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of VCs and local justice mechanisms in CHT	25
<u>Activity Result 1.3</u> GoB monitoring capacity for evaluating VCs and other local justice mechanisms' performance is strengthened and systematized	41
<u>Activity Result 2.1</u> Beneficiaries in project areas understand the roles and functions of the VCs and other local justice mechanisms and are able to access their services when required	48
<u>Activity Result 2.2</u> Evidence-base and knowledge-management on VCs and local justice mechanisms increased	55
3. Challenges and Lessons Learned	66
4. Updated action plan (January 2020 to December 2020)	71
5. Communication and visibility	73
6. Cross-cutting issue – gender	75
7. Monitoring and evaluation	76
8. Way forward	76
9. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	76
10. Financial report	76

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AACO	Assistant Accountant cum Computer Operator
ADC	Additional Deputy Commissioner
ADM	Additional District Magistrate
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AVCB	Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BCC	Behavior Change Communication
BCSAA	Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BHDC	Bandarban Hill District Council
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
BPA	Bangladesh Police Academy
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
BTKS	Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
CDU	Capacity Development Unit
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHTRC	Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council
CIRDAP	Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific
CJ	Chief Justice
CSO	Civil Society organization
CSV	Comma-Separated Values
CYM	Courtyard Meeting
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DCo	District Coordinator
DDLG	Deputy Director, Local Government
DF	District Facilitator
DLAO	District Legal Aid Officer
DMIE	Decentralized Monitoring, Inspection and Evaluation
DTP	District Training Pool
DVCMC	District Village Court Management Committee
ERD	Economic Relations Division
ESDO	Eco Social Development Organization
EU	European Union
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
GO	Government Order
GRAUS	Gram Unnayan Sangathon
HQ	Headquarter
HR	Human Rights
IC	Individual Consultant

ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IG	Inspector General of Police
IMED	Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division
IPA	Innovation for Poverty Action
JATI	Judicial Administration Training Institute
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude and Perception
KM	Kilometer
LGD	Local Government Division
LGSP III	Local Government Support Project-III
MIE	Monitoring, Inspection and Evaluation
MLAA	Madaripur Legal Aid Association
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOLGRD&C	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives
MoLJ and PA	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
MoPA	Ministry of Public Administration
MP	Member of parliament
MT	Master Trainer
MTR	Mid-term Review
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NID	National Identity Card
NILG	National Institute of Local Government
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NLASO	National Legal Aid Services Organization
NPD	National Project Director
OC	Officer in Charge
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicators
PBI	Police Bureau of Investigation
PHQ	Police Head Quarter
PIC	Project Implementation Committee
PMIS	Project Management Information System
PMU	Project Management Unit
PNGO	Partner Non-Government Organization
PSA	Public Service Announcement
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PSD	Public Security Division
PVC	Polyvinyl chloride
RHDC	Rangamati Hill District Council
RPA	Responsible Party Agreement
RR	Resident representative
SID-CHT	Strengthening Inclusive Development in Chittagong Hill Tracts

SMS	Short Messages Service
SSL	Secured Socket Layer
TOC	Tender Open Committee
TOT	Training of Trainer
TUS	Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha
TVC	Television Commercial
UC	Upazila Coordinator
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UNOSSC	UN Office for South-South Cooperation
UP	Union Parishad
USD	United States Dollar
UVCMC	Upazila Village Court Management Committee
UZ	Upazila
VC	Village Court
VCA	Village Court Assistant
VCMC	Village Court Management Committee
VCNIS	Village Court Management Information System
WDF	Women Development Forum

1. Summary and context of the action

1.1 Description

- i. Name of the beneficiaries of grant contract: The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
- ii. Name and title of the contact person for the Project: Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh
- iii. Name of partners in the action: Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRDandC)
- iv. Title of the Action: Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II
- v. Contract number: DCI-ASIE/2015/372-22831
- vi. Start date and end date of the reporting period: 01 January 2020 - 31 March 2021
- vii. Target country or region: Bangladesh
- viii. Final beneficiaries/or target groups (including numbers of women and men):

Target group(s):

The target beneficiaries of the project are 15,120 locally elected representatives and officials, 10,800 village police officials in 1,080 Union Parishads, 27 Deputy Directors of the local government and 128 Upazila Nirbahi Officers.

Final Beneficiaries: The final beneficiaries will be the people of 1,080 Unions of plain land and people of 121 UPs of three CHT districts of Bangladesh. They will be directly benefitted from a more accessible, efficient, speedy, and accountable justice delivery system at the local level.

1.2 Background and area of project intervention

1.2.1 Brief description of the context in which the action was formulated

Extensive case backlog in the lower (formal) courts in addition to long, cumbersome, and complex procedures mean that a large proportion of Bangladeshis, especially the poor, are deprived of their access to justice. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) passed the Village Courts Act 2006 to address the serious need of protecting the majority of rural population through rule of law but it was not functional and effective. As a result, citizens had limited confidence to take their disputes to the Village Courts.

The Local Government Division (LGD) under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRDandC) implemented a pilot project titled Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh (AVCB) Project (2009-2015) in 351 Unions of Bangladesh with financial and technical support from the European Union (EU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The goal was to improve access of the rural people to justice through Village Courts in those 351 Unions. The pilot project provided support for building the capacity of service providers, creating demand for Village Courts through awareness-raising initiatives, policy reform actions, and strengthening the institutional monitoring system.

The success of the AVCB project in the pilot phase prompted UNDP, EU, and GoB to scale up the project and launch a follow-up phase in January 2016, targeting 21 million people in 1,080 Unions. The traditional justice system plays a vital role in dispensing social justice in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) as well and the tribal community rely on it primarily. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the system, with the aim to enhance access to justice mechanisms in the CHT. As a result, the Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II Project expanded its activities in 121 Unions of three CHT districts on 10 October 2019.

The overall objective of this project is to contribute to improving access to justice for disadvantaged and marginalized groups in 1,201 Unions of Bangladesh. The specific objectives are to make local authorities more responsive to justice needs and offer appropriate legal services in the form of a well-functioning Village Court in CHT and to empower local people, especially women, poor and vulnerable groups to resolve their disputes at the local level quickly, economically and transparently.

1.2.2 Implementation modality of the Project

This project is implemented under the National Implementation Modality (NIM) with the support of the Project Management Unit (PMU), headed by the National Project Coordinator. The day-to-day activities are being implemented through three components, namely Programme Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E), Knowledge Management, and Operations. Furthermore, four NGOs, experienced in dispute resolution and/or supporting Village Courts, were hired by UNDP under the Responsible Party Agreement (RPA) to implement a number of activities in plain land areas. They were primarily responsible for providing support to Union Parishads (UPs) in running Village Courts and engaging the community through capacity

building and outreach at the grassroots level. Contracts with the four NGOs ended on 09 February 2021. For CHT areas, three local NGOs with working experience in CHT are responsible for providing capacity-building of traditional leaders who work at the grassroots level and for raising awareness within the community. Out of the three NGOs, two have already been hired for Bandarban and Khagrachari districts but the remaining one was not hired due to the low financial capacity (yearly turn-over rate) of the NGO. UNDP has re-tendered by splitting the requirements into smaller scope of work and allowing larger NGOs to apply for more than one lot.

The National Project Director (NPD) appointed by the LGD is responsible for administering the day-to-day implementation and management. In addition, two committees - the Project Steering Committee (PSC¹) and the Project Implementation Committee (PIC²) - are providing oversight functions. Two PSC and two PIC meetings were held during this project period.

1.2.3 Geographical coverage of the Project

The project is working with 1,200 UPs³ (1079 UPs of plain land and 121 in CHT) in 154 Upazilas (sub-districts) under 30 districts of 8 divisions. The distribution of Unions by division and districts is given in the table below:

Table-01 Distribution of working UPs by Divisions, Districts and Upazila				
Sl. #	Division	District	No. of Upazila	No. of UP
1	Barisal	Bhola	5	47
		Barguna	4	25
		Patuakhali	4	46
2	Chattogram	Chandpur	5	44
		Chittagong	5	46
		Cox's Bazar	6	36
		Noakhali	6	46
		Rangamati	10	50
		Bandarban	9	38
		Khagrachari	7	33
3	Dhaka	Faridpur	6	35
		Gazipur	5	26
		Gopalganj	3	32
		Madaripur	4	43
4	Khulna	Bagerhat	6	42
		Khulna	6	41
		Satkhira	4	47

¹The PSC provides policy guidelines for project implementation and approval of implementation decisions. The local government secretary of the MoLGRDandC chairs the PSC

²The PIC is chaired by National Project Director (NPD), who is responsible for supervising the day-to-day implementation and management of project activities. The PIC monitors and evaluates the progress of the program, and guides project personnel in the preparation of the annual work plan, etc

³Could not start intervention in one UP of Charfassion Upazila of Bhola district due to non-existence of UP bodies to run the Village Courts

5	Mymensingh	Jamalpur	4	38
		Mymensingh	3	33
		Netrokona	3	28
6	Rajshahi	Naogaon	6	49
		Pabna	5	37
		Sirajganj	5	45
7	Rangpur	Gaibandha	4	51
		Kurigram	6	47
		Panchagarh	5	43
		Rangpur	5	41
8	Sylhet	Moulvibazar	4	41
		Sunamganj	3	20
		Sylhet	6	50
	Grand Total	30	154	1,200

Executive Summary

The project has supported the Local Government Division (LGD) in functionalizing Village Courts (VCs) in 1,079 Union Parishads (UPs), capacity-building of VC's service providers (UP representatives and officials), reviewing legal framework, increasing awareness of the role and function of Village Courts, and strengthening GoB's monitoring capacity. In addition, it also helped to enhance the traditional justice system in three CHT districts and explored the possibility of Village Courts in CHT areas doing action research.

The project has successfully activated Village Courts in 1079 UPs. These have provided efficient and effective legal services to 2,32,000 rural people, including women and vulnerable populations, till March 2021. Out of this number, 70,923 individuals accessed Village Court services and obtained a quick remedy with high satisfaction during the current reporting period. About 97% of the Village Court users were satisfied with their services received. It took on an average of 23 days to resolve a dispute and court users spent only 161 takas (USD 2) on average as court fee, conveyance, and food cost to get services from Village Courts⁴.

A significant improvement was witnessed in women's participation in the Village Courts by breaking a century-old tradition where women rarely participated in the traditional dispute resolution system. Women's involvement in Village Court's decision-making process as panel members have increased to 18% in March 2021 from 2% in 2017. According to the report of *Impact Study Measuring Impact in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, women now participate in the VC sessions as panel members, applicants, defendants, witnesses, and audience.

With project support, a proposal for Village Courts Act, 2006 amendment has been submitted to the LGD ministry, which has started the amendment process aiming to enhance VCs' efficiency and effectiveness by removing limitations of the present VC Act. Once it is approved, people's access to Village Courts will increase in line with the enhancement of pecuniary jurisdiction and inclusion of family issues into the Act. Village Courts have received 11,458 cases between July 2017 to March 2021 from district courts, demonstrating that this system contributes to reducing case backlogs in the district courts. Of the total referred cases, 3,036 were referred during the reporting period.

VC services have made remarkable contributions to the social and economic benefits within the rural community. Project supported Village Courts have recovered BDT 1,897.20 million (USD 22.45 million) as compensation from the respondents between July 2017 to March 2021. The applicants used this money for multiple purposes such as treatment, meeting family expenses, doing small business, land recovery, etc. (Sources: Village Courts User Survey, November 2020). Out of the total recovered amount, BDT 605.52 million (USD 7.17) was recovered and provided to applicants during this reporting period. VCs have restored peaceful relations between neighbors and family members, as cited in the Mid-Term Review (MTR) report.

⁴ Village Courts Users Survey, conducted in November 2020

The project continues to raise awareness at the grassroots-level through courtyard meetings, community meetings, multimedia shows, rallies, and distribution of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials. It has delivered messages on Village Courts to over 10 million rural people through its grassroots-level awareness-raising activities till March 2021. In addition, the project has reached almost 164 million people through social media (4 million) and mobile SMS (160 million). All Information Education and Communication (IEC) /Behavior Change Communication (BCC), visibility materials including banners, stickers, newsletter, display corners, reports, presentations, and media coverage, have promoted the partnership between the Government, EU, and UNDP.

With the project's support, the Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (MIE) wing of the Local Government Division (LGD) developed and implemented the Decentralized Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (DMIE) system in 1,079 Union Parishads (UPs). As a result, 27 districts have started to develop quarterly Village Court performance reports covering 1,079 Union Parishads (UPs) of 128 Upazilas and sent those to LGD following the DMIE system, which helps to ensure the quality of Village Courts services.

The project compiled policy documents, including a compendium of CHT laws and regulations and customary laws and practices of the three tribes (Chakma, Marma, and Tripura). A training pool consisting of 126 (100 male and 26 female) members has been formed through Training of Trainer (ToT) to provide capacity-building training to around 5,000 traditional leaders in 2021. Two NGOs hired in Khagrachari and Bandarban districts are now fully equipped with the required knowledge to implement grassroots-level capacity-building and awareness-raising activities.

The project has equipped different traditional institutions such as the Circle Offices, Headman Network Offices, Karbari Network Offices, and Women Headman & Karbari Network Offices with ICT equipment and other logistics support to establish a monitoring system on case documents and reporting system. Furthermore, 2,238 traditional courts (2,046 Karbari and 192 Headmen) have been equipped with logistics support to deliver justice to the community.

The AVCB Phase II project has created strong demand of the VCs to the neighboring Union Parishads and beneficiaries. The government has demonstrated its support to this approach by enacting VC Rule in 2016, expressing willingness to amend the VC Act further, issuing different directives to support the functioning of VCs, contributing USD 0.75 million to extend the project activities up to June 2022, and providing UP-level staff support by deploying the Account Assistant cum Computer Operator (AACO). The government has also expressed willingness to scale up this project across all Unions of Bangladesh and readiness for full takeover of Village Courts after phase-out. The Government also has distributed additional cash to activate Village Courts outside of the project's working areas.

According to the exit strategy, the project has handed over the Village Courts activities from the project-supported Village Courts Assistants (VCAs) to UPs officials (AACOs and UP Secretaries) in February 2021 and provided capacity-building support to AACOs and UP

Secretaries. A total of 425 (Male 353 and Female 72) AACOs were recruited in 425 Unions out of 1,079 Unions under the project area till the reporting period. The recruitment of AACOs in 375 UPs is under process, and the recruitment process of AACO in 141 UPs was postponed due to writ petitions pending in High Court, which is being contested by the Local Government Division. These recruits will also be trained under the project to work as the bench clerk (*peshkar*) of the Village Court.

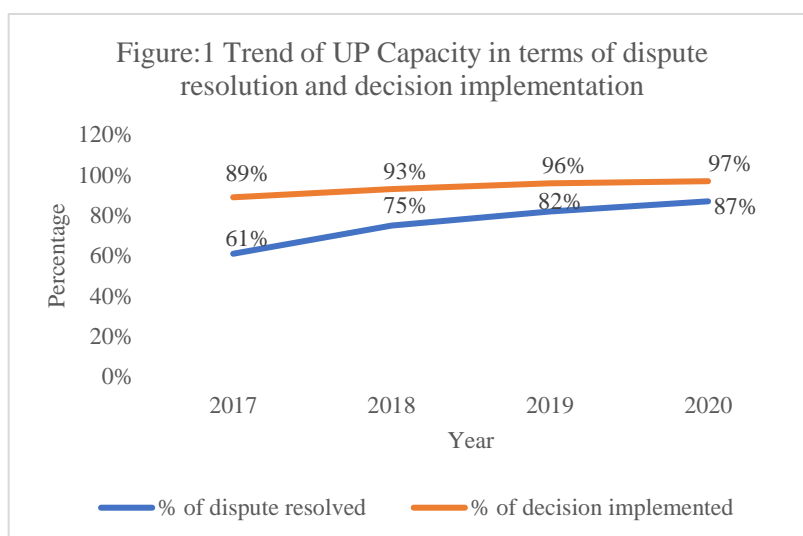
Apart from the nCovid-19 pandemic, the project encountered several other challenges, including the late release of GoB funds (parallel financing) to ensure implementation of related activities, transition of VC's responsibility from project recruited Village Courts Assistants (VCAs) to Account Assistants Cum Computer Operators (AACOs) and UP Secretaries, hiring of local experienced NGOs to provide support and conducting action research. In the plainland areas, the project will terminate its field activities in June 2021 and will be engaged up to December 2021. To that extent, the project will provide support to amend the Village Court Act, 2006 (Amended in 2013), strengthen case referral system, monitor and assess the role of AACOs in assisting UPs, pilot the VCMIS, and strengthen Government systems to monitor Village Court performances. On the other hand, in CHT areas, the project will continue field level activities up to April 2022 and will provide support to strengthen the traditional justice system in CHT areas and conduct action research in 15 UPs of CHT areas. Furthermore, the project will be engaged in developing the next phase of the AVCB project by deploying a formulation mission. Special efforts will be given in getting approval from necessary project documents in coordination with the EU, LGD, ERD, IMED, and Planning Commission so that the next phase can start by January 2022.

Activities carried out during the reporting period

Activity Result 1.1: Capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level improved, key skills strengthened to enable Village Courts in new target Unions, and local justice mechanisms in CHT to function effectively by the end of the project implementation.

The capacity development initiative for elected-UP representatives and VC officials has resulted in the effective application of the law and regulations during VC proceedings. In areas with the AVCB Phase II program, UP officials were found to be more knowledgeable about the VCs and spent more time on resolving disputes through the VC system. Records were also kept regarding disputes resolved through the VC system, and the records maintained were of a higher quality.

Figure-01 shows that the skill of service providers on dispute resolution and implementation of VC's decisions is gradually increasing in the project areas. Being capacitated by the project support, Village Courts in the project areas have resolved more disputes and implemented more decisions in the reporting period than that of the previous three years.



One hundred twenty-six (126) traditional leaders in CHT areas who received ToT on “Case Management and Documentation on Traditional System” are now ready with manuals to provide training to grassroots-level traditional leaders. The project has produced two types of training materials on case management and documentation (Module for Master trainers and Traditional leaders) and one orientation manual on the traditional justice system for the elected public representatives.

a. Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)

Table- 02 Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 1.1 Capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level improved and key skills strengthened to enable Village Courts in new target Unions and local justice mechanisms in CHT to function effectively by the end of the project implementation</i>				
1.1.1 UPs equipped with <i>ejlash</i> (court bench), court	0	1080	1079	One Union Parishad in Bhola district has not

Table- 02 Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
forms and registers and have trained Village Courts Assistants (VCAs)/AACOs			(1079 UPs are equipped with trained VCAs, VC forms and registers and ejlash (Court Bench)	been oriented due to its territorial dispute, which is pending in the honorable High Court.
1.1.2 # of national training institutes who have updated information on VC issues in their regular training curriculum/ syllabus.	1	4	2 (NILG and JATI)	Progress status of integration into two training institutes has explained under Activity 1.1.5
1.1.3 # of District Training Pools established	0	27	27	-
1.1.4 Officials and representatives of Union Parishads trained on Village Courts functions (disaggregated by gender)	0	15,120	28,700 Female: 6,050	28,700 includes refresher training to the same group
1.1.5 % UP representatives and officials in AVCB project areas who gave correct responses to 9 key knowledge questions.	0%	55%	-	Impact study (End-line Survey) is going on through third-party to measure the status
1.1.6 % UPs in the project area which correctly maintain all VC forms and registers.	0	100%	Monitoring reports indicate that registers and forms are correctly maintained by VCA	Same as above
1.1.7 AACOs trained to take over role of Village Court Assistant (disaggregated by gender)	0	1080	Trained 368 (Male:308, Female:60) AACOs 425 (Male 353 and Female 72) AACOs	The LGD has planned that the position of Village Courts Assistant (VCA) created by the Project will be taken over by the Accounts Assistant Cum Computer Operator (AACO) and

Table- 02 Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
			recruited out of 1,079	accordingly went for recruitment, but recruitment of this position in few districts are currently on hold by a High Court's Order following a Writ Petition.
1.1.8 % of resolved cases which are enforced	80	80%	94% (Mar '21)	-
1.1.9 % of cases heard in AVCB area which are within the VCs jurisdiction and in compliance with the correct procedure	0	100%	Field visit findings indicate that cases that were reported under VC's jurisdiction	Impact study (End-line Survey) is going on through third- party to measure the status
1.1.10 In CHT, # of traditional leaders, local CSOs, local administrations, judiciary, legal professionals, and other relevant actors that are knowledgeable about local dispute resolution systems and norms	0	5,362	126 (ToT provided to 126 traditional leaders)	The project has created a pool of master trainers to train the traditional leaders at the ground level, but the traditional leaders' training could not be organized due to nCovid-19 outbreak and delay in the NGO hiring process.
1.1.11 Proper documentation in support to the functioning of local justice mechanisms is in place	0	50% of project areas of CHT	No progress	End line study will be conducted in 2022 through third-party to know the status
1.1.12 Training material including other materials related to CHT is in place.	0	Yes	Two types of training materials on case management and documentation	End line study will be conducted in 2022 through third-party to know the status

Table- 02 Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
			(Module for Master trainers, and Traditional leaders) and one orientation manual on the traditional justice system for the elected public representatives has been developed.	

b. Description of the activities implemented during the reporting period

1.1.1 Equip UPs with necessary forms, furniture, *ejlash* (court bench), VCAs, etc.

At least 22 types of forms and registers, necessary furniture, *ejlas* (Court bench), and personnel (i.e., Village Court Assistants) are required for smooth delivery of Village Courts services. These include forms for recording cases, registering judgments, collecting court fees, issuing summons, etc.

During this reporting period, the project re-printed 21 different types of forms and formats and distributed to 1,079 Unions based on the requirement from each Union.

The project has provided targeted training to AACOs and mentoring to improve the knowledge and skills of all 1,079 VCAs and recruited AACOs. The project also provided administrative support to Union parishads (UPs) to run Village Courts with proper documentation and implemented awareness initiatives to create demand for the court's service.

Table-3 Brief information about types of VC forms distributed				
Sl	Name of the forms	Quantity distributed (set)	No. of pages in a set	Use of the forms
1	Form-1 (Application form)	1456	150 Leaves	To file a case
2	Form-2 (Case Register)	937	72 Leaves/144 pages	Use to record a case
3	Form-3 (Order Sheet of the case)	2634	120 Leaves	Use to record the order of the case

Table-3 Brief information about types of VC forms distributed				
Sl	Name of the forms	Quantity distributed (set)	No. of pages in a set	Use of the forms
4	Form-4 (Summon to the defendant)	2752	120 leaves	To issue a summon to the respondent
5	Form-5 (Summon to the witness)	898	120 leaves one side	To issue summon to the witness
6	Form-6 (Instruction to nominate panel member)	2119	120 leaves	For instructing to nominate VC panel member
7	Form-7 (VC panel member nomination form)	1532	120 leaves	For nominating VC panel member
8	Form-8 (Request letter to the panel member asking attend VC session)	1910	120 Leaves	To keep the record of the attendance of the VC panel members
9	Form-9 (Solemn-name)	1329	120 Leaves	For keeping a record of dispute resolution through Solemn-nama
10	Form-10 (Attendance sheet)	1290	150 Leaves	To keep the record of the attendance of the applicant, respondent, and the witness.
11	Form-11 (Case Slip)	1074	120 Leaves	To provide information about following the hearing date of the case
12 A	Form-12 (A- Decree or Order form)	778	120 pages	To issue a decree or order of the case
12 B	Form-12 (B- Decree and Order Register)	489	120 Leaves/240 Pages	To maintain documentation about decree or order of the case
13	Form-13 (Compensation Register)	470	120 Leaves/240 pages both side	To maintain a register of the VC compensated money

Table-3 Brief information about types of VC forms distributed				
Sl	Name of the forms	Quantity distributed (set)	No. of pages in a set	Use of the forms
14	Form-14 (Fees/ Fine receipt)	1349	Leaves: 50/100 Pages both side	To use in providing receipt against Fees/ Fine
15	Form-15 (Fees / Fine Register)	648	100 48 Leaves/96 pages both side	To maintain documentation about Fees / Fine
16	Form-16 (Dispatch Register)	977	108 Leaves	To use for registration of the UP-letter dispatch
17	Form-17 (Quarterly report of dispute received and resolved)	426	48 Leaves	Form-17, 18 and 19 will be used to monitor the progress of VC performance
18	Form-18 (Quarterly report of dispute received and resolved under Upazila level)	266	48 Leaves	
19	Form-19 (Quarterly report of dispute received and resolved under District level)	245	48 Leaves	
20	Form-20 (Recovery of compensation/ fine)	18	100 leaves	To use for maintaining recovery of compensation/fine
21	Form-21 (Transferring the case to the Criminal Court)	14	100 Leaves	To use for transferring the case to the criminal court

1.1.2 Train all key actors on roles and functions of Village Courts and mainstreaming gender issues

Table-04 shows that during the reporting period, the project provided training to 275 AACOs and 39 UP representatives on Village Courts and its function. District Training Pool (DTP) members of the respective districts conducted the training sessions. Three-day long training for the AACOs was carried out in Kurigram, Gaibandha, Naogaon, Pabna, Khulna, Gopalganj, Barguna, Gazipur, Moulvibazar, Sylhet, and Chandpur districts. Three-day long training courses were also held at Upazila level for newly elected UP representatives of Nurabad and Ahmedpur UP under Charfasson Upazila of Bhola district and Bhuria UP under Patuakhali Sadar Upazila of Potuakhali district.

Table-04 Number of key VC actors received training			
Name of the training	Male	Female	Total
Provide training to AACOs	233	42	275
Provide training to newly elected UP representative	30	9	39
TOTAL	263	51	314

Recommendations/findings from the participants during the training:

- Duration of the training needs to be increased.
- Newly appointed AACOs do not have enough knowledge of VC and its function. Trainings will provide guidance for them to run the court systematically.
- The project should organize refresher training so that AACOs can align the topics with their experiences.
- Charfasson Upazila is 80 KM away from district Head Quarter. Thus, most of the DTP members were not interested in facilitating the training at the Upazila level.

The project had initially planned to conduct training for newly recruited UP secretaries in the project areas. The National Project Director (NPD) issued a letter to all respective Deputy Directors, Local Government (DDLGs) of the project area for take stock of the total number of untrained UP secretaries during the reporting period. But the event has been deferred to April-June 2021 period due to the 2nd wave of the nCovid-19 across the country.



Training for AACO on Village Court

Workshop on AACO's involvement in Village Court:

The project organized 15 workshops on AACO's involvement in Village Court activities in Gazipur, Gopalganj, Panchagar, Naogaon, Moulvibazar, Chandpur, Khulna, Rangpur, Sirajganj, Gaibandha, Pabna and Kurigram districts under the guidance of local administration. The overall objective of the workshop was to ensure effective handover of Village Courts activities from project supported VCAs to AACO for sustaining the VC.

The specific objectives were as follows:

- To provide knowledge to AACO about their roles and responsibilities to run VC
- To strengthen the integration of AACO in Village Court activities

Deputy Commissioners of respective districts attended the workshops as chief guests and Deputy Director, Local Government chaired the workshops. National Project Director, AVCB Phase II project, and Additional Secretary, LGD attended those sessions virtually using the Zoom platform to provide his guidance and directions for facilitating the VC activities at the local level. In total, 830 participants (Female: 98, Male: 732) including Chairman, AACO/UP Secretary, media personnel, DTP members, and representatives from local administration, attended these workshops. The project organized these workshops following the government safety guidelines of nCovid-19 pandemic.



Workshop on AACOs involvement in Village Court

1.1.3 Sensitization of key stakeholders on gender and Village Courts

The project organized one district-level sensitization workshop on gender and Village Courts in Cox's Bazar with 44 men and 15 women participants. The workshop had discussions on



Sensitization workshop on Gender and Village Court

gender equality and its relevance to the Village Courts' functioning, challenges that poor and disadvantaged women and men faced while accessing VC services, and women representation in the VC decision-making process. The workshop also discussed the roles and responsibilities of the respective stakeholders in promoting gender-responsive VC services.

In addition, the project also conducted 103 workshops with women UP members during the reporting period to raise awareness of women leaders about their roles and responsibilities during the Village Court trial session and to mobilize poor women to seek justice through Village Courts. 3,331 participants attended the total number of workshops of which, 2,535 were women.

1.1.4 Establishment of clear and systematic coordination mechanisms with Upazila and District authorities

Project Reflection Workshop at Central Level:

The project organized a day-long ***Project Reflection Workshop: Towards a Sustainable Way Forward*** on 4th March 2021 at the Hotel InterContinental, Dhaka. The workshop's overall objective was to contribute to ensuring the sustainability of the project by implementing an institutional monitoring system, involving AACOs in Village Courts functions, and documenting the lessons learned for effective phasing out of the AVCB Phase II project.

A total of 222 participants from DDLG, UNO, representatives from different Ministries, media, UNDP, and EU attended the workshop.

Mr. Md Tajul Islam MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, attended the workshop as the chief guest and inaugurated the workshop. H.E. Ms. Rensje Teerink, EU Ambassador and the Head of Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh and Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh, participated as special guests. Mr. Helal Uddin Ahmed, Senior Secretary, Local Government Division (LGD), chaired the workshop.



Project Reflection Workshop

The workshop was divided into an inaugural and a technical session. The first session comprised of speeches from the respective chief guest and special guests as part of the inaugural session. The second part was focused on the presentations and open discussions on engagement of AACO/UP Secretary to run VCs, engagement of local administration in monitoring of VCs through DMIE system, and Village Court's Management Committee.

Remarks by the Guests:

Remarks by the Chief Guest:

Speaking on the importance of Village Courts in maintaining a peaceful life, the Chief Guest stated,

“everybody wants to live in peace, and I want to live in peace; however, to live peacefully, sole peacefulness does not work until or unless other’s happiness is ensured. This concept was realized more than a century ago. For instance, if Russia is not in a good situation, it would be a threat for America; ultimately, this will affect the whole world.” He also emphasized how learning from this project can be scaled up in all UPs of the country in the upcoming days.

Remark by the Chair of the event:

The Chair of the Inaugural session of the workshop said that although Village Courts achieved popularity over time, some challenges have still emerged. Even though few corrections were made in VC Act 2006 in 2013, the demands came to amend the laws yet considering the current context. Ministry is involved in continuous discussions and consultations with different stakeholders. He also added that LGD is committed to implementing VCs in all UPs and hoped that the EU and UNDP will continue their supports.

Remarks by the EU Ambassador and the Head of Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh:

H.E. Ms. Rensje Teerink, EU Ambassador and the Head of Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh in her remarks said that Village Courts can deliver justice with the ability to resolve disputes quickly with minimum delay and have the potential advantage of delivering and foreseeable results while reducing the backlog of cases in the formal courts.’

Remarks by the Resident Representatives, UNDP Bangladesh:

Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, the Resident Representative of UNDP Bangladesh stated that the Village Court is not only helping to settle disputes locally and very quickly in an affordable manner but also securing more participation of women to play active roles in dispute mechanism.

Sharing experiences from the field on Village Courts:

Ms. Most. Fuara Khatun, UNO, Atgharia, Pabna, and Mr. A K M Galib, DDLG, Mymensingh shared their practical experiences on Village Courts. Their observations were as follows:

- Human resources need to be increased considering the workload.
- Training of VC’s service providers should be continued.
- Campaign and awareness raising initiatives need to be increased.
- Performance of UP chairman on Village Courts/function of Village Courts can be added as a criterion of Chairman election and evaluation.
- Incentives need to be provided for VC activities through acknowledgment and encouragement.
- Most of the land-related cases are beyond the financial jurisdiction of VC. Thus, Village Court’s financial jurisdiction should be increased.
- Project activities need to be extended across the country.
- Monitoring of Village Courts involving local administration needs to be strengthened.

Annual Progress Review Meeting at District level:

The district administration of Sylhet organized an Annual Progress Review Meeting on 25 February 2020 to review the VC’s performance. Deputy Commissioner and DDLG attended

the workshop as Chief guest and Chair of the workshop respectively. The meeting's objective was to review the VC's performance, address the problems or difficulties faced by UPs to run Village Courts, review key learnings gathered by UPs, and capture the field's reflection to provide more support through proper communication and coordination.

In total, 83 people (Male: 77 and Female: 6) including representatives from the police department, District Legal Aid Officer, media personnel, representatives from NGO, members of District Training Pool, UNOs, chairmen from the project area, and representatives from partner organizations participated in the meeting.

Recommendations yielded from district level workshop:

- Orient representatives of police stations and sensitize them to refer cases that fall under VCs jurisdiction to Village Courts.
- Activate VC in all Unions beyond the project area.
- Amend VC Act, 2006 addressing the following areas- increase financial jurisdiction from BDT 75,000 (\$887.57) to BDT 150,000 (\$1775.14) and include family-related issues such as maintenance, early marriage into VC's law.
- Increase women's participation in VC's decision-making process through awareness-raising and capacity development initiatives.
- Continue awareness-raising initiatives on Village Courts through Union Parishads
- Organize the same event in each year.
- Recognize the chairman's contribution by awarding UPs for their performance on VCs by the district administration.
- Take necessary measures for continuation of capacity building initiatives after the end of the project.

Monthly Upazila Coordination meeting with AACO/UP secretary:

The project organized 256 monthly Upazila level Coordination Meetings with the AACOs and UP Secretaries aiming to increase their knowledge on reporting and documentation of VC's proceedings so that they can assist UPs in running Village Courts. The meeting discussions included overall functions, preparation of performance reports, and extracting information from different registers. The project prepared a guideline including budget, schedule, participant types, duration, etc. by considering lessons learned from the field and shared with the local administration for facilitating the meeting more efficiently.

Activity 1.1.5 Provide support to National Training Institutes (NILG, BCSAA, JATI, BPA, etc.) to update and develop training materials and ensure VC is integrated into regular curricula/syllabus, ensuring that gender and vulnerability issues are mainstreamed

With the policy advocacy supports, Village Courts issue has already been integrated into Judicial Administration Training Institute's (JATI) training curriculum. JATI discussed VC Act as 'Statute Review' in different trainings. Integration of VC issues into the Bangladesh

Civil Service Academy Administration (BCSAA), the Bangladesh Police Academy (BPA), and Police Training Institutes/Centers are currently underway.

UNDP's target to integrate VC's issues in the training curriculum of National Training Institutes could not be achieved in 2020 as planned due to closure of government offices amidst the nCovid-19 pandemic. This hindered required follow up and coordination protocols with respective ministries and training institutes.

As reported earlier, with UNDP's policy advocacy support, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) issued a letter to the respective department/training institutes to consider integrating the VC issue in their training curricula. Following the letter of the MoHA, the Police Head Quarter (PHQ) issued a follow-up letter to the respective training institutes of the police to know the status of VC integration. Similarly, the Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA) issued a letter to its respective training institutes to integrate the VC issues into their curricula.

1.1.6 Capacity development of traditional institutions, local CSOs and local administration in CHT as well as the judiciary, legal professions, and other relevant actors in CHT

Provide Training of Trainers (ToT) on Traditional System (Case management, and documentation):

During this reporting period, the project organized four Training of Trainers (ToT) on case management and documentation to strengthen the traditional justice mechanism. It was a five-day intensive training for future facilitators/resource persons who will be engaged with traditional leaders' capacity building across the CHT.



The key participants of the ToT were the representatives from CHT traditional institutions, representatives from NGOs,

representatives from Civil Service Organizations (CSOs) and Bar Associations, Women rights activists and elected public representatives who have advanced skills in facilitation and possess sound knowledge on administrative and juridical pluralism of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Eighty-five participants (66 male and 19 female) from different ethnicities attended the training from different Upazilas of three hill districts (Bandarban, Khagrachari, and Rangamati District). Before the final selection of the participants, various level consultations, i.e., district level, cluster level, etc. were carried out and finally, participants were selected based on following criteria:

- Skills and experiences on facilitation of sessions

- Sound knowledge of the CHT traditional justice systems and case management
- Enthusiastic intention for future engagement
- Knowledge of local language and understanding the power of different languages in CHT to overcome language barriers in training facilitation.

Provide training to the elected public representatives of Union parishad and Upazila Parishad on Traditional justice mechanism:

The project organized two batches of training at Bandarban to make the elected public representatives of Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad well informed about the CHT specific laws and regulations. Forty-one (Male-25, Female-16) elected public representatives from different Union Parishads of Bandarban district participated actively in these trainings. It is worth mentioning that public representatives from different ethnic groups, i.e., Marma, Tripura, Mro, Khyang, and mainstream Bengali communities attended these trainings. A training module with necessary methods, tools, and techniques, including relevant content was developed for this training in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

The training content includes historical context of CHT traditional justice systems, institutional and administrative features of the CHT, roles, and responsibilities of the traditional leaders, differences between traditional justice and formal justice system, traditional laws, customs and rituals, human rights, and gender situation in CHT, equality-equity, and justice, coordination between the traditional justice systems and local administration.



Orientation of elected public representatives on traditional justice mechanism

Challenges: It was challenging to keep the participants engaged throughout the training as most of them were public representatives and had other priorities they needed to meet urgently during the sessions.

Revision and print of TOT training manual of Traditional justice system:

A day-long workshop was conducted with the traditional leaders and circle chiefs to revise and finalize the manual's content. The training manual will guide the traditional leaders to conduct training sessions on the traditional justice system, case management, and documentation process. This ToT training manual is already endorsed by three circle chief offices. Endorsement of the manual from the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC) and 3 Hill District Councils (HDCs) will be taken through a workshop as per the advice of

CHTRC's chairman. The workshop will be organized as soon as the nCovid-19 outbreak situation improves.

Organize Planning/review Workshop:

An online Annual Work Plan (AWP) 2020 revision workshop was held with the project and relevant UNDP staff. The workshop's main objectives were to review the progress of project activities in 2020 and make a concrete plan for the remaining period of 2020 to achieve the target and develop a draft plan for 2021. The workshop discussed the progress of activities from January to September 2020, revised a workplan from October to December 2020 and shared the lessons learned challenges, and way forward, and also drafted a workplan for 2021. Based on the review workshop's discussion, AWP 2021, and other necessary documents, including the field visit plan, revised budget, activity plan, communication plan, and gender action plan were prepared.

Activity Result 1.2: Legal and policy framework revised to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of VCs and local justice mechanisms in CHT

The existing legal framework for Village Courts is the Village Court Act, 2006 (amended in 2013) that describes its functions, jurisdiction, and formation process. The project has drafted a proposal on the amendment of VC Act, 2006 (amended in 2013) after a series of consultations with district judiciary, police, UNOs, DDLGs, DCs, UP representatives, practitioners, academicians, NGO representatives, and beneficiaries for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the VC system. The draft proposal was finalized through a national-level consultation and submitted to the concerned ministry to start the amendment process.

Being sensitized through the consultation workshops in the districts with judiciaries, police and local administrations, a total of 11,458 cases had been transferred from district courts to Village Courts in project areas between July 2017 to March 2021, of which 3,036 had been transferred during this reported period. The upward trends of referred cases from the district courts to Village Courts (Referred case: 1,549 in 2017, 3,100 in 2018 and 3,773 in 2019) could be interpreted as a recognition that the Village Courts system is a reliable mechanism for resolving petty local disputes.

a. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)

Table- 05 Progress against OVI				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 1.2 Legal and policy framework revised to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of VCs and local justice mechanisms in CHT</i>				
1.2.1 Proposals developed to amend Village Court	No	Yes	VC rule enacted in Feb 2016.	

Table- 05 Progress against OVI				
Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
Act / Rules or Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to facilitate transfer of cases to Village Courts			Amendment proposal has been submitted to the ministry	
1.2.2 Proposal developed to facilitate transfer of cases to Village Courts	No	Yes	The project has generated recommendations through a series of workshops held with judiciaries and police.	-
1.2.3 Directive from IG Police to facilitate referrals to VCs in place issued.	No	Yes	Sent a proposal to the IG police by the Ministry of Home Affairs.	-
1.2.4 Practice Note from Chief Justice (CJ) on screening and referral of cases by District Courts in place.	No	Yes	Sent proposal to the MoLJ& PA by LGD highlighting the rationale of issuing Practice Note	-
1.2.5 Judicial officers authorized to participate in VC training and become part of District Training Pool	No	Yes	GOs issued by NLASO and MoLJ& PA with the necessary guidance of the Bangladesh Supreme Court	-
1.2.6 In CHT, existing customary laws and practices are reviewed, codified/ documented, and harmonized with other justice systems in CHT and the law (incl. gender rights)	0	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The customary laws and practices of Chakma, Tripura, and Marma communities have been reviewed and documented A Compendium of CHT laws and regulations has been compiled. A report on the harmonization of the local justice system is in progress. 	-

Village Court Ends Harassment: A Story of a Referral Case

Ms. Nazma Begum (Age 45) is an inhabitant of village Pouchbari at Baghbati Union of Sirajganj Sadar Upazila. She used to cultivate a small piece of land inherited from her father, where she grew different types of crops for her five-member family. Her monthly family income is 15,000 BDT (USD 178). As she became over-occupied with family engagements, she handed the land to her brother Mr. Zakir Hossain (Age 49) – a vegetable shop owner for cultivation in return for sharing the profit from sales of products grown on her land. Zakir is a low earner with a monthly average income of 12,000 BDT (USD 142). Both parties were living their life with hardship.

However, even though Zakir was growing multiple crops on the land, he did not share the promised profit with Nazma Begum. When requested to share the profit, Zakir used to come up with different excuses to evade profit sharing. On 05 June 2017, Nazma Begum approached Zakir and demanded her due profit. However, Zakir refused to pay, and then an altercation took place between them whereby Zakir and his wife Ms. Kolpona abused and assaulted Nazma Begum. They also threatened Nazma Begum not



Nasima is leading a normal life after resolving the case

to demand any profits moving forward. Being terrorized by the incident, Nazma Begum sought redress from the local elites for her injustice. Even though the local elites tried to mitigate the issue, Zakir and his wife didn't turn up for mitigation. Finding no other alternative, Nazma Begum filed a case alleging the incident at the local police station.

The case was referred to the magistrate court for due proceedings. Once the case commenced in the district court, Nazma Begum started to incur different expenses like lawyer's fees, travel expenses, etc. She spent around 30,000 BDT (USD 355) and visited the court four times. This expenditure turned out to be quite a burden on her. On the other hand, Zakir needed to visit the district court three times and spent 11,000 BDT (USD 130) for this case. After four months, the case was referred to Baghbati Union Parishad to resolve in the Village Court system.

The UP received the case two months after the order of referral was made and registered. Upon reporting the case, the disputants were informed to be present for appearance and share their comments on the case. Both parties decided to nominate members for the VC panel. Following the VC process, the hearing took place in the VC panel's presence, and the case was decided unanimously (5:0) in favor of Nazma Begum. The VC panel ordered Zakir to pay BDT 5,000 (USD 59) as compensation to Nazma Begum. Zakir paid the compensation amount to Nazma Begum within the stipulated time.

Nazma Begum is pleased with the Village Court system. She expressed that it was beyond her expectation that the dispute would be solved within such a short period without

incurring additional expenditures. She believes that the local community people should approach the Village Court system for resolving disputes more often.

Zakir stated that *“She is my younger sister. It was a heartfelt pain to run the case against her. However, I went to the district court several times and spent a lot of money. It was huge suffering to go there on the due date. The Village Court solved the issue promptly even though I had to pay 5,000 BDT (59 USD) as compensation. I did not know about the Village Court earlier. I felt relieved after the decision that I don’t need to go to district court again”*.



Respondent Zakir at his vegetable shop

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

Activity 1.2.1 Engage in advocacy and sensitization with relevant stakeholders on case referral

Consultation workshop with relevant stakeholders on case referral to incorporate early screening (district/national level):

The project organized two consultation workshops in Jamalpur and Kurigram, though it was planned to be conducted in 15 districts. The project could not carry out the workshops at 13 districts due to the dire situation of nCovid-19 pandemic across the country. A total of 111 persons (Women:14) were present in these two workshops. Officials from district judiciary, district administration, police personnel, and selected UP chairpersons of respective districts took part as well. The main findings and suggestions from these workshops held so far are as follows:



Consultation workshop on expediting coordination and case referral to Village Court

- The pecuniary jurisdiction needs to be increased.
- VC decision-making processes should be simplified.
- Monitoring tools should be developed for effectively monitoring the quality of the decision making by VC.
- Full time designated staffs should be engaged for VC.
- VC system should be made functional all over the country.

- The system should be developed so that the police can refer the disputants to Union Parishad for resolution through the VC system
- More awareness programming should be carried out.
- UP chair needs to be further trained on VC Act, 2006 and VC Rules 2016 along with ADR system.
- A link can be introduced with the UP office and district legal aid office so that UP chairs could take the assistance of DLAO in need of any legal support.
- Attendance of respondents after serving the summon should be ensured by making necessary amendments in the VC Act.
- Coordination with police regarding VC should be arranged so that VC triable cases can be sent to UP.
- UP chair should play an important role to resolve the disputes amicably to ensure harmony between the parties.
- At present, the police are under an obligation to refer even the VC triable cases to formal court due to Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Hence, policy advocacy with Police is required to refer the cases to Village Courts from police station.
- Provisions should be made to continue Village Court proceedings if respondents willingly disobey the summon.
- The integrity of the UP Chair is the first criteria to have a successful VC system. Hence capacity building and motivational initiatives need to be taken in this regards.
- UP Chair – Judiciary meeting should be held regularly.
- There should be a focal point for VC and District court for regular communication.

Activity 1.2.2 Lobby for Practice Note from Chief Justice and Directive from IG Police on screening and referral of cases to Village Courts

UNDP's target to strengthen case referral to Village Courts (VCs) could not be achieved in 2020 as Chief Justice has yet to issue a Practice Note to refer cases from formal courts to Village Courts. The Inspector General (IG) of police has not issued a directive yet to refer cases from police stations to Village Courts. Moreover, due to the nCovid-19 pandemic, the project could not coordinate and follow up with the respective ministries and stakeholders, since the government declared a general holiday during the outbreak including the closure of government offices as well.

A couple of initiatives have been taken by the project to get this Practice note from Chief Justice. As reported earlier, a letter was sent from LGD to Law & Justice Division requesting a directive from Supreme Court. After repeated follow-ups from LGD and the project, there is still no response yet from the Law and Justice division. Considering the delay and importance of the Practice Note, the NPD of the project issued a letter addressing the Supreme Court Registrar General, but this is still pending. The project will try to achieve this result in 2021 with continuous follow-up.

UNDP has also taken initiatives to get a directive from the IG of Police. As a result of the advocacy and support of UNDP, the LGD has issued a letter to the Public Safety Division

(PSD) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and subsequently, the PSD has sent a letter to the Police Head Quarter (PH) on the issue. Although there has not been any response made yet from the Police Headquarter, UNDP will follow up with relevant stakeholders on this matter.

Activity 1.2.3 Draft proposed amendments to the Village Court Act based on consultation with stakeholders

Technical Consultation with Experts , Ministry and Project Staffs on Village Court Act and Rule:

The project organized a technical consultation meeting at the CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka with judiciary experts, Ministry officials, and AVCB Phase II PMU Staffs in January 2020.

National Project Director, AVCB Phase II, and Additional Secretary, LGD, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives joined the event as chairpersons of the meeting while Joint Secretary, Law and Justice Division, Ministry of Law Justice Parliamentary Affairs (MoLJPA), Joint Secretary (UP), Local Government Division, MoLGRD&C, attended as special guests. The technical consultation meeting was moderated by the Senior Project Manager, AVCB Phase II. A total of 19 individuals participated in the discussion from the respective Ministries, PNGO, PMU, and individual experts. The meeting shared the field findings on the Village Courts legal framework review, triangulated and validated the field findings, sought feedback on the field findings, and suggested the reform proposal.



Technical Consultation on Village Court Act and Rules

Recommendations for VC Act amendment from the participants:

- Children can be omitted from the Village Court Act as child issues are addressed in the Children Act, 2013.
- When the UP Chairman serves notices to the defendant, and the defendant does not appear before the Chairman, the VC's objective becomes ineffective. Thus, the law needs to restore the previous provision of 2006 Act {Sec. 5(5)}.
- The provision on the inclusion of deceased heirs in the VC Act needs to be considered in both civil and criminal matters.
- A proposal was made to include a provision where the cases referred by district courts to Union Parishads have to be reported back to the district court. However, the majority of the experts were against such provision considering the complexity that may arise.
- The subject matter jurisdiction of the “Arbitration Council” as per the Muslim Family Law Ordinance, 1961 may include or merge with Village Court jurisdiction; however, it needs to examine carefully and develop a separate amendment proposal for Muslim Family Law Ordinance, 1961.

- If the VC does not resolve the case within a maximum of 120 days while facing a natural disaster, it can be reformed and will count as continuous, excluding the duration of the natural disaster.
- The pecuniary jurisdiction of the VC can be increased to 150,000/- BDT.
- Search Penal Code to include any non-cognizable offense against property may be included within the VC's criminal jurisdiction. The technical committee believed that the current schedule is self-sufficient and covers almost all types of petty offenses that can be resolved locally.
- It will not be safe to propose a 'Panel of Jury/Member' from the respective Union outside the elected member of the UP.

National level consultation on legal review and draft proposed amendment of Village Court Act and Rules by the National Consultation of legal review:

AVCB phase II project organized a National Consultation on the Review of Legal Framework of VC Act, 2006 at the Hotel InterContinental, Dhaka, on 29 November 2020. National Project Director of the Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase II (AVCB Phase II) Project and Additional Secretary, Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) facilitated the consultation workshop. Honorable Minister of MoLGRD&C, Mr. Md Tazul Islam MP attended the program as Chief Guest. Ms. Rensje Teerink, Ambassador and Head of Delegation, Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, and Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative UNDP Bangladesh, were present as the Special Guests at the Consultation. Mr. Helal Uddin Ahmed, Senior



Honorable minister is delivering his speech at National Consultation

Secretary, LGD, chaired the event. A total of 121 participants (22 women and 109 men),

including Judges, Senior Government Officers, representatives from UNDP and other donor agencies, NGO representatives, academics, civil society members and journalists participated in the consultation.

On behalf of the project, National Consultant Mr. Tajul Islam, Advocate, Bangladesh Supreme Court, presented the amendment proposal of the Village Court Act, 2006. The project recommended the following issue for the amendment:

Table-06: Amendment Proposal of VC Act, 2006		
SL.	Amendment Proposal from Project	Participant's Recommendation
01	Include new Definition of the Terms used in the Act	Accepted
02	Removal of Children related issues from the Schedule of VC Act, 2006,	Accepted
03	Amend S.5(5) so that VC panel could be formed unanimously when the parties fail to nominate members of the Village Court,	Accepted. But to add “subject to sub-section (5) in Sec. 5(1).
04	Reduce the duration of the amicable settlement time from 30 days to 15 days,	Accepted
05	Increase of Pecuniary Jurisdiction of the Village Court to BDT 150,000,	Accepted.
06	Finalizing the decision of Village Court when there is a member missing on the day of decision,	Accepted.
07	Inclusion of Successors as a Party of the Dispute,	To include the option of successors in case of Civil disputes only.
08	Inclusion of maintenance and polygamy issue in the Schedule of the Act.	a) The polygamy issue was advised to be removed from the proposed amendment considering the nature of the offense. b) The maintenance issue was suggested to be further considered by considering other laws so that no conflict of laws could arise.

1.2.4 Review of existing customary laws & practices and codification/ documentation of laws as well as support to existing harmonization efforts of different justice systems in CHT.

Organize regional and district level yearly advocacy dialogue on harmonization:

The project organized a district-level yearly advocacy dialogue on the harmonization of traditional laws and justice system at the Khagrachari district on 21 January 2020. The specific objectives of the advocacy dialogue were as follows:

- Harmonization among the multi-stakeholders' groups for strengthening the traditional justice systems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
- Identifying major advocacy issues, major challenges, opportunities, and guidelines to develop a draft advocacy strategy on harmonizing traditional laws and justice system within the CHT component under the AVCB Phase II project.

Participants from different professional backgrounds participated in the workshop in Khagrachhari district, including Circle Chiefs, representatives from district-level administration, public representatives, representatives from civil society and rights-based organizations, socio-cultural activists, Khagrachhari district police department, women representatives, lawyers, traditional leaders, specially Headman and Karbari, representatives from local youth, student groups, representatives from different Communities etc. Mr. Pratap Chandra



Guest of the event delivered a speech at advocacy dialogue

Bishwas, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Khagrachhari district was present as Chief Guest, while Barrister Raja Devasish Roy, Honourable Chakma Circle Chief, Rangamati delivered the keynote in the program. Raja Saching Prue Chowdhury, Honourable Chief of Mong Circle, Khagrachhari district, chaired the program. Total of 41 participants (Male-28 and Female-13) attended this workshop.

Another regional advocacy dialogue on harmonization was organized virtually on 17 August 2020. A total of 29 participants (Male- 21, Female-8) were present at the event including CHTRC representatives, women's representatives, legal practitioners, development workers, traditional leaders, civil society representatives, representatives of rights-based organizations, etc. A member of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council was present as a guest of honor, and Chakma Raja Barrister Devasish Roy, Senior National consultant, AVCB Phase II – CHT part, presented a keynote paper on "Equitable Access in Traditional Justice Mechanisms." He also shared the findings from the previous workshops.

A participant, women rights activist Ms. Daw Nai Prue Nelly stated, "It would be good to include women in court's judgment process, especially in the Bohmang circle. There is no positive environment for women for access to justice in the traditional justice system, and to overcome this, the capacity development training will help the marginalized women".

Organize workshop on local justice with multiple stakeholders at District, Regional and National level:

During this reporting period, the project organized the following two programs, which were held at Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC), Rangamati, following the approved schedule.

Workshop on Local Justice System with Women Groups:

The project conducted a workshop on Local Justice System with Women Groups at Hill District Council in Rangamati on 04 March 2020. Ms. Nirupa Dewan, Former Member of the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh, was present as guest of honor; Raja Devasish Roy, Senior National Consultant, and honorable Chakma Circle Chief presented the keynote.



The workshop brought together people from different sectors, especially women, to critically discuss the quality of the services they receive from the traditional justice courts and their recommendations on facilitating a solution for making the duty-bearers more accountable, inclusive and efficient.

Workshop on Local Justice System with women group

Specific objectives of this workshop were as follows:

- Increase women's participation in the traditional system court management
- Articulate the best options for reaching the vulnerable women in the traditional justice system and measures to create a women-friendly environment
- Assess women, especially the vulnerable women's needs, and how they want to receive services from traditional/ customary courts to bring effective, comprehensive, and consistent project planning and implementation

An open discussion was held to get different views/opinions of the participants. Some of the key points discussed in the workshop are given below:

- Eliminate discrimination against women in the justice processes. For instance, how to increase women participation in the justice system and engage women in the traditional & other redress mechanisms as panel members
- Some important subjects for women such as inheritance, other family laws, method of traditional justice, and women representation in traditional Justice System were discussed
- Intersectional analysis was also brought to the table. For example, women are discriminated regardless of race, sex, religion, and age. So, analysis should be made considering these characteristics
- Women's active representation in traditional courts/ Increase number of women as traditional leaders
- Family law and traditional justice system

Guests shared that the traditional justice system has a unique role in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, upholding peace, and harmony in the society. Traditional leaders play a significant role in reducing conflicts at Para, Mouza, and Circle levels engaging different community peoples and contributing to decrease case burden in the formal courts in three hill districts.

Results from the workshop are

- In this workshop, it was identified how services will be made more available and accessible for women. To mention a few, it can be done through an increased number of women judges in traditional justice system as currently traditional justice system has very limited women traditional leaders compared to men traditional leaders, prioritizing appointment of women in the traditional justice system and capacity development initiatives on gender responsive services for traditional leaders.
- Identification of strategies to reach women for appointing them in roles in the traditional justice system. This includes awareness campaigns about the family law for women empowerment, especially for family members, different events on gender sensitization on a wider scale for addressing the women rights in family laws, etc.

Scoping workshop on Local Justice System:

The project organized a “Scoping Workshop” on the Local Justice System with service recipients at Hill District Council in Rangamati on 02 March 2020. Mr. Goutam Dewan, Convener, Chittagong Hill Tracts Citizen’s Committee, and former Chairman, Rangamati Hill District Council, graced the occasion as the guests of Honor. Raja Devasish Roy, Senior National Consultant, and honorable Chakma Circle Chief presented the keynote through a PowerPoint presentation, and Mr. Ching Keu Roaza, Member, National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh and former Chairman, RHDC, presided over the workshop.

The objectives of the workshops were as follows:

- Increase understanding of the importance of ensuring access to justice for the poor and vulnerable communities among the workshop participants
- Assess vulnerable communities’ needs and know how they want to receive services from traditional/ customary courts to bring effective, comprehensive, and consistent project planning and implementation; and
- Articulate the best options for reaching out to the poor and vulnerable groups in the traditional justice system and identify measures to create the ground space for fairness in the justice system.



Scoping workshop on local justice system

The meeting discussed some of the key points in the workshop such as service providing institutions in the traditional justice system in the CHT requires to enhance efficiency and fairness in the traditional justice system, the provisions of law and access to information about

the trial process, the special status of women, children, and other privileged citizens (Intersectional Analysis), enforcement of judgment and order, Judge's impartiality, and the process of court proceedings and provision of customary laws.

Some of the results from the workshops are as follows:

- Increased understanding of issues that requires to be included in the traditional justice system such as ensuring representation of traditional leaders in different level in different issues of land, forest, and environment-related committees and other forums; engaging Headman and Karbaries in all development activities at district, Upazila, and Union level.
- Increased understanding of access to justice for the poor and vulnerable peoples among the workshop participants, such as participants understood that relevant services are available for poor and vulnerable groups and provide necessary exceptional support to these groups.
- Increased understanding of the perception about the reintegration of poor and vulnerable groups as service recipients of the traditional justice system.
- Assessment of vulnerable communities' needs and how they want to receive services from traditional/ customary courts for further effective, comprehensive, and consistent project planning and implementation ideas.
- Articulation of the best options for reaching the poor and vulnerable groups in the traditional justice system and measures to create a fair environment. Such as representation from poor, women, marginalized groups, special programs for poor and vulnerable groups, engagement and coordination of traditional institutions with different government institutions, financial allocation, and administrative support for implementing judgment considering the friendly environment for targeted groups.

The following are some associated challenges of this program:

- Reaching marginalized and vulnerable communities and ensuring their participation in the decision-making process.
- Creating consensus and practice, especially among the traditional leaders, about improving service delivery for service recipients' groups in the traditional justice system.
- Not enough prioritization from the Government and non-government institutions to strengthen the traditional justice system and reach targeted marginalized groups.

Organize advocacy workshops for clearer roles and responsibilities of the traditional system and other redresses (workshop) at district level:

In the reporting period, two district-level advocacy workshops were organized for clearer roles and responsibilities of the traditional justice system and other redress mechanisms in Khagrachari and Bandarban districts. In Khagrachhari district, the program was held at the Conference Room, Parjatan Motel, Khagrachhari on 9 March 2020, while the other workshop was organized on 16 March 2020 at Conference Room, Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC), Bandarban. Ninety-three participants (Male- 66 and Female-27) from different professional backgrounds and diverse ethnic communities from each district participated actively in these workshops.

Traditional leaders like Headman and Karbari, lawyers, media journalists, Human Rights activists, women leaders, community people, youth and civil society actors and Deputy Director of Local Governance (DDLG-Bandarban district) from two districts attended these workshops. Mr. Kyaw Shwe Hla Marma, Chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC), was present as Chief Guest.

Main objectives of the program are

- Clarifying the respective jurisdictions of the traditional and state courts and support complementary and avoidance of overlapping.
- Bringing forth a clearer understanding of the roles and functions of the traditional justice institutions and their capacity-building strengths, weaknesses, needs, and challenges through the service recipients' perspectives, particularly litigants and the general public.
- Identifying areas on traditional justice administration that may be improved through advocacy measures.

Consultancy for Technical Assistance on harmonization of the local justice system (person), IC for reviewing the existing customary laws and practices of different tribes, IC for editing and updating of CHT laws and regulations compiled by CHTRC:

As reported earlier, the project appointed a Consultant for conducting the study on harmonization. The main objective was to review all relevant legal and regulatory frameworks and conduct an in-depth study for harmonizing local justice systems in CHT following the existing laws, legislative Acts, and practices in consultation with all respective stakeholders and line departments/ ministries of the central government and CHT institutions and submit a report.

Meanwhile, the Consultant conducted workshops at the district and regional level, carried out discussion sessions with multiple stakeholders such as Chittagong Hill Tracts Region Council, three hill district councils, civil society members, women groups, traditional leaders, and chief circles. The Consultant could not finish his work due to nCovid-19 and it is expected that the study on harmonization is expected to be completed as soon as the National Consultation workshop is organized.

Review the traditional laws and practices of the tribal people:

Three National Consultants (NCs) were hired for reviewing the traditional laws and practices of the tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The initial contracts of 3 NCs are from 23 February 2020 to 22 May 2020. Due to nCovid-19, their duration has been extended without cost till 31 August 2020.

2

Consultation meetings, focus group discussions (FGD), and individual interviews were carried

out with a cross-section of people ranging from local civil society leaders, elected representatives of local government institutions, village elders, teachers, and traditional leaders.

Three ICs completed the review and documentation of customary laws and practices by organizing a couple of physical meetings, while most consultation meetings were organized virtually. Headmen, Karbaris, community leaders, traditional institutions, women leaders, institutional representatives, public representatives, civil society members, cultural activists, development workers, journalists, legal professionals, youth representatives, students, and community representatives participated in the meetings. Many person-to-person interviews and telephone conversations were conducted with some key persons. The three NCs have recommended the following.

Recommendation on Chakma Customary Laws and practices:

- HDC should play a key role in enacting the proposed rule for the functioning of the traditional courts. Section 66 of the Hill District Council Act 1989 provides powers to adjudicate social disputes by Circle Chiefs, Headmen, and Karbaris. The Act also directed the HDC to enact a rule detailing the adjudicating process and court fees determination.
- Enact law prohibiting polygamy or multi-marriage.
- Remove the existing barrier by including provision or practice in the Chakma inheritance law, which will allow a daughter to the same share as that of a son is entitled to a deceased father's estate.
- Include provision or practice in the Chakma inheritance law for a widow, which will allow her to share on deceased husband's estate as that of a male member/son is entitled.
- A female Assistant Headman and a female Assistant Karbari should be appointed in each Mouza and village, respectively.
- MoCHTA, CHTRC, HDCs may take the initiative to arrange necessary regular funds for the traditional courts' day-to-day functioning.
- Allowances payable to Chief, Headmen, and Karbaris should be increased considering the current economic situation in the country. It is also recommended that their allowances should be considered for enhancement with each government new pay scale is announced.
- In the present administrative dispensation under rule 40 of the CHT Regulation 1900, the Circle Chief and Headmen have to ask for assistance of the Deputy Commissioner to enforce, in case they are unable to deliver judgment in their Courts. Since the Deputy Commissioner, following the amendment in 2003, to section 8 of the CHT Regulation, is no longer the District Magistrate of the district, the District Judge should be invested with the authority to enforce the judgement given by the traditional Courts.
- The adjudicating jurisdiction of Headmen and Karbaris should be enhanced by incorporating the powers to resolve certain criminal offenses, which were incorporated in Village Court Act, 2006.

- Chief, Headmen, and Karbaris are the pillars of Chakma Traditional Institution. To get these institutions to function effectively and successfully, it is essential that an objective study is commissioned to identify the strength, weakness, and prospect of this institution so that an effective initiative can be undertaken to develop its skill and efficiency and improve its capacity for coordination, which in turn will help achieve the objectives it was established for. MoCHTA, CHTRC, HDCs can play a leading role in this respect.
- If the reformation of the customary law is prolonged, in that case, a detailed direction or notification should be declared by the Circle Chief in relation to adjudicating process and restoration of human rights for women and children.

Recommendations on Marma Customary Laws and practices:

- Circle Chiefs, Headmen, and Karbaris are the pillars of the Marma traditional institutions. To ensure that these institutions could function successfully, it is essential that an objective analysis on the strengths, weaknesses, and potentials of the traditional institutions of Chiefs, Headmen, and Karbaris is carried out to help coordinating and capacities strengthening efforts so that the Marma traditional institutions eventually succeed in meeting the needs they have been created for.
- A ‘Consultative Council’ by including people from the Marma society in three Circles may be constituted to prepare a list of proposals for reforms in the Marma personal law to remove inconsistencies that are not in tune with the human rights norms. These proposals may be placed before an assembly of representatives of Marma traditional institutions' leaders, Marma social elites, representatives from Marma women organizations, youth and student representatives from their respective organizations for their opinion. Following a thorough review of what has been suggested for reforms, the assembly may come up with a consensus to accept universal application recommendations in the Marma community.
- The CHT Headmen Network may take the initiative to organize a capacity-building workshop annually for the traditional institutional leaders by arranging a ‘Refresher’s Course’. A ‘Trainers Panel’ may be constituted with experts, having extensive knowledge on roles of customs and usages in the progression of *Pahari* societies, from amongst the members of *Pahari* communities. Specialists on human rights and women’s rights at the national level may also be included in this proposed Panel. The Ministry on CHT Affairs, CHT Regional Council, and the HDCs may be called upon to lend all possible cooperation and assistance in this regard.
- Since Marma communities live in three administrative Circles, the Circle Chiefs may convene a meeting of Headmen and Karbaris in their respective Circles at least once a year to facilitate the exchange of opinions so that they, as the custodian of customary laws, carry out their functions with integrity. The Chiefs may also seize the opportunities provided by the meeting to come up with necessary instructions to Headmen and Karbaris in grappling with challenges, if any, to the application of customary law-centric Marma personal laws.
- To ensure the traditional institutional leaders can dispense with their functions with any bias to none, a ‘Jury Board’ may be constituted with respectable and sensibly wise

elders in the locality, and a half of the members of this 'Jury Board' may be drawn from amongst the women gentry.

- Inheritance law in Marma community/society needs to be reformed allowing female members of the family to the same share as the male members are entitled to the family property.
- A female Assistant Headman and a female Assistant Karbari should be appointed in each Mouza and village.
- MoCHTA, CHTRC, HDCs may take the initiative in arranging for necessary funds for the smooth functioning of the traditional courts.
- Allowances payable to Chief, Headmen, and Karbaris should be increased considering the current inflationary trend in the economy. It is also recommended that their allowances be considered for enhancement each time the government announces a new pay scale for its employees.

Recommendations on Tripura Customary Laws and practices:

- Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad (BTKS) needs to reform the Tripura Customary Law's specific provisions, which contradict the standard of human rights.
- Tripura traditional judicial process should be reorganized, harmonizing the present systems involving BTKS, Headmen, and Karbari.
- Introduce documentation or registration process of marriage procedures; under the leadership of BTKS and executed by Headmen and Karbaries at the para level.
- Specify inheritance portion for sons and daughters, preferably 50:50.
- Specify a unique marriage system, rules for separation, guardianship of a minor, inheritances, maintenance, prohibit polygamy, and other social practices harmful for women.
- Ensure women's representation (if possible 50%) in the judiciary system as judges starting from the village up to the level of the Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad to ensure women's voice in the traditional judiciary process.
- Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad should convene conferences to analyze and amend the customary law and practices from time to time.
- Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad should issue specific instructions to its branches and to the relevant Headmen and Karbaries on the traditional judicial process.
- Maintain proper coordination and cooperation by Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad with Mong circle, Chakma circle, and Bohmong circle authorities on amendment and enforcement of Tripura Customary law and practices.
- Provide necessary training to the traditional leaders on contemporary judicial procedures, including the formal law and the customary law.

Editing and updating of CHT laws and regulations compiled by CHTRC:

As stated in the last report, the project hired a Senior National Consultant for updating and compiling CHT laws and regulations from 12 December 2019 to 30 June 2020. The

compilation work was planned to collect laws and related documents, including gazettes directly linked to CHT and consultation meetings with CHT and Dhaka stakeholders. Due to nCovid-19 pandemic, face-to-face consultation meetings could not be organized. However, the IC discussed through telephone consultations with concerned officers of the Hill District Councils.

The compendium comprises of three volumes; the first part of volume 1 includes the CHT Accord, the 1997 Bengali version, the English version and the enactments, which are in force, as CHT specific special laws in CHT. The second part of the first volume includes the rules and regulations made under the HDLGCs acts/HDCs acts and CHTRC act. The second volume comprises two parts. The first part contains the other CHT-specific special laws (CHT Regulation, 1900, etc.), and the second part historically significant laws and documents. The third volume comprises two parts. The first part includes texts of some general laws (National Laws) of GoB applicable to CHT subject to the consistency with the provisions of the CHT specific special laws and the other CHT specific special laws. The second part includes miscellaneous matters, such as references of books and documents and the indices.

Key recommendations:

- Updating and compiling the law book will positively impact activities by CHT institutions, GoB Offices, legal experts, researchers, and the courts.
- This compendium will help to remove ambiguities in the legal aspects in CHT or connected to CHT. It has recommended continuing compiling, from time to time, all other GoB Orders, Letters, Circulars, and CHT related policies.

Printing and dissemination of customary law (Publication of customary laws and practices), Printing of CHT laws and regulations compiled by CHTRC:

The project has hired a Consultant to design and print customary law and CHT laws and regulations. The Consultant is designing the layout of the CHT laws and regulations. It is expected that the document will be published by September 2021.

Activity Result 1.3 GoB monitoring capacity for evaluating VCs and other local justice mechanisms' performance is strengthened and systematized

With the Project's support, Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (MIE) wing, Local Government Division (LGD) has developed and implemented the Decentralized Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (DMIE⁵) system in 1,079 Union Parishads (UPs) of Bangladesh. As a result, 27 districts have prepared quarterly Village Courts performance reports covering 1,079 Union Parishads (UPs) and 128 Upazilas for the period of October-December 2020 and sent those to LGD following the DMIE system, which ensured the involvement of UPs, UNOs, and DDLG's in the monitoring of Village Courts performance.

⁵ Decentralized Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (DMIE) system describe role and responsibilities of UP, Upazila and District regarding monitoring of Village Courts including reporting mechanism.

Moreover, Village Courts Management Committee (VCMC) formed in 27 districts and 128 Upazilas, has increased the Government's involvement in monitoring Village Courts performance. During the last quarter of 2020 (October-December), all 27 District (VCMCs) and 128 Upazilas (VCMCs) met once following the GO issued in 2012 to monitor the Village Courts performance.

Regarding strengthening the monitoring of traditional justice system in CHT areas, different traditional institutions (Circle Offices, Headman Network Offices, Karbari Network Offices, and Women Headman and Karbari Network office) have been equipped with ICT equipment (computers, printer, digital camera, scanner) and other logistics support to establish a monitoring system on case document and reporting system.

a. Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicator (OVI)

Table-07 Progress against OVI				
Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 1.3 GoB monitoring capacity for evaluating VCs and other local justice mechanisms' performance is strengthened and systematized</i>				
1.3.1 # Districts submitting reports to LGD in accordance with Decentralized M&E (DMIE) system.	0	27	27	27 districts submitted quarterly VC's performance report to Senior Secretary, LGD
1.3.2 % UPs supported by the project which submit quarterly reports to UNO in accordance with the DMIE system.	0	90%	100%	Study will be conducted in 2021 to measure the progress of this indicator
1.3.3 % District and Upazila VCMCs in project areas which are meeting in accordance with the GO 2012	0	70%	27 District VCMC and 128 Upazila VCMC formed, and they meet once in last quarter of 2020 (Oct-dec'20) following the GO issued in 2012	Study will be conducted in 2021 to measure the progress of this indicator
1.3.4 # UPs using VCMIS system for reporting and monitoring purposes	15	115	72 UPs (including the UPs of pilot phase) including baseline ** Please see the rationale of piloting VCMIS in 57 UPs	The target includes the baseline and target of the AVCB Phase II project. Here baseline was 15, and the target of AVCB Phase II is 100

Table-07 Progress against OVI				
Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
			instead of 100 UPs under 1.3.4	
1.3.5 LGD produces trends and pattern-based reports on VC performance.	0	At least 1 annual report on VC performance issued	-	No progress as GO issued in January 2020 and after that nCovid-19 pandemic emerged and continuing.
1.3.6 A monitoring system of access to justice for the most vulnerable in CHT is in place	0	Monitoring system in place	The conceptualization and the design of the monitoring system have been drafted.	The Monitoring system could not roll out for testing at the ground level due to nCovid-19 outbreak and delay in NGO hiring process.

The Village Court settles the dispute of higher court

Mr. Kashem Mia, a tractor driver from Srishurja Tilagar village of Kamalganj Upazila in Moulvibazar district, earns a modest amount of 12,000 BDT (142 USD) per month. He is the only earning person from his 4-members family. Mr. Fatikul Islam Raju, a grocery shop owner Kashem's, and lives with a 12-members family. His monthly income is 10,000 BDT (118 USD). Despite being neighbors, they were never on good terms, and often got into altercations. Their relationship kept deteriorating, and on 24 July 2017, Kashem was attacked and assaulted by Fatikul. Upon Kashem's hue and cry, local people came to his aid while Fatikul fled away from the scene. Following the incident, Kashem approached local leaders, but they failed to resolve the dispute due to lack of cooperation from Fatikul.

After failing to get any assistance, Kashem filed a complaint case on 26 July 2017 at the Moulvibazar judicial magistrate court alleging the unprovoked attack on him. After recording the statement of the alleged offense, the honorable judicial magistrate directed the district Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) to explore the facts. Upon investigation, police submitted the findings to the court, which ordered on 13 May 2019 to refer the case to the Patonushar Union Parishad for resolving the dispute under Village Court Act, 2006. Two years have passed since then. Before this referral, both the parties had to appear before the magistrate court and thus travel to the district. The required expenses like lawyer's fees, travel costs and loss of earnings. During the trial at the district court, both parties needed to do 20 visits. The visiting cost was almost 40,000 BDT (473 USD) altogether.

The case was received and registered in the UP on 20 August 2019. Upon being registered and following all the procedural steps, both parties were informed about nominating their panel members to form the Village Court. On 29 September 2019, the VC panel sat for the first session where both the disputants stated their facts. Through the mediating role of the panel members, both parties



Respondent Fatikul is satisfied with the VC services

decided to resolve their long-standing differences with each other. Following the order of the VC panel, Kashem and Fatikul submitted a written settlement agreement to resolve the case committing to living in peace and harmony. In this case, Kashem went to UP for three days only. Moreover, it didn't cost him anything.

Kashem said, "I am happy for resolving the case within a short time by the Village Court; otherwise, it would not be possible to continue the case for a long time at the district court."

Fatikul said, "It was a relieving moment for me because the case was resolved in a short time without any cost. I am happy indeed. I appreciate the VC efforts of the government".

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

1.3.1. Support LGD in taking over Village Courts' performance monitoring of 351 UPs in pilot phase

Monitoring Inspection and Evaluation (MIE) wing, LGD circulated a Government Order (GO), with the project support, highlighting roles and responsibilities of Union Parishad, Upazila and district to monitor Village Courts. The GO was sent to the Deputy Directors, Local Government (DDLG) and Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO) across the country through courier and email. The project supported the LGD in distributing the hard copy of the GO to all UPs, Upazilas, and districts as per the direction of the Local Government Division. Based on the suggestion of the MIE wing, the project provided logistics supports (printing of GO for around 4,500 UPs, 500 Upazilas, and 64 districts, etc.) in sending the GOs through the ministry's dispatch.

1.3.2 Further capacity strengthening of MIE Wing of LGD, and district and Upazila officials UPs performance management and oversight of Village Courts through DMIE system

- The DMIE system was developed and finalized after having a series of consultations with different stakeholders, including the Cabinet Division, MIE wing, and UP section of LGD. The MIE wing issued a Government Order on 2 February 2020 to implement the DMIE system across the country, highlighting UP, Upazila, and the district's roles and responsibilities regarding monitoring Village Courts' performance. According to the system, the UP Chairman is responsible for preparing and sending the quarterly VC performance report to the concerned UNO within the first 10 days of each month of the reporting quarter. Similarly, the UNO will prepare a report compiling all of UP's reports under his/her jurisdiction and send it to the concerned DDLG. The DDLGs will prepare a report compiling all Upazila reports under his/her jurisdiction and send them to the Secretary, LGD with a copy to the Director, LGD, Deputy Commissioner/District Magistrate, District Judge, and Director General (DG), MIE Wing, LGD.
- The project planned to organize two batches of day-long in-person trainings for field-level staff [District Coordination Officers (Dcos) and District Facilitators (DFs)] in Dhaka. To maintain safety protocols for nCovid-19, the project organized three batches of virtual training on the DMIE System over Zoom in April 2020. A total of 52 field-level staff (Dco-27 and DF-25) actively participated in this online training. The training provided knowledge and skill development for DFs and DCOs so that they can organize and provide training to the UP Chairs, Secretaries, Account Assistants Cum Computer Operators (AACOs) on DMIE system.

District Facilitators (DFs) and District Coordination Officers (Dcos) who received one-day training on the DMIE system provided training to UP Chairmen, UP Secretaries, and AACOs on the DMIE system. UP Chairmen, UP Secretaries, and AACOs of 1079 UPs received one-day training on the DMIE system as well. The concerned UNO arranged the training at Upazila level,



Upazila level training on DMIE System

taking technical assistance from the District Facilitators and District Coordination Officers (Dcos) in coordination with DDLG. In total, 3,692 participants attended the training, out of which, 18% were female.

1.3.3 Strengthening Village Courts Management Committee (VCMCs) across the project areas and lobbying for increased balance in gender representation

As reported earlier, 27 district-level VCMCs and 128 Upazila level VCMCs were formed in project areas following the GO issued in 2012. According to the GO, both committees are required to meet quarterly to monitor the Village Court's performance and provide strategic direction. But due to nCovid-19, the VCMC meeting was not held as per plan. In total, 49 District VCMC and 223 Upazila VCMC were held between January-December 2021. All 27

District VCMCs and 128 Upazila VCMCs met once during the last quarter of 2020 (October-December) per the GO guidance.

1.3.4 Replicating web-based Village Court management Information System (VCMIS) in 100 project Unions for efficient performance monitoring

As per the PAGO⁶, the VCMIS piloted in 15 UPs is to be replicated in 100 more UPs taking hardware supports from LGD's project [like Local Government Support Project (LGSP)] or other sources and taking technical supports from AVCB Phase II. The project initially selected 100 UPs for piloting the web-based VCMIS based on the following criteria: availability of trained Accounts Assistant-cum-Computer Operator (AACO), availability of electricity, availability of internet and mobile network and educational experiences and computer literacy of Village Court Assistant (VCA) and got approval from the 7th PIC on 21 June 2020.

Rationale of piloting VCMIS in 57 UPs instead of 100 UPs:

As per LGSP -III project's plan, computers were purchased for all UPs of Bangladesh but could not be distributed to UPs till December 2020 due to the pandemic related movement restrictions. As a result, the project conducted an assessment in 100 selected UPs to learn about the willingness of UP Chairmen participating in the piloting of VCMIS by providing ICT equipment supports (computer, printer, and internet). A total of 57 UPs expressed their interest and agreed to provide ICT supports for piloting the VCMIS.

VCMIS software update: The project has upgraded the VCMIS software after rigorous assessment based on the 2013 amended Village Courts Act 2006. The updates were as follows:

- Installed SSL (secured socket layer) to enhance VCMIS software security.
- Re-designed user login mechanism to support newly added Unions for VCMIS implementation.
- Populated a text box and dates for giving details about cases referred from High court.
- Added data input validation to block compensation amount adding not more than 75,000 tk.
- Fixed cases status and order sequences.
- Added Unicode based country wise locations from PMIS database.
- Added new feature to support installment for compensation /Land collection.
- Fixed case implementation inconsistency for compensation
- Applied new validation rules for phone and National Identity Card (NID) for both applicant and defendant.
- Added ward no dropdown selection instead of the input box to reduce wrong data input.
- Added validation rules to check case date sequences.
- Added new case status type called "Case dismiss".
- Fixed Bangla Unicode problem for wrong typing.

⁶ Pillar Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreement (PAGO⁶)

Providing training on VCMIS:

The piloting of VCMIS has been going on in 57 Unions. UP Secretary and Accounts Assistant-cum-Computer Operator (AACO) of 57 UPs received knowledge and skill development through training, orientation and user guidelines from the project. Six batches of training were organized in coordination with Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) where BCC provided the computer lab supports. The first day was allocated for basic computer skills and VC's procedures, and the remaining two days were allocated for VCMIS. A total of 116 officials (UP Secretary-51, AAACO-57, and DF-8) participated in the training, including 14 female participants.



Training on VCMIS

VCMIS pilot is underway now in 57 UPs where AACOs are updating the VCMIS. The VCMIS live server is made operational, and the user credential is distributed accordingly. Users started adding case data through VCMIS and district facilitators have been closely monitoring data under their respective districts and providing support if users are facing any issues.

1.3.5 Advocate for including a monitoring system into the updated Village Courts Rules and for access to justice to the most vulnerable in CHT

The project has procured ICT equipment and logistics items following UNDP's procurement policy and supplied to the following traditional institutes during this reporting period:

Upgrading traditional institutes:

- Three circle Chief offices (Chakma, Mong, and Bohmang Circle Chief Office) received nine desktop computers, three printers, three digital cameras, and three scanners as well as six ceiling fans and six file cabinets.
- Three Headman Association Offices (Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari districts) received three laptops, three digital cameras, three printers, and six ceiling fans.
- Two Karbari Association Offices (Rangamati and Khagrachari districts) received two laptops, two digital cameras, two printers, and four ceiling fans.

- One Headman Karbari Kalyan Parishad office in Bandarban received one laptop, one digital camera, one printer, and two ceiling fans.
- CHRTC received two desktop computers, three laptops, two DSLR cameras, two printers, two scanners, one photocopier and three drawer file cabinets.



ICT equipment receiving by Chakma Circle Chief

Upgrading Headman and Karbari courts:

- 2,567 file cabinets were provided to 238 Headmen and 2,329 Karbari courts under Rangamati and Bandarban districts. In addition, out of 238 Headmen and 2,329 Karbaries, 192 Headmen and 2,046 Karbari in Rangamati and Bandarban district received chairs, tables, and benches during this reporting period.

Activity Result 2.1 Beneficiaries in project areas understand the roles and functions of the VCs and other local justice mechanisms and are able to access their services when required

Awareness of community members about VCs and its functions has increased through a number of awareness and community mobilization initiatives, e.g., courtyard meetings, drama shows, rallies, workshops, and IEC initiatives. As a result, 2,32,000 community members sought remedies through Village Court between July 2017 and March 2021. A total of 70,923 community members out of the total sought remedies during this reporting period.

There was a total of around 61,960 media reports about VCs, including 531 national news stories, of which 108 were on television. Out of total media coverage, 581 news coverages, and 15 television coverages were made in this reporting period. Most of these stories broadcasted the success of Village Courts emphasizing on the performance, voices of stakeholders, success stories, etc.

a. Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicator (OVI)

Table-08 Progress against OVI				
Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
<i>Activity Result 2.1: Beneficiaries in project areas understand the roles and functions of the VCs and other local justice mechanisms and can access their services when required</i>				
2.1.1 % People in project UPs who say they are aware of	9%	70%	Outreach Strategy finalized, and	Impact study (End-line Survey) is going on

Table-08 Progress against OVI				
Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
VCs and its functions.			accordingly VC messages have been delivered to approximately 10 million community people (57 percent is women) directly	through third- party to measure the status
2.1.2 % People in project areas are able to correctly answer that Village Courts deal with minor conflicts and disputes.	1% of those aware of the Village Courts	50% of those aware of VCs	Same as above	Same as above
2.1.3 Knowledge gap on VCs between men and women narrowed compared to baseline.		Less than 10% knowledge gap	-	Same as above
2.1.4 % of people in CHT areas reporting that they are aware of local justice delivery system	-	70%	No progress	End line study will be conducted in 2022 through third- party to know the status
2.1. 5 % of women involved in disputes resolution mechanism of local justice delivery system	-	15%	No progress The project has approached and continuing advocacy at Circle Chief offices (Chakma Circle, Mong Circle and Bohmang circle) to increase the numbers of women	End line study will be conducted in 2022 through third- party to know the status

Table-08 Progress against OVI				
Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
			Headman and Karbaries in their respective jurisdiction and territory.	

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

2.1.1 Develop outreach strategy and implement community mobilization initiatives in each Union

Grassroots level awareness activities by partner NGOs:

After getting approval for one and half year extension of the project, contracts were extended with four partner NGOs [Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA), Wave Foundation, and Eco Social Development Organization (ESDO)] up to 09 February 2021 to complete the remaining work that was halted due to nCovid-19 in 2020.

During the reporting period, they completed the following awareness-raising activities:

Community mobilization initiatives for local citizens about VCs:

Awareness of community members, service providers, and other relevant stakeholders about Village Courts and their function increased through community mobilization initiatives conducted both at the national and local levels. During this reporting period, the project delivered VC-related messages to around 1,251,506



VCA is facilitating a Courtyard meeting

community people (69% of them are women) through courtyard meetings, multimedia drama shows, and rallies.

Attend District and Upazila level GO-NGOs Coordination meeting:

The project has used Upazila and district level NGOs' coordination meetings as a vehicle to influence local NGOs to convey VCs messages. Partner organizations participated in 901

district and Upazila level NGO coordination meetings during this reporting period. A total of 21,500 people (male: 17,197, female: 4,303) participated in those meetings.

2.1.2 Developing, updating and printing public education and awareness materials for distribution.

- The project published a poster indicating VC slogans and messages. A total of 200,000 copies were printed and distributed to the different stakeholders up to the Union level.
- Published 242,000 stickers on services of Village Courts and distributed to the field for circulation. The sticker's main content is, 'for getting justice within the shortest time and minimal cost, let's go to Village Court,' a famous slogan adopted /by the project since its piloting phase.
- Designed and developed an e-book on media coverage.
- Developed a video based on media coverages of international, national, local, online, and TV channels.
- Six drama programmes and six magazines that were developed during the last reporting period in local dialect focusing on gender, and services of Village Court have been broadcasted during this reporting period.
- One bi-annual Bangla newsletter has been prepared, highlighting the project's progress and success with 37,000 copies printed and distributed.
- An electronic newsletter highlighting the nCovid-19 response from the project has been published and shared on the website ([4 Page NEWSLETTER.indd \(villagecourts.org\)](#))
- An audio-visual has been developed focusing on the results and activities of the project.
- The project produced a one-minute TV Commercial (TVC) in 2019. It was made in drama form where a widow having a disabled child got justice from Village Court over a land-related dispute focusing on the key messages and slogan of Village Court. This year, the project has selected three TV channels for broadcasting this TVC through a competitive process. Those are Channel I, RTV, and ATN News. This TVC has been broadcasted in 1st quarter of 2021.



Broadcasting SMS on Village Court and appearance in Social Media:

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (BTRC) broadcasted an SMS reaching 160 million mobile phone subscribers. The message said, “Fee to resolve a criminal case is BDT 10 while for a civil case is BDT 20 in Village Court. No other cost is incurred for these services.” This free SMS service is a initiative of the project in collaboration with BTRC that started in July 2019. The project also got 97,500 views on different social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, website, etc.

2.1.3 Raise awareness of network NGOs on Village Courts and support their capacity to raise awareness

During the reporting period, the project organized workshops in 26 districts with government institutions and NGOs promoting Village Court's messages. The workshops discussed Village Court's performance, challenges, learnings and generated action plans to promote Village Courts. In total 1,291 (Male: 1079 and Female: 212) participants including representatives from the police department, District Legal Aid officers, media personnel, representatives from different NGOs, members of District Training Pool, UNOs of concerned Upazilas, UP Chairmen from 51 UPs of the project area, and representatives from partner organizations attended the workshops.

2.1.4 Organize workshops/seminars with journalists at the national and local level to increase coverage of Village Courts

The project organized five half-day workshops on gender and VC with journalists in Chattogram, Jamalpur, Naogaon, Satkhira, and Panchaghar districts. A total of 299 (268 male and 21 female) participants joined these workshops. The major objectives of these workshops were to sensitize media personnel on gender issues and VC by sharing basic information, relevant national and international law regarding gender, and to increase their engagement in raising awareness and improving service-seeking behaviors of community people specially women through Village Courts. Local administration of the respective districts organized these events.



Journalists workshop on Gender and VC

2.1.5 Update and maintain the Village Courts website and social media

AVCB Phase II project's website (<http://www.villagecourts.org>) was updated regularly with VC performance data, news of different events, photos, different IEC materials, etc.

During the reporting period, the project received news coverage 596 times, including one international, 61 national, 15 television news channels on Village Courts and AVCB II Project. The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), a global research and advocacy platform working in more than 50 countries has published a study report in April 2020 with the headline “Rural institutional innovation: can Village Courts in Bangladesh accelerate access to justice and improve socio-economic outcomes?”



In November 2020, The Daily Sun, an English language newspaper in Bangladesh published news on the National Consultation Workshop on Review of Village Court Act, 2006 held on 29 November 2020 at Hotel Intercontinental, Dhaka, with support from the Local Government Division (LGD), the European Union, and UNDP. The news stated that the Government has prioritized Village Courts to ensure justice for all, especially Bangladesh's rural people. In this workshop, the stakeholder emphasized the amendment of the VC Act 2006, to make Village Courts more effective. Mr. Tajul Islam, honorable Minister, MOLGRD&C emphasized activating Village Courts across Bangladesh to reduce the backlog of cases in formal courts and ensure justice for all.

2.1.6 Raising awareness on existing legal systems and options for redress mechanisms in CHT

The project is working to produce different types of Information Education and Communications (IEC) materials in three tribal languages (Chakma, Bangla, and Marma). Messaging has been finalized through consultations and some IEC materials are being drafted. The status of IEC materials development are as follows:

Table-09 Progress status of IEC materials		
Name of IEC materials	Progress Status (# printed, # distributed, etc.)	Target group
Audio-visual documentaries production and screening	Scripts of the three audiovisual drama have been drafted and will be shared with senior management for approval in the next quarter.	Community people, traditional leaders, local elites and public representatives

Flipchart for courtyard session (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing and dissemination of the materials	VCAs and community people of 15 Unions (Action Research area) in CHT
Village Court Chart (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing and dissemination of the materials.	Community people, traditional leaders, elected representative of 15 Union (Action research area) in CHT
Pocket card (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing and dissemination of the materials.	Community people, traditional leaders, elected representative of 15 Union (Action research area) in CHT
Sticker (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing and dissemination of the materials.	Community people, traditional leaders of 15 Union of actions research areas
Poster (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted for revised design and printing and dissemination	Community people, and traditional leaders of 15 Union of actions research areas
Billboard installation at Union Parishad (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing and installation in the 15 Union Parishads	Community people, traditional leaders of 15 Union of actions research areas
Project Brochure	Submitted the draft design to LGD for final approval	Donor, Project partners, government officials, UP chairman, circle offices etc.
Poster	Submitted the draft design to NPD for his feedback	Traditional leaders, community people and UP chairman.
Leaflet	Submitted the draft design to NPD for his feedback	Traditional leaders, community people and UP chairman.
Flipchart	Submitted the draft design to NPD for his feedback	community people especially women

Awareness-raising (Citizen Charter) & maintenance support to Deputy Commissioner's offices on access to services:

During this reporting period, the project installed three digital citizen charters in the Deputy Commissioner's offices in Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban



Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachari, Mr. Protap Chandra Biswas with his colleagues and UNDP staffs in front of the digital billboard

Youth groups for popular theater:

The project developed and finalized a guideline after consultation with all the respective stakeholders for forming youth groups. This guideline was shared with the implementing partners for the execution of the field-level activities.

Following the guideline, a total of four youth volunteer groups comprising of Chakma, Tripura, Marma, and mixed communities were formed in Khagrachari by Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha (TUS). Each group has 30 members with an equal number of male and female members. Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha and the PNGO developed a script engaging a scriptwriter with experience in providing training to volunteers and performing the stage show. The script was translated into Chakma, Tripura, and Marma languages. In Bandarban, the partner NGO initiated the process for forming the youth groups.

Activity Result 2.2: Evidence-based and knowledge management on Village Courts and local justice mechanisms increased

A study is being conducted to generate evidence on the project's overall impact. The baseline survey has already been completed while the end-line survey is underway. In addition to the impact study, success of the project has been documented through Courts User Survey, study on Referral Case, Lessons Learning Study, and Impact of Village Courts on Women Empowerment. The project also published the Annual Report 2019 and Leaflet highlighting its success and shared these documents with different stakeholders and development partners.

Progress against OVI

Table-10 Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicator (OVI)				
Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
Activity Result 2.2 Evidence-base and knowledge-management on VCs and local justice mechanisms increased				
2.2.1# Studies commissioned which support VC's ability to deliver access to justice	0	6 (1. Baseline of AVCB Phase II (plain land), 2.MTR, 3. End line AVCB Phase II (plain land), 4. Study on institutional Monitoring system	2 (Baseline of AVCB Phase II (Plain land), and MTR completed. End-line of AVCB Phase II (plainland) is underway. Baseline survey (CHT) was started but data collection	-

Table-10 Progress against Objectively Verifiable Indicator (OVI)				
Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Baseline	Target	Progress against OVI	Remarks
		5. Baseline in CHT, and 6. End line in CHT	stopped due to the nCovid-19	
2.2.2 # Lessons learned studies undertaken and disseminated	0	1	1	Lesson learned study report is available
2.2.3 Increased understanding of gender and justice issues	0	At least one report on gender and VCs/ CHT local justice mechanisms	1	Report on impact of Village Courts on women empowerment is available

b. Description of the activities implemented during reporting period

2.2.1 Develop and implement detailed M&E and research plan

Field monitoring by the project:

The AVCB Phase II Project's M&E team and other members of the Project Management Unit (PMU) visited different Unions of Madaripur, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Khulna, Gazipur, Netrokona, Jamalpur, Cox's Bazar, Chattogram and Rangpur districts during this reporting period to monitor the progress made against targeted goals. The monitoring included documentation of VC's proceedings, knowledge and skill assessment of VCAs, VC performance, satisfaction level of beneficiaries on Village Courts services, efficiency and effectiveness of Village Courts, use of IEC materials, maintenance of different registers (courtyard meeting register, counseling register, stock register, attendance register, visitor register), data collection for impact evaluation, implementation of the VCMIS, and monitoring of VC's performance after withdrawal of VCA.

At the end of each visit, findings were shared with field-level staff, DDLG and UNO for further improvement. Meetings were also conducted with UP chairmen and members to motivate them for resolving disputes properly following the VC Act.

Members of the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) attended one Quarterly Coordination Meeting⁷ (QCM) organized by Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) during this reporting period. The participants of QCM were the Project Coordinator, Monitoring and Reporting Coordinator, District Coordination Officer, Finance Officer, focal person of MLAA and District Facilitators deployed by UNDP in working areas of MLAA. The partner organizations arranged monthly coordination meetings virtually due to the dire situation of the nCovid-19 across the country. Furthermore, some ad-hoc virtual coordination meetings were held based on the requirements of the project.

PCU provided technical support to four partner NGOs for the meetings. Both financial and programmatic progress and challenges faced by NGOs during implementation were discussed in the meetings.

PCU took the necessary actions to complete the handover process of Village Courts activities from the project supported VCAs to AACOs by January 2021 involving local administration. They have developed a guideline and provided orientation to DFs for ensuring effective transition.

As contracts with the four PNGOs ended on 09 February 2021 and the service contract with District Facilitators working in 27 project intervention districts will be over on 30 June 2021, the PCU worked very closely with the operation unit to ensure disposal of project fixed assets provided to PNGOs and DF offices.

Members of the PCU have supervised and monitored the work of 27 District Facilitators and provided management and capacity building support for smooth implementation of field-level awareness-raising and capacity building through four partner NGOs. They also guided and regularly monitored the four partner organizations, checking all necessary financial and programmatic documents to ensure timely fund transfer to NGOs. They have maintained close communication with Project Coordinators, Finance Officers, and Monitoring & Reporting Coordinators for MIS data entry, documentation of VC's proceedings, and upholding Union-wise Village Courts Performance, along with being involved in troubleshooting.

District Facilitators (DFs) deployed in 27 districts were engaged in the following activities in consultation with the respective DDLG and coordination with the PNGO colleagues:

- Building and strengthening the relationship with UP chairs, UNOs, and DDLGs to ensure their support to implement project activities smoothly.
- Providing support to the local administration to conduct different training, prepare VCMC meeting plan and budget and ensure timely submission for NPD's approval.

⁷Quarterly Coordination Meetings (QCMs) is an NGO's activity organized by partner NGO quarterly where all District Coordination Officers, PC, Monitoring and Reporting Coordinator, Finance Officer and Focal person of AVCB Phase II project of respective NGOs attend. In addition, District Facilitators deployed by UNDP in NGO's working district also participate in the quarterly meeting of the respective NGO.

- Maintaining close coordination with DTP members in each district and ensuring their presence in training sessions and different forums.
- Providing technical support to the local administration for organizing different district-level events such as VCMC meetings, monthly coordination meetings with AACOs and UP Secretaries, GO-NGO workshops, yearly coordination meetings, etc.
- Assisting PNGOs to organize and facilitate CYMs, multimedia drama shows, and other meetings following the guideline provided by PMU.
- Maintaining a close relationship with local journalists to encourage them to publish reports and related information highlighting the benefits of the VC to make it more popular.
- Ensuring effective use of IEC materials by field-level staff through monitoring.
- Guiding and providing technical support to PNGO to attend the quarterly coordination meeting organized by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) to orient local NGOs about VC and to make them responsive to integrate VC in their regular activities.
- Monitoring Village Courts' performance by reviewing documentation of VC's proceedings and observing Village Courts hearing sessions.
- Coordinating with UP Chairmen and members to run the VC following Village Courts Act 2006.
- Conducting Village Court users' survey following the guideline provided by M&E and the knowledge management team. In this regard, information has been collected by reviewing case documents and interviewing petitioners and respondents.
- Checking reliability and validity of the data by reviewing monthly VC's performance report and cross-checking it with its sources.
- Continuing advocacy with local administration for issuing government directives instructing local NGOs to disseminate messages on VC through their community mobilization initiatives.
- Providing extensive support during handing over Village Courts activities from the project supported VCAs to AACOs.
- Providing extensive support during disposal of project fixed assets provided to PNGOs.
- Providing support for implementing revised monthly VC's performance reporting formats.

Field monitoring by the Implementation Monitoring & Evaluation Division (IMED):

During this reporting period, a representative from Implementation Monitoring & Evaluation Division – IMED visited two UPs of Barguna district, and two UPs of Kurigram district. He reviewed Village Courts performance, and met with UP representatives, VCA, and beneficiaries, while also visiting Sadar Upazila of Bandarban district to meet with traditional leaders. All visits were carried out between 01 October 2020 to 01 November 2020. At the end of these visits, Mr. Bashir Ahammed, Assistant Director of IMED, shared the findings with the National Project Director (NPD) with his recommendations which were as follows:

- As per the Village Court Act, 2006, the jurisdiction of the Village Court is 75,000 BDT. This amount is significantly lower than the current market value.

- If the respondent avoids the summon, there is no provision to ensure the respondent's presence before the court.
- UP Chair does not come to UP regularly. Besides, the UP chair is reluctant to hand over the charges to the panel chair which leads to problems in getting services for the applicants and respondents.



VC performance monitoring by the IMED official

- The project carried out training for Headman, Karbari, and other concerned associations to strengthen the traditional justice system in Bandarban. However, it was challenging for some participants to understand the training due to the language barrier and therefore, the project should facilitate the refresher training considering the local dialect of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Field monitoring by UNDP:

During this reporting period, Ms. Van Nguyen, Deputy Resident Representative, visited Rajanagar UP in Rampal Upazila in Bagerhat district of the Khulna region to observe the VC operation on 29 December 2020. She met with UP service providers, saw VC's performance along with documentation of VC's proceedings



Ms. Van Nguyen, DRR of UNDP in a discussion session with UP representatives

(different registers and case documents), met with beneficiaries to learn about their experiences with Village Courts and observed a hearing session.

Ms. Van expressed her appreciation to the UP bodies for their services to underprivileged people of the community. She remarked that VCs' support in establishing justice and peace in rural areas leads to good governance and reduced litigation in higher courts. She emphasized the involvement of local administration to make the VCs more functional.

NGOs' Financial and Operational documents review:

The AVCB II project engaged four partner organizations a) Bangladesh Legal Aid Service Trust (BLAST), b) Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO), c) Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA), and d) Wave Foundation from December 2016 to 09 February 2021 for

assisting UPs to run Village Court and capacity building and awareness raising at the grassroots level.

During this reporting period, the project took an initiative to review the organization's necessary financial and operational documents from 10 December 2019 to 09 February 2021. The objective of the assessment was to review the financial and operational documents and management of expenditure records for the AVCB Phase II project as part of project operational closing and follow-up progress of Audit 2019 recommendations. The team performed a random document review at the organization's HQ, including an interview with concern focal persons of respective organizations to collect necessary information.

Project financial management and operating mechanisms of the PNGOs were reviewed in terms of budget control, cash management, certification by approving authority, managing receipts and disbursements of funds, recording all financial transactions, and preparing expenditure reports, bank reconciliation, etc.

The assessment revealed that due to continuous technical support to the NGO by the PMU, the overall performance of financial and administrative record keeping, financial management, internal control, and budgetary control systems were well-organized. Moreover, administrative procedures and operational compliance have also improved.

Re-design PMIS and provide training to DFs:

As reported previously, the project has developed and launched a web-based MIS to track the progress of different indicators related to VC's performance and to monitor Union-wise performance of VCs. The system generates different reports (progress reports by Unions, Upazila, district, division, HQ, etc.) based on the pre-defined query criteria. As contracts with four partner NGO's expired on 09 February 2021, the system has been re-designed giving data entry authority to District Facilitators in place of the NGOs and based on the revised monthly VC's performance reporting format. As per re-design PMIS, District Facilitators have been entering the VC performance data since February 2021.

The project conducted three online training batches on redesigned project MIS's new platform for 22 District Facilitators. The training focused on skill building of DF's on PMIS so that they can enter VC performance data into the PMIS after phasing out of PNGOs from February 2021. A staging (temporary) PMIS server was deployed as a clone of the PMIS live server so that District Facilitators and PMU staff could familiarize themselves with the process.

2.2.2 Undertake baseline survey, independent evaluations, surveys of beneficiaries and officials and others need-based assessments including explanatory study for possible rolling out in CHT

Impact Study of AVCB Phase II Project:

As reported earlier, the project hired Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) to conduct an impact study of the AVCB Phase II project. The impact study included two rounds of surveys with the

first round of surveys (baseline survey) conducted in 2017 and the second round started in this reporting period. As per the initial plan, the second round was supposed to be conducted in 2019 but shifted to 2020 due to the following reasons:

- The baseline was conducted in May 2017, and the program's implementation was delayed due to some unforeseen circumstances. The gap between baseline and end line is not enough to generate long-term outcomes if the end-line is conducted in the middle of 2019. To correctly estimate the long-term outcomes, the AVCB program shall operate for a reasonable period in a particular Union Parishad.
- The program was extended up to December 2021.

Due to the above circumstances, the contract with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) was revised and extended. A total of 145 Union Parishads were selected for the data collection. Meanwhile, data collection has been completed and data cleaning and analysis are currently underway. It is expected that the report will be available in July 2021.

2.2.3 Undertake in-house research and review interventions in order to support the knowledge base on Village Courts, and improve interventions (lessons learned studies; specific research topics on gender and Village Courts etc.)

Lessons Learned Study of AVCB Phase II project:

The project carried out a Lessons Learned Study through one National and one International Consultant. The mission was for 30 days, starting from 18 November 2019 to 02 January 2020. During this reporting period, consultants submitted a final report incorporating the feedback of AVCB Phase II Project. Some of the recommendation highlights from the report are as follows:

- UNDP should use the success of Village Courts as a platform for wider discussion within the development community in Bangladesh to discuss the place of Village Courts within the rule of law and governance strategy of the Government.
- Senior management within UNDP and LGD are urged to engage with donors and high level officials in the justice sector to bring Village Courts into the broader discussion such as through a high level conference which engages the most senior levels of government and the donor community. This could generate another boost to the next phase of the project.
- The Village Courts paperwork needs to be drastically simplified to reduce the burden on UPs and reduce the likelihood of compliance dropping off after the project ends if the VCA is withdrawn.
- The AVCBII project should revise the law to link the financial ceiling to the value of specific assets including a list of items which be equivalent to the value of one cow, or a small plot of land. Where there is no equivalent value, the financial threshold should remain as it is.
- The project continues to work towards operationalising the DMIE and VCMIS so as to simplify and speed up reporting.

- PMU should focus on strengthening the institutional linkage between judiciary and Village Courts by ensuring that the DDLG or other LGD representatives attend the DLAC committee meetings, and that the judicial magistrate attends at the Upazila level VCMC meeting.

Impact Study on Women Empowerment:

Impact Study on Women Empowerment by a National Consultant was conducted during this reporting period. The mission was for 40 days, starting from 26 November 2019 to 15 January 2020. The consultant submitted the final report addressing the feedbacks of the AVCB Phase II Project. Some of the findings from the study are as follows:

- The AVCB II project has contributed to enhancing women's access to justice in rural areas.
- Women's visibility at the VC sessions has broken century-old traditions as they rarely attend hearings in the traditional Shalish system. Now, women participate in the VC sessions as VC panel members, applicants, defendants, witnesses, and audience. Most male spouses or relatives do not obstruct to female applicants, defendants, witnesses, and audiences participating in the Village Court sessions.
- The percentage of female applicants was slightly over 29 percent in October 2019, which remained static in the last few years. The key reason is that the VCs could not fully address female justice seekers' needs and priorities. These include women's day to day issues such as domestic violence, dowry, restoration of severed marital relations, succession certification, child marriage, divorce, maintenance etc. are not incorporated in the existing Village Court Act.

Court User Survey:

The project conducted a Court User Survey to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the Village Courts. The study followed qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to collect the citizen's feedback on the Village Court's services and decisions. A total of 520 service recipients were interviewed from June 2019 to December 2019, covering 326 Unions. Interviews took place at the household level, with both complainants and defendants who used VC services to address disputes. An intensive document review took place to collect basic information of those 520 cases at the Union Parishad (UP) level. Brief findings of the study are as follows:

- Village Court users received services both on criminal and civil matters. Around 50% of cases dealt with by Village Courts were civil matters. Out of the total applicants, 38% were women, and the remaining 62% were men.
- Village Courts delivered services efficiently and effectively. Disputes have taken relatively little time to be resolved, 23 days on average, and court users spent only BDT 161 (USD 2) on average for court fees, transportation, snacks, etc.

- Satisfaction with VC's services (both applicants and defendants) and its final decision were high (97%). The primary reasons behind their satisfaction were: faster service (decisions) and minimal court fees, neutrality, and fairness of the panel members.
- The enforcement rate of VC's decision is significantly high, which is around 93%.
- Village Courts recovered on an average BDT 15,721 (USD 186) per applicant's petition as compensation and provided it to applicants.
- Among the AVCB Phase II project's awareness-raising activities, Courtyard Meeting (CYM) was the most effective source for VC's information as 36% of service recipients came to know about VCs through it.
- Village Court users who filed their cases initially, either at a police station or at the district court, lost more than one year to wait for a court decision. They spent a significant sum of money without any results but once referred to a Village Court, their cases were resolved on average in 50 days and court users spent only BDT 235 (USD 2.78) per case for conveyance, food cost, and others.

Study on Referral Case:

The project carried out a study on strengthening the case referral system. This study was conducted on 6,880 referral cases and information was collected from 732 Unions of 107 Upazilas under 22 districts covering seven divisions. A quantitative data collection method was followed, and a structured data collection format was developed to collect the data. The findings of the study are as follows:

- Among the referral cases, 281 (4.1%) were civil matters and 6,599 (95.9%) were criminal matters. 5,343 (78%) applicants were male, and 1,537 (22%) applicants were female
- Among the cases, 77% (5,295) cases were filed at thana (police station), and 23% (1,585) cases were filed at district courts directly.
- On average, 430 days were elapsed between filing a case at thana or district court and referring the cases to the concerned UPs to resolve the cases through Village Courts.
- A total of 4,149 cases were resolved through Village Courts where on average, 39 days were required to resolve the cases

Activity 2.2.4 Undertake and organize South-South Cooperation activities for mutual learning and exchanging

UNDP continued its efforts to bring higher-level results through South-South and/or Triangular Cooperation. In a recent publication of the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), titled "Good Practices on South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development – Volume 3", the Activating Village Courts project was one of the seven initiatives in UNDP Bangladesh, which were highlighted as a successful case.

The UN Secretary-General launched the publication on 10th September 2020. This publication has opened up opportunities to replicate the successful Village Court mechanism in other southern countries to address justice service delivery challenges in rural settings.

Activity 2.2.5 Organize a National Village Courts Conference

The project planned to organize a VC conference at a national level in 2020 with the Honorable President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh following the Prime Minister Office's recommendation in 2019. The event could not be organized due to the outbreak of the nCovid-19 pandemic across the country.

Activity 2.2.6 Produce and print knowledge products

Annual Report:

During the reporting period, the project shared 1,200 copies of the Annual Report with relevant stakeholders to disseminate the project results, success, and endeavors.

Leaflet highlighting the success of the project :

The project distributed 5,500 copies of leaflets highlighting the project's success to the relevant stakeholders like DC, Superintendent of Police (SP), DDLG, ADC, UNO, UP Chair, UP Secretary and others. This leaflet highlighted the efficiency and effectiveness of the Village Court.

Activity-2.2.7 Conduct Baseline and end line survey in CHT areas (3 districts)

A consultancy firm named Disaster Management Watch was onboarded to carry out the baseline survey in the CHT area. The firm submitted the inception report with a revised methodology, work plan and prepared the data collection tools taking the feedback of the M&E and KM unit. As per the contract, the baseline study's final report was supposed to be ready by September 2020. But the data collection has been delayed due to the outbreak of nCovid-19 across the country. Upon receiving approval from the respective authority, the data collection process will start. However, as the firm's initial contract was till 30th September 2020, the contract was extended to 30 November 2021 with no additional cost.

2.2.8 Action research/feasibility study for exploring/scoping of VC's in CHT (15 UPs of 3 Upazilas of 3 districts)

As per the plan, a year-long action research initiative/feasibility study is supposed to be carried out in 15 UPs under 3 Upazilas for exploring/scoping of Village Courts (VC) in CHT areas. Village Courts legal framework is also expected to be reviewed and revisited by following lessons learned from the action research/feasibility study to prevent potential conflict or contradiction between Village Courts services and local dispute resolution options. Under the action research study, three NGOs are supposed to be engaged in three districts to assist Union

Parishads to run Village Courts through capacity building of VC's service providers and creating its awareness-raising activities in the targeted areas. In addition, a research firm will be hired to generate policy recommendations from the lessons learned of the action research initiatives.

For doing action research on Village Court in 15 UPs, the project, in consultation with the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, selected the following 15 UPs under 4 Upazilas in three districts and got approval from PSC on 09 February 2020.

Table-11: List of Unions for Action Research				
Sl No	Union Name	Upazila Name	District Name	Remarks
1.	Gozalia Union	Lama	Bandarban	Chairman from Marma Community, this Union consists of mix community (Bengali and Indigenous), received <i>Ejlas</i>
2.	Aziznagar Union	Lama	Bandarban	Chairman from Mainstream community (Bengali), this Union consists of mix community (Bengali and Indigenous), received <i>Ejlas</i>
3.	Lama Sadar Union	Lama	Bandarban	Chairman from Mainstream community (Bengali), this Union consists of mix community (Bengali and Indigenous) but majority is Bengali, received <i>Ejlas</i>
4.	Faitong Union	Lama	Bandarban	Chairman from Mainstream community (Bengali), maximum UP members are from ethnic group and this Union consist of mix community (Bengali and Indigenous), received <i>Ejlas</i>
5.	Ruposhipara Union	Lama	Bandarban	Chairman from Marma Community, this Union consists of mix community (Bengali and Indigenous), received <i>Ejlas</i>
6.	Farua	Belaichari	Rangamati	Chairman from Tanchangya Community and covers ethnic diversity and received support for <i>Ejlas</i>
7.	Belaichari	Belaichari	Rangamati	Covers ethnic diversity (Marma, Tanchangya, Pankhua and Chakma) and as recipient of <i>Ejlas</i>
8.	Langadu Sadar Union	Langadu	Rangamati	As Chairman as well as Headman (Traditional Leaders) and mixed community with Bengali and tribal but did not receive <i>Ejlas</i> support
9.	Kalapagujjya	Langadu	Rangamati	Recipient of <i>Ejlas</i> and the Chairman and majority of inhabitants are Bengali. (Cover Bengali Community)
10.	Bogachattar	Langadu	Rangamati	The Chairman and majority of inhabitants are from Bengali community. (Cover Bengali community) but did not receive <i>Ejlas</i> support
11.	Merung Union	Dighinala	Khagrachari	The Chairman from Bengali Community, received <i>Ejlas</i> support
12.	Dighinala Union	Dighinala	Khagrachari	The Chairman from Chakma community, received <i>Ejlas</i> support
13.	Boalkali Union	Dighinala	Khagrachari	The Chairman from Chakma community, received <i>Ejlas</i>

Table-11: List of Unions for Action Research				
SI No	Union Name	Upazila Name	District Name	Remarks
14.	Kabakali Union	Dighinala	Khagrachari	The Chairman from Bangali Community, did not receive any <i>Ejlas</i> support
15.	Babuchara Union	Dighinala	Khagrachari	The Chairman from Chakma community, did not receive any <i>Ejlas</i> support

Two NGOs named Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha (TUS) & Gram Unnayan Sangathon (GRAUS) have been hired from 30th November 2020 to 29th April 2022 in Khagrachari and Bandarban respectively to support the project in strengthening traditional justice system in three CHT districts and implementing capacity building and awareness-raising activities under Action Research initiative. The project could not hire local experienced NGO in Rangamati district for supporting the strengthening of traditional system and action research initiatives due to low financial capacity (yearly turn-over rate) of the NGO. Considering this limitation, UNDP has re-tendered to hire NGO for Rangamati district, splitting the total requirements into the two lots so that one NGO can apply for one or more than one lot. The process for hiring an NGO for Rangamati district is currently underway.

Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha (TUS) & Gram Unnayan Sangathon (GRAUS) have hired two community mobilizers and 10 Village Courts Assistants for 10 UPs under two Upazilas to run Village Courts through capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives.

Action Research/feasibility in 15 UPs of CHT has been hampered seriously due to nCovid-19. In 2020, when all stakeholders were struggling to reach two years targets in a single year due to delayed approval of different project documents, all stakeholders agreed to extend the activities of CHT component up to June 2022. When the project was ready with two partner NGOs for Bandarban and Khagrachari districts for the implementation of activities, the 2nd wave of nCovid-19 hampered activities of Village Courts in 15 UPs of three CHT districts. It is expected that the project will take deliberate action to accomplish the feasibility study once the pandemic situation improves.

3. Challenges and Lessons Learned

The types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and most likely to be encountered in the coming days are given as follows with mitigating measures:

Table-12 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
A. Types of difficulties/problems encountered during the reporting period	
1. Due to the nCovid-19 pandemic, the project couldn't implement its activities (CHT and Plain Land) as per the plan since mid-March 2020 which has impacted planned targets. That time it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed the progress and impact of nCovid-19 on project target. Held meeting with EU where all parties agreed that it will not be possible to reach

Table-12 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
was uncertain when the project will resume its full swing implementation and hence it was impossible to reach a few of the targets mentioned in the approved Logical Framework.	the target mentioned in the LFA and have agreed to extend the plainland activities up to December 2021 and CHT's activities up to June 2022. Accordingly, the activities for CHT areas extended for 18 months (up to June 2022) and plainland extended for 12 months up to December 2021 to accomplish undone activities that were impacted due to nCovid-19.
2. There was a high risk of transmission of nCovid-19 among the project beneficiaries, Village Court service providers and project staff.	The project encouraged all stakeholders to maintain health safety measures and ensured hand sanitizer, masks and disinfection spray at the programme venue while conducting any events e.g., workshops/ meetings/ training.
3. On-time releasing of GoB funds (parallel financing) to ensure implementation of actions funded by the GoB. Delay disbursement of GoB fund causes delay in implementing actions funded by GoB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project was ready with the necessary files for approval so that project can start action just after getting approval from GoB. • Continuous follow-up and close coordination with the concerned ministry would yield good results.
4. Piloting VCMIS in 100 UPs requires hardware support from the government or other sources. Getting such support was challenging. LGSP-III under LGD confirmed that the AVCB II project could use ICT equipment that the LGSP-III project will provide to UPs. But due to nCovid-19, LGSP-III could not supply ICT equipment to UPs as per plan. As a result, it was not possible to initiate the piloting of VCMIS in 100 UPs as per plan.	AVCB II project has assessed the 100 UPs to know their willingness to pilot VCMIS and the availability of ICT equipment. Out of 100 UPs, 57 agreed to provide ICT equipment supports and do piloting. Hence, instead of 100 UPs, piloting of VCMIS was initiated in 57 UPs. Already training on VCMIS has been provided to AACOs and Union Parishad Secretaries of those 57 UPs.

Table-12 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
5. Handing over responsibility from project recruited VCAs to AACOs could not take place as per plan due to delayed recruitment of AACO. As per the plan, LGD initiated the process of recruiting AACOs but recruiting this position in few districts was stayed by High Court's Order following a Writ Petition.	<p>LGD has started the recruitment process. Meanwhile, 425 AACOs (Male 353 and Female 72) have been recruited in 425 Unions out of 1,080 under project area. According to the sustainability strategy, the project has provided capacity-building support and handed over Village Courts-related activities from project supports VCA to AACOs in few Unions.</p> <p>LGD being the respondent for writ petitions has taken steps, and close coordination with the attorney general office, and its panel lawyers have contested in the writ petitions. Some of the Writs have been already set aside in favor of LGD, whereas some are pending. On the pending cases, LGD is contesting and expected to have the verdict in their favor.</p>
6. Hiring experienced local NGOs to strengthen the traditional justice system and conduct action research in 15 UPs of CHT areas.	As per the plan, three local NGOs were supposed to be hired in three districts. Following the UNDP's procedure, two NGOs were hired for Bandarban and Khagrachori districts. Still, one for Rangamati district could not be hired because of the low financial capacity (yearly turnover rate) of the NGO. Now, UNDP has re-tendered, potentially splitting the requirements into the smaller scope of work and/or allowing more prominent NGOs to apply for more than one lot.
B. Type of difficulties/problems that may affect implementation in coming days	
1. There is a high risk of transmission of nCovid-19 among the project beneficiaries, Village Court service providers, and field-level project staff.	The project will strictly follow the health safety measures to carry out project activities at the national and local levels following the health safety guideline.
2. The project envisages challenges in involving AACOs in VC activities as recruitment of this position in many project districts currently is stayed by High Court Orders following multiple Writ Petitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGD and UNDP will pursue the government to complete the AACOs' appointment at all the UPs (with priority to the project area UPs) without further delay.

Table-12 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will provide capacity-building support to AACOs once the recruitment is completed • LGD will issue a letter to DCs instructing the handover of Village Courts responsibilities to AACOs, and accordingly, DCs will issue a directive to UPs for handing over VCs responsibilities to AACOs
3.The project envisages challenges in rolling out Village Courts in CHT in terms of implementation.	Close coordination with LGD, MoCHTA, CHT Regional Council, Hill District Councils and Circles and local administration will be maintained.
4. VCs are authorized to deal with some cognizable offenses. In case of these offenses, police retain the power to investigate, which creates a barrier to activate VCs.	The project has been working with the home ministry to issue directives from the police chief to facilitate referrals to VCs.
<p>5. Achieving the results and objectives of CHT component within the remaining period remains a formidable challenge due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence of nCovid-19 • Delay in hiring experienced local NGO in Rangamati district for supporting strengthening the traditional system and action research initiatives due to low financial capacity (yearly turnover rate) of the local NGO • The local context in CHT areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will monitor the nCovid-19 situation and will carry out project activities following the health safety guideline • UNDP has re-tendered, potentially splitting the requirements into the smaller scope of work and/or allow participation of more prominent NGOs to apply for more than one lot • The project will maintain close coordination with LGD, MoCHTA, CHT Regional Council, Hill District Councils, Circles, and local administration.
6. Scaling up the project across Bangladesh, bridging the gap between this phase and the next phase due to shortage of time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating the high-level tripartite meeting between GOB, EU, and UNDP for strategic guidance. • Deploying formulation mission as early as possible. • Accomplishing all works that are required for getting GOB approval of the project.

Table-12 Difficulties encountered, and measures taken to overcome problems	
Types of difficulties encountered during the reporting period and potentially encountered in the coming days	Possible steps already taken or to be taken to overcome the challenges/difficulties
7. Upcoming UP election will affect VC's performance and Action Research initiative in CHT areas as UP representatives will be busy with their election campaign, and there is a possibility of elected a new set of UP representatives.	Field level staff will monitor the situation and accordingly will inform UNOs and DDLGs to take necessary measures. Training of UP representatives in Action Research Areas will be carried out after the UP election.
8. Already planned activities of plainland areas that were designed using GOB resources have been impacted by current wave of nCovid-19. Hence, the project is forseeing challanegs to accomplish all planned activities by December 2021. In addition, facing difficulties to hire two international consultants and organizing international exposure visits due to nCovid-19.	Duration of plainland activities can be extended to accomplish activities that were undone due to nCovid-19. For this extension, no amendment will be required of current project documents, as it is within the tenure of the approved project duration. Only approval from the EU and PSC may be required. In addition, this will allow stakeholders (EU, UNDP, and LGD) with more time to develop the future program and necessary project documents by deploying a formulation mission. UNDP wishes to engage with the EU on this issue in the coming months to find a mutually agreeable solution

Lessons Learned:

- The involvement of different stakeholders such as Circle Chief Office, Headmen Association, Karbari Association, Women Headmen and Karbaries Association, and local administration in both the planning and implementation stages of logistics distribution helped to deliver logistics smoothly even in remote areas of CHT.
- UNDP should use the success of Village Courts as a platform for wider discussion within the development community in Bangladesh to discuss the place of Village Courts within the rule of law and governance strategy of the Government.
- Local government officials like the DC, DDLG (at the district level), and UNO (at the Upazila level) are critical to the successful implementation of Village Courts. They are also members of different committees at the local level. The project can use these platforms to strengthen the role of the VCs.
- Closer liaison and coordination with LGD and Finance Division was effective for disbursing the GOB fund as early as possible.
- Due to nCovid-19, work from home modality has increased the skill and capacity of staffs and partners on virtual communication (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) and online training/orientation.

4. Updated action plan (April 2021 to June 2022)

Table-13 Work Plan (April 2021 to June 2022)						
Activity Result	Activity	Quarter				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
1.1 Capacity of relevant stakeholders at national and local level improved and key skills strengthened to enable Village Courts in new target Unions and local justice mechanisms in CHT to function effectively by the end of the project implementation	1.1.1 Equip 1,080 UPs with all necessary forms, furniture, <i>ejlash</i> (court bench), VCAs and others.					
	1.1.2 Develop, update and print training materials (mainstreaming gender and vulnerability issues).					
	1.1.3 Form Master Trainer (MT) and District Trainers Pools (DTP) and provide ToT for both.					
	1.1.4 Train all key VC actors (AACO, VCA; UP Secretary; UP Chair, Panel Chair, UP members, Village Police etc.) in project area on role and functions of Village Courts, mainstreaming gender issues.					
	1.1.5 Sensitize key stakeholders (UNOs; DDLGs; judges; police; Women's Development Forum etc.) in project area on gender and Village Courts.					
	1.1.6 Establish clear and systematic coordination mechanisms with Upazila and district level government authorities.					
	1.1.7 Develop capacity of field level staff					
	1.1.8 Provide support to National Training Institutes (NILG, BCSAA, JATI etc.) to update and develop training materials and ensure VC is integrated into regular curricula/syllabus, ensuring that gender and vulnerability issues are mainstreamed.					
	1.1.9 Develop capacity of traditional institutions, local CSOs and local administration in CHT as well as judiciary, legal professions, and other relevant actors in CHT.					
1.2 Legal and policy framework revised to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of VCs and local justice mechanisms in CHT	1.2.1 Engage in advocacy and sensitization with judiciary and police to enable early case screening within current framework.					
	1.2.2 Lobby for Practice Note from Chief Justice and Directive from IG Police on screening and referral of cases to Village Courts.					

Table-13 Work Plan (April 2021 to June 2022)						
Activity Result	Activity	Quarter				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
	1.2.3 Draft proposed amendments to the Village Court Act based on consultation with stakeholders.					
	1.2.4 Print and distribute necessary VC materials and guideline.					
	1.2.5 Undertake field monitoring to ensure legal compliance and quality of decision making.					
	1.2.6 Review existing customary laws and practices and codification/documentation of laws as well as support existing harmonization efforts of different justice systems in CHT.					
1.3 GoB monitoring capacity for evaluating Village Courts and other local justice mechanisms' performance is strengthened and systematized	1.3.1 Support LGD to take over Village Courts performance monitoring of 351 UPs in pilot phase.					
	1.3.2 Further strengthen institutional capacity of MIE Wing of LGD, and district and Upazila officials to manage performance of UPs and oversee Village Courts through DMIE system.					
	1.3.3 Strengthen Village Courts Management Committees (VCMCs) across the project areas and lobby for increased balance in gender representation.					
	1.3.4 Replicate web-based Village Courts Management Information System (VCMIS) in 100 project Unions for efficient performance monitoring.					
	1.3.5 Advocate for the inclusion of the monitoring system into the updated Village Courts Rules and for setting up a monitoring system of access to justice for the most vulnerable in CHT.					
2.1 Beneficiaries in project areas understand the roles and functions of the VCs and other local justice mechanisms and are able to access their services when required	2.1.1 Develop outreach strategy and implement community mobilization initiatives for local citizens about VCs in each project Union.					
	2.1.2 Develop and implement gender awareness-raising strategy aimed at improving the ability of women to make use of Village Courts.					
	2.1.3 Develop, update, and print public education and awareness materials and distribute to project areas					

Table-13 Work Plan (April 2021 to June 2022)						
Activity Result	Activity	Quarter				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
	2.1.4 Raise awareness on existing legal systems and options for redress mechanisms in CHT					
	2.1.5 Raise awareness of network NGOs on Village Courts and support their capacity to do outreach					
	2.1.6 Organize workshops/seminars with journalists at national and local level to increase coverage of Village Courts					
	2.1.7 Update and maintain the Village Courts website and other social media					
2.2 Evidence-base and knowledge-management on VCs and local justice mechanisms increased	2.2.1 Develop and implement detailed M&E and Research plan					
	2.2.2 Undertake baseline survey, independent evaluations, surveys of beneficiaries and officials and other need-based assessments including exploratory study for possible rolling out in CHT					
	2.2.3 Undertake in-house research and review interventions in order to support the knowledge base on Village Courts and improve interventions (lessons learned studies; specific research topics on gender and Village Courts, etc.).					
	2.2.4 Undertake and organize South-South Cooperation activities for mutual learning and exchanging					
	2.2.5 Organize a national Village Courts Conference					
	2.2.6 Produce and print knowledge products					
	2.2.7 Action Research/feasibility study for exploring/scoping of VC's in CHT (15 UPs of 3 Upazilas of 3 districts).					

Comments: *The workplan is subjective to the developing nCovid-19 situation in the country and associated restrictions.*

5. Communication and visibility

Visibility of Village Courts and AVCB Phase II Project activities were highly noticeable in print and electronic media, social media, IEC/BCC materials, knowledge products, and various events during this reporting period. All IEC/BCC, visibility materials including banners,

display corners, reports, presentations, and media coverage, highly promoted the partnership of the Bangladesh Government, European Union, and UNDP for activating Village Courts.

Table-14 Progress of Communication and visibility materials	
Items	Progress Status
Plain Land	
Posters	Printed 242,000 copies posters focusing on VC services including gender issues, and distributed among various stakeholders, including district information offices.
Stickers	Printed 200,000 stickers focusing on slogan of VC and distributed among beneficiaries, outreach GO-NGOs, including district information offices and other relevant stakeholders.
Newsletter	Produced and printed 37,000 copies of Issue-7 of Bangla newsletter (Uchchhas) and distributed among UP, Upazila, district and Dhaka level stakeholders including outreach GO-NGOs, media.
Annual Report	Printed 1,200 copies of the annual report and distributed among the stakeholders.
Media Coverage E-Book	Developed an E-book with Selected Media Coverages on Village Court activities since 2017 in National and Local print and online media. This was uploaded to AVCB website and social media sites.
Media Coverage Video	Developed a Video with Selected Media Coverages on Village Court activities in National Electronic media. This was broadcasted in events like National Consultation Workshop and Project Reflection Workshop.
Signboard	Partially repaired 1079 signboards and fully repaired 12 signboards of Village Courts to improve the visibility of the project.
Project Results Audio Visual	Developed an Audio-Visual Presentation focusing on Project Results and success stories of VC. It was shown in the Project Reflection Workshop.
TVC	One Television Commercial (60 seconds) focusing on a poor single woman-headed household having a differently-abled child who resolved her land-related disputes in VC was broadcasted in Channel I, ATN News, and RTV during January-February 2021.
CHT Area	
Audio-visual documentaries production and screening	Scripts of the three audiovisual drama have been drafted and will be shared with senior management for approval in the next quarter.

Table-14 Progress of Communication and visibility materials	
Items	Progress Status
Flipchart for courtyard session (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing, and dissemination of the materials
Village Court Chart (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing, and dissemination of the materials.
Pocket card (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing, and dissemination of the materials.
Sticker (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing, and dissemination of the materials.
Poster (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted for revised design and printing and dissemination
Billboard installation at Union Parishad (Only for Action Research Area)	ToR and budget submitted to revise design, printing, and installation in the 15 Union parishad
Project Brochure	Submitted the draft design to NPD for his feedback
Poster	Submitted the draft design to NPD for his feedback
Leaflet	Submitted the draft design to NPD for his feedback
Flipchart	Submitted the draft design to NPD for his feedback

Visibility Report is attached as Annex-I

6. Cross-cutting issue - Gender

The AVCB Phase II project has targeted women to encourage them to seek remedies from VCs through its capacity-building and awareness-raising activities. The project followed the gender mainstreaming strategy in all interventions carried out, from planning to implementation.

During this reporting period, the project reached 866,591 women (69% of total participants) through different community mobilization efforts, including courtyard meetings, rallies, multimedia drama shows, etc. As a result, Village Courts received around 21,000 applications from women, which was 30% of the total applicants. Out of the total cases reported by women, 91% of cases were resolved through the Village Court. The project provided capacity-building support to 2,535 women leaders. As a result, representation of women in Village Court's decision-making process has increased from 2% (2017) to 18% (in March 2021).

According to the report of *Impact Study Measuring Impact in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, women now participate in the VC sessions as VC panel members, applicants, defendants, witnesses, and audiences. Moreover, most male spouses or relatives do not obstruct female applicants, defendants, witnesses, and audiences participating in the Village Court sessions.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation efforts under the project have been described under Activity Result 2.2

8. Way forward

In plainland areas, the project will terminate its field activities in June 2021 and will be engaged up to December to amend the Village Court Act 2006 (Amended in 2013), strengthen the case referral system, monitor and assess the role of AACOs to assist UPs in running Village Courts, piloting VCMIS, and strengthen government monitoring system to monitor Village Courts performance. In CHT areas, the project's top priorities will be strengthening traditional justice system and conducting action research in 15 UPs. During the remaining period, the project will also be engaged in developing the next phase of the AVCB project by deploying a formulation mission. Special priority will be given in getting approval of necessary project documents in coordination with the EU, LGD, ERD, IMED and Planning Commission so that the next phase can start by January 2022.

9. Progress against Objective Verifiable Indicators (OVI)

Annex-III

10. Financial Report

Annex-II