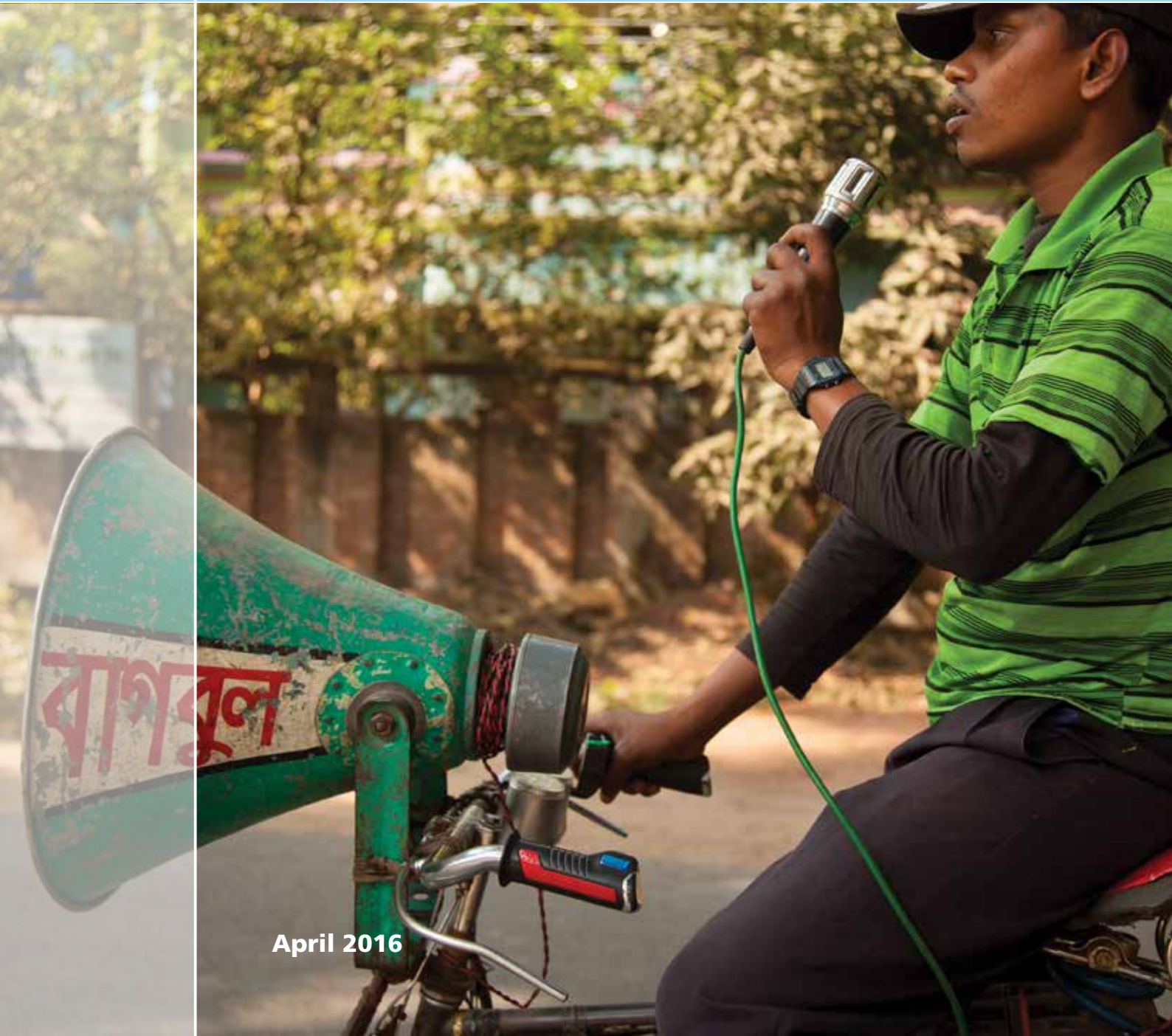




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PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

Bangladesh and the 2030 Agenda

Targets for a more peaceful, just, and inclusive society



April 2016

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Acronyms and Bangla terms

ADR	Alternative dispute resolution
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CBOs	Community-based organisations
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
GDP	Gross domestic product
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme at BRAC
HRLS	Human Rights and Legal Aid Services Programme at BRAC
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICs	Middle-income countries
MLAA	Maduripur Legal Aid Association
MMM	Maduripur Mediation Model
MP	Member of Parliament
LDCs	Least developed countries
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NLASO	National Legal Aid Services Organization
PIL	public interest litigation
<i>Polli Shomaj</i>	Rural women's groups established by BRAC's Community Empowerment Programme
PRI	Property Rights Initiative at BRAC
<i>shalish</i>	Traditional community-level dispute resolution mechanism
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMCs	School Management Committees
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UP	Union Parishad, most local layer of government administration
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
Upazila	A sub-district; the next level of local government, consisting of several Union Parishads

Executive summary

DESPITE SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC PROGRESS OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS and achievements in areas such as poverty alleviation, health, and education, Bangladesh still faces a number of developmental challenges related to violence, lack of access to justice, and limited citizen inclusion in decision-making processes.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by UN Member States in September 2015, and which Bangladesh has signed, provides an opportunity for Bangladesh to focus attention on many of these challenges. The Agenda includes Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 to: “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. This report explores three specific targets in Goal 16, which are highly relevant to the development challenges faced in Bangladesh today.

First, action towards meeting target 16.1 to: “Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere” could help reduce the violent insecurity that Bangladeshi citizens face. This comes in a variety of forms, including interpersonal and criminal violence, gender-based violence, and acts of political/religious violence. The most prominent form in recent years relates to political violence which, in addition to deaths and injuries, has been damaging for economic growth.

Second, a focus on target 16.3 to: “Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all” would also be of relevance to Bangladesh. The rule of law is weak according to various assessments. As a result of limitations of the formal justice system – including an enormous case backlog, difficulties in accessing courts (faced by the poor in particular), and delayed decisions – a majority of citizens turn to informal justice institutions.

Third, target 16.7 to: “Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” could be a focus point of efforts to improve the state of democracy in Bangladesh. Although partly advanced, democracy has deteriorated following boycotts and political divisions in the last few years. Despite a variety of participatory mechanisms for citizens to influence government at the local level, the highly centralised government in Bangladesh limits the effectiveness of direct citizen participation.

Nonetheless, national action towards meeting these targets does not mean starting from a blank slate: there are a number of initiatives currently being implemented in Bangladesh that seek to address many of the challenges related to the SDG targets on violence, justice, and inclusive citizen participation, identified above. This report provides an overview of 20 initiatives that take a variety of approaches and are

implemented by different actors such as government entities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community groups.

While this report is not an evaluation of impact or outcomes, it is clear that many of the initiatives covered hold promise and could be leveraged or built upon to help Bangladesh meet its commitments under Goal 16.

“We are committed to lead by example again in case of SDGs. In our journey, no one will be left behind as we aspire to build a just, progressive, peaceful and prosperous Bangladesh.”

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina¹

As Bangladesh’s government goes through the process of integrating the SDGs into national development plans and policies, it is clear that there is ample opportunity for it and other stakeholders to engage on Goal 16 and get on with the job of implementation. At the same time, the new development framework offers several opportunities for those working on issues related to violence reduction, access to justice, or citizen’s participation. The 2030 Agenda could be used to ...

1. **...cut across silos:** The many interlinkages between the issues addressed under the three targets analysed highlight the need to avoid working in silos. For example, the absence of justice mechanisms to resolve property disputes is linked to the incidence of violence. The 2030 Agenda’s cross-cutting commitment to peaceful, just, and inclusive societies should be used as a framework to cut across silos.
2. **...promote multistakeholder cooperation:** High levels of cooperation between various stakeholders – including government, NGOs, social organisations, occupational platforms, and donors – exist across the initiatives reviewed. This must be sustained and built upon. Without replicating what already exists, Goal 16 could act as a platform to bring together different stakeholders and facilitate coordination, cooperation, lesson learning, and knowledge exchange.
3. **...monitor progress and drive accountability:** Civil society and other stakeholders should play a role, not only in helping set national indicators, but also in producing data to monitor progress. The creation of new data – on issues like levels of violence or people’s participation in governance – could be used to hold the government to account for its commitments, while also helping the government to better target its interventions.
4. **...learn what works and what does not:** While many initiatives to promote peace, governance, and justice already exist in Bangladesh, the Goal 16 implementation, monitoring, and review process could act as an overall framework for the in-depth evaluations and lesson learning required in order to identify which of these initiatives merit further support and scaling. Learning should be facilitated through new Goal 16 platforms.
5. **...focus beyond the state – and innovate:** Efforts to build social capacity will need to complement support for state institutions. Citizen-led initiatives which seek to use open data, technology, and other forms of innovation to open up decision-making to wider scrutiny could be scaled up under the wider Goal 16 framework in a way that captures the perspectives of traditionally marginalised social groups.
6. **...think long-term:** The issues that this report focuses on require long-term systemic changes rather than a series of short-term projects. The vision for the SDGs, with targets that are gradually met over the next 15 years, should be the basis upon which to have discussions on sustainability and long-term planning.

¹ Cited in Bangla News 24 (2015), ‘Bangladesh to attain SDGs to’, *Bangla News 24*, (www.en.banglanews24.com/fullnews/bn/115885.html).

Introduction

BANGLADESH HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC PROGRESS in the last 15 years, but remains a country affected by violence, afflicted by fragility, and at risk of violent conflict. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity to continue Bangladesh's growth, but to do so in a way that also addresses deep-seated drivers of conflict which prevent the country and its people from reaching their full potential.

In September 2015, world leaders gathered at the United Nations (UN) in New York to sign up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Never before has a multilateral agreement been negotiated through such an extensive process of global consultation. Though unwieldy, the ambitious new development framework's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets cover a huge range of development issues. Included is Goal 16, which aims to: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". Indeed, recognising their integral role as both development enablers and outcomes, the 2030 Agenda has identified the creation of more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies to be one of five cross-cutting priorities for the international community.²

Attention is now turning to implementation, which the 2030 Agenda states should be primarily carried out at the national level through integration of the goals and targets into national development plans and frameworks. Given the scale of its ambition and that people lie at the heart of its focus, the 2030 Agenda notes that implementation will be a multistakeholder endeavour, with government, donors, UN agencies, civil society organisations, and businesses all expected to play a role.³

Saferworld has for the last three years conducted policy research, led on advocacy initiatives, and hosted a range of dialogues on why and how peace, justice, and inclusion can best be incorporated into the SDGs. The organisation's attention is also now turning to implementation, including in Bangladesh, where Saferworld has been working for nearly 10 years.

Bangladesh's government has stated its intention to align its national five-year development plan with the SDGs and has set up a new coordination body in the Office of the Prime Minister, who has stressed that: "we are committed to lead by example again in case of SDGs. In our journey, no one will be left behind as we aspire to build a just, progressive, peaceful and prosperous Bangladesh"⁴

² United Nations General Assembly (2015), 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Op cit* Bangla News 24.

A rickshaw driver stops at the roundabout in Jessore, one of the districts where Saferworld and BRAC are running a four-year community security programme.

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The purpose of this briefing is to highlight the importance of Goal 16 for the development of Bangladesh and to demonstrate that a range of initiatives already exist that could contribute to or guide the country's progress in meeting Goal 16. For reasons of scope, the analysis is restricted to three of Goal 16's 12 targets:

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

The rationale for choosing these targets was that they relate to three thematic areas – namely, violence reduction, justice, and governance; and that each is important for the Bangladeshi context, but is distinct enough that it merits investigation in its own right.

This briefing is presented as follows. Part One discusses the three targets and their significance for Bangladesh today, including their relevance to existing national plans. Part Two outlines 20 initiatives that could be considered to be already contributing to meeting Goal 16 or, at the very least, provide a reference point for learning and policy-making moving ahead. Part Three outlines key next steps for implementation of Goal 16 in Bangladesh.

1

An overview of how the targets relate to the Bangladesh context

THE GOAL 16 TARGETS on violence reduction, justice, and inclusive citizen participation are highly relevant to Bangladesh. This section provides a brief overview of each target, describing the current scenario in Bangladesh regarding the need for a reduction in violence, for improvements in the quality of and access to justice, and for more inclusive citizen participation in government and decision-making. The overview exhibits the need for further efforts in these areas to promote social development and the well-being of the citizens of Bangladesh.

Table 1: Performance on various MDG indicators in Bangladesh

Indicator	Baseline in 1990	Progress achieved in 2014
2.1 Net enrolment rate in primary education, %	60.5	97.7
3.1a Ratio of girls to boys in primary education (gender parity index = girls/ boys)	0.83	1.03
3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament, %	12.7	20
4.1 Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	146	46

Excerpt from the 'Bangladesh Progress Report 2015'.⁵

Note: the baseline year does not necessarily reflect data from 1990, but rather from the closest year.

Bangladesh has made significant advances in areas such as poverty alleviation, health, and education, according to numerous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) indicators. Highlights among these achievements are presented in Table 1. The country has maintained steady economic growth, with an average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increase of 6.18 per cent from 2004–2014.⁶ Bangladesh is expected to achieve middle-income country status in the next two decades. According to the government's

⁵ General Economics Division (2015), 'Bangladesh Progress Report 2015', p 10, (www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/library/mdg/mdg-progress-report-2015.html).

⁶ World Bank (2014), World Development Indicators, Bangladesh, (<http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=World-Development-Indicators>).

official statistics, there was a net primary school enrolment rate of 97.3 per cent in 2013, with almost no disparity between boys and girls.⁷ In health, notable achievements include the dramatic reduction in child under-five mortality rate from 146 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 41 per 1,000 live births in 2013.⁸ The percentage of the population using an improved drinking water source increased to 97.9 per cent in 2013.⁹

SDG target on violence reduction

Nonetheless, Bangladesh faces a number of developmental challenges, including the prevalence of violence and insecurity. The citizens of Bangladesh are victims of violence and insecurity in a variety of forms, leading to deaths and human suffering, as well as a decline in economic activity and social development.

The most prominent form in the last several years relates to violence instigated by different political factions (both pro-government and opposition), as well as violence between these groups and the state, notably in the form of violent riots and protests. While there is no official count of fatalities from political violence in recent times, it has been estimated that at least 115 people died in political unrest in Bangladesh from the beginning of January to 10 March 2015.¹⁰

Aside from deaths and injuries, the political violence has been damaging for economic growth. In February 2015, Bangladesh Finance Minister AMA Muhith stated that he doubted the country would be able to meet its 7.3 per cent GDP growth target due to political unrest.¹¹ Strikingly, the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry claimed that during 16 days of unrest in January 2015, businesses lost a total of BDT 350,000 million, or approximately US\$4.5 billion.¹² As argued by one analyst in March 2015:

“In the midst of this political turbulence, Bangladesh’s economy has been rocked with a communications blockade, urban violence, and a prevailing sense of uncertainty in the country... Shutting down transportation in the past few months has hindered private investment and export activity as well... The economic gains made by the country run the risk of being partially lost if political instability continues.”¹³

The nature of conflict and how citizens in Bangladesh experience that conflict varies according to geography, history, and the nature of the actors involved in violence. This includes, for example, the conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which first erupted in the 1970s as a result of counter-insurgency operations and subsequent land settlements which displaced some indigenous communities.¹⁴ This conflict was ostensibly resolved with the Peace Accord of 1997, yet it has not been fully implemented, with tensions still pervasive due to the displacement of many indigenous peoples from their lands.¹⁵ There have been skirmishes in recent times in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in which homes have been burned and civilians have died as a result.¹⁶

Fundamentalist groups have also carried out violent attacks in Bangladesh in recent years. In 2005, Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh instigated some 500 coordinated bomb blasts in 63 of Bangladesh’s 64 districts, in which two people were killed and

7 General Economics Division (2013), ‘Millennium Development Goals: Bangladesh Country Report 2013’, (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/mdg-report-2013-english.pdf).

8 *Op. cit.* General Economics Division, p 90.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *The Telegraph* (2015), ‘Bangladesh paralysed by violence as scores die in political war’, 10 March, (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/bangladesh/11461344/Bangladesh-paralysed-by-violence-as-scores-die-in-political-war.html).

11 *Forbes Asia* (2015), ‘IMF Worried About Bangladesh’s Growth’, 11 March, (www.forbes.com/sites/alyssaayres/2015/03/11/imf-worried-about-bangladeshs-growth/).

12 *The Daily Star* (2015), ‘Loss Tk 36,445cr in 16 days’, 15 January, (www.thedailystar.net/loss-tk-36-445cr-in-16-wasted-days-61306).

13 Rumi R (2015), ‘Bangladesh on the Brink’, 26 March, (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/26/bangladesh-on-the-brink/>).

14 Adnan S, Dastidar R (2011), *Alienation of the Lands of Indigenous Peoples: In the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh* (Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission).

15 Amnesty International (2013), ‘Pushed to the Edge: Indigenous Rights Denied in Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts’ (London: Amnesty International), (www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/pushed_to_edge.pdf).

16 *Ibid.*

Political unrest on the street in Satkhira district, captured by a participant in Saferworld and BRAC's participatory photography project.

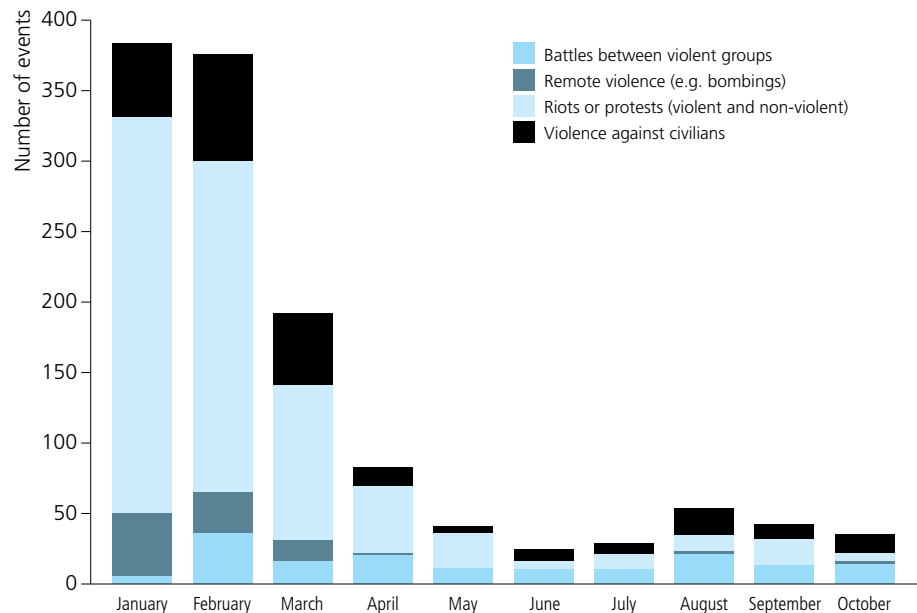
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around 50 injured.¹⁷ Although Bangladesh has not experienced any such major attack since then, there has been a rise in smaller-scale incidents in recent times – with secular bloggers and foreign workers targeted and murdered.¹⁸ Bangladesh is rated at 25 out of 162 in the 2015 Global Terrorism Index.¹⁹

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project collects reports on incidents of different types of violence. Figure 1 shows different types of violence that occurred between January 2015 and October 2015. The preponderance of political violence – in the form of riots and protests – is clearly visible.

Figure 1: Different types of violence in Bangladesh, January–October 2015



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project – Asia Data (www.acledata.com/asia-data/).

¹⁷ International Crisis Group (2010), 'The Threat from Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh', Asia Report N°187, 1 March, p 12, (www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/187_the_threat_from_jamaat_ul_mujahideen_bangladesh.pdf).

¹⁸ BBC (2015), 'Bangladesh: The threat of small-scale terror attacks', 9 October, (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34476059).

¹⁹ Institute for Economics and Peace (2015), *Global Terrorism Index 2015*

The risk for Bangladesh lies in an escalation (or re-escalation) of any of these different forms of violence, whether in terms of political instability, insurgency, or attacks by violent groups. Any serious intensification of violence could severely knock Bangladesh off its current development trajectory.

As in other countries, however, interpersonal and criminal violence remain the forms of insecurity that affect most people. Official statistics on homicide rates, based on reporting by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), were relatively low at 2.7 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2013 – comparable to the regional average.²⁰ Eighty-two per cent of adults report feeling safe walking home at night and Bangladesh scored 78 in Gallup's Global Law and Order survey in 2015, just below Sri Lanka (79), but above Pakistan (60), India (67) and Nepal (73).²¹ Nonetheless, gender-based violence appears to be a major issue in Bangladesh; the National Human Rights Council found that more than 35 per cent of respondents perceived violence carried out by husbands to be one of the major problems faced by women in Bangladesh, just trailing poverty at 37 per cent.²²

Given the risk of conflict and the impact of insecurity on Bangladeshi citizens, SDG target 16.1 on violence reduction is relevant to Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh achieves 84th place in its Global Peace Index (with 162nd place being the lowest), the Institute of Economics and Peace has estimated that violence still costs Bangladesh US\$13.5 billion.²³ The Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010–2021, the overarching development plan for the country, emphasises the need for a focus on this area, recognising absence from violence to be an integral part of overall governance, especially with regard to violence against women.²⁴ As discussed, efforts to reduce violence are needed – not only to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Bangladesh, but also to ensure and enhance economic and social development.

SDG target on access to justice

SDG target 16.3 on access to an effective justice system is also pertinent to Bangladesh. Bangladesh's judicial framework derives from the English court system, with district courts being the lowest level for the judiciary. The country is also home to a variety of informal justice institutions, which are often termed *shalish*. While the 'traditional' *shalish* varies widely at the local level, they generally involve village leaders, though they may include politicians or other notable local figures. Village courts – a justice institution that includes politicians and other leaders at the Union Parishad (the most local layer of government administration) level – have increased in prominence, and are featured below.

According to a variety of evaluations, the rule of law in Bangladesh is weak. One aggregate statistic is the rule of law measure under the Worldwide Governance Indicators of the World Bank. As seen in Figure 2, the rule of law rating in Bangladesh is relatively poor compared to the average of both lower middle-income countries (MICs) and least developed countries (LDCs).

²⁰ This is below the rate of 3.8 per 100,000 in the United States. UNODC (2013), UNODC Statistics, (<https://data.unodc.org/#state:1>).

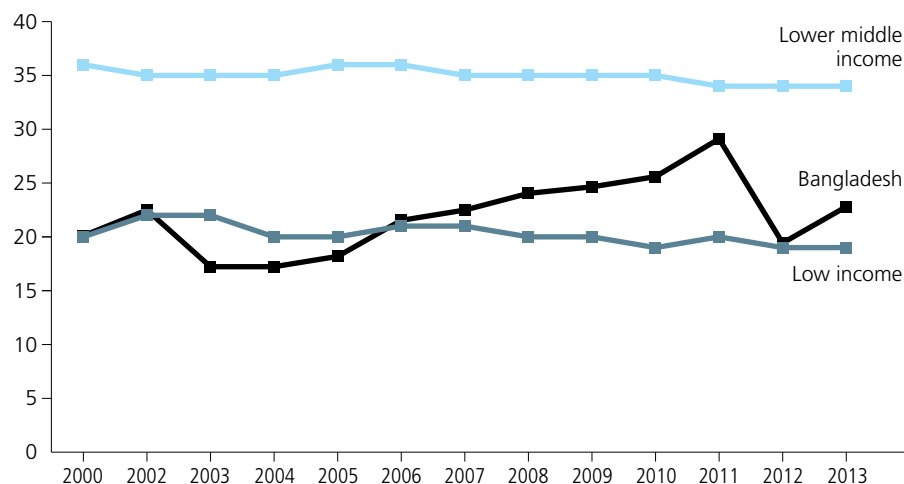
²¹ This is scored using three survey indicators on perceptions of safety, experience of crime and confidence in police. Gallup (2015), *Global Law and Order 2015* (London: Gallup).

²² National Human Rights Council (2011), 'Perceptions, Attitudes and Understanding: A Baseline Survey on Human Rights in Bangladesh', NHRC Report, (www.nhrc.org.bd/PDF/Summary%20Report.pdf).

²³ Institute for Economics and Peace (2015), *Global Peace Index 2015*

²⁴ Government of Bangladesh (2012), 'General Economics Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010–2021: Making Vision 2021 a Reality' (General Economics Division, Planning Commission), April, (http://bangladesh.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bangladesh.gov.bd/page/6dca6a2a_9857_4656_bce6_139584b7f160/Perspective-Plan-of-Bangladesh.pdf).

Figure 2: Rule of law in Bangladesh and countries by two income groups
(percentile rank: 0–100)



Source: Author analysis of Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2000–14.

In addition, there are other indications of lagging justice systems in Bangladesh. In the World Justice Project rule of law index, Bangladesh rates at 0.39 out of 1.00 for civil justice, ranking fifth out of the six countries of the South Asia region and 88th out of 102 globally ranked countries. It is also rated at 0.33 out of 1.00 for criminal justice, fourth out of the six countries of the region and 88th globally.²⁵ In total, it is ranked as 11th out of 15 countries of the same income status that are also rated in the report.

There is increasing concern regarding overall governance in the judiciary of Bangladesh. Reports on judicial appointments suggest that an affiliation to a political party can influence the selection process.²⁶ Perception surveys of citizens regarding public services also suggest that there are high levels of corruption within both the judiciary and the police. As seen in Table 2, according to a citizen survey by Transparency International Bangladesh in 2012, which looked at corruption within the main government services, 75.8 per cent of citizens experience corruption in law enforcing agencies, 59.0 per cent in land administration, and 57.1 per cent in judicial services.²⁷

Table 2: Experiences with corruption in various service sectors
(% of households)

	2010	2012
Law enforcement agency	79.7	75.8
Land administration	71.2	59.0
Judiciary	88.0	57.1
Health	33.2	40.2
Local government	43.9	30.9
Agriculture	45.3	20.4

Source: Reproduced from Transparency International Bangladesh, 2012.

Bangladesh's formal justice system faces numerous other challenges. The 16th amendment to the constitution, which states that Supreme Court judges may be removed by parliament, reduces the independence of the judiciary. Case backlogs are presently

²⁵ World Justice Project (2015), Rule of Law Index

²⁶ Institute for Governance Studies (2010), 'The Judiciary: Policy Note', Institutions of Accountability Series

²⁷ Transparency International Bangladesh (2012), 'Corruption in Service Sectors: A National Household Survey' (Dhaka: Transparency International Bangladesh), (www.ti-bangladesh.org/files/HHSurvey-ExecSum-Eng-fin.pdf).

A family stands outside their house in Satkhira district. They have lived in the area their whole lives, but have no evidence that proves legal ownership of the land.

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estimated to comprise approximately three million cases.²⁸ Access to formal justice institutions is limited, particularly for the poor, for several reasons. First, the courts are located in the district capitals of Bangladesh, which are distant from the rural areas in which most poor people live. Travel to and from the courts is therefore costly, especially in terms of time away from work, as well as travel costs, lodging, and food. Accessing the courts also necessitates other costs. Second, lawyer fees are quite expensive, although they are sometimes paid by a legal aid organisation; yet the process costs – such as providing proper documentation – can be substantial as well. Third, judicial decisions can take years, given the enormous backlog of cases. Fourth, judgments are often not implemented, whether due to the weakness of the administration or the strength of the interests involved. Given the difficulties in accessing the formal court system, many citizens use informal justice institutions such as the local *shalish* and village courts.²⁹ The director of the Human Rights and Legal Aid Services at BRAC, Bangladesh's largest NGO, argues that:

“Protection of one’s legal right to an identity or ownership of a piece of land or exercise of one’s choice of mobility cannot come at the cost of a pure economic model of development intervention, but one that is integrated with the lived reality of the citizen who is entitled to enjoy any one or all of these rights.”³⁰

Property disputes are one of the most common sources of conflict in Bangladesh. Within the main legal challenges perceived by the population as a whole, land disputes rank at the top, with 47 per cent of citizens perceiving it as one of the most common major forms of dispute or legal issue.³¹ Table 3 summarises the top seven such issues that emerged from a survey by the Local Government Division.³² These quarrels can develop into outright conflict, often violent, between individuals and also groups. For example, according to Amnesty, the government has failed to ensure rights to traditional lands in the eastern Chittagong Hill Tracts region, with thousands of Pahari indigenous people left without land – and many ending up in violent confrontations with Bengali settlers – as a result.³³

²⁸ *The Daily Star* (2015), ‘Case Backlog Piling Up’, 22 March, (www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/case-backlog-spirals-73002).

²⁹ Hasle L (2003), ‘Too Poor for Rights? Access to Justice for Poor Women in Bangladesh’, *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, 29 (3 & 4), September–December 2003.

³⁰ Pereira F (2013), ‘Bringing Justice, Equality and Inclusion to the Global Development Agenda Beyond 2015’, *The Daily Star*, 4 February, (<http://hris.brac.net/media-news/178-bringing-justice-equality-and-inclusion-to-the-global-development-agenda-beyond-2015>).

³¹ Government of Bangladesh (2010), ‘Baseline Survey Report on Village Courts in Bangladesh’ (Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives), August, (www.villagecourts.org/Publication/Baseline%20Survey%20Report.pdf).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Amnesty (2013), ‘Bangladesh: Indigenous Peoples engulfed in Chittagong Hill Tracts land conflict’, (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/06/bangladesh-indigenous-peoples-engulfed-chittagong-hill-tracts-land-conflict/>).

Table 3: Citizen perceptions of the most common types of crimes and disputes

Type of issues	% of respondents
Land-related disputes	47
Theft	44
Quarrel	41
Family conflict	21
Robbery	16
Dowry related	7
Child marriage	3

Source: Government of Bangladesh, Local Government Division, 2010.

Note: N = 10,016, where each respondent was asked which forms of disputes and offences are common.

Given the many challenges to justice in Bangladesh, SDG target 16.3, which focuses on access to justice, is highly relevant. The Perspective Plan of Bangladesh has a strong focus on improving justice systems and ensuring access to them. Effective justice institutions, both formal and informal, are critical for maintaining peace and order for all citizens. Likewise, ineffective justice systems – and a lack of access to justice – have spillover effects on violence and on economic growth, among others.

SDG target on inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making

The inclusion and representation of people in decision-making, the third target, is another priority area for Bangladesh. Bangladesh has a Westminster-model parliamentary democracy, in which the prime minister is the head of state. The power of the vote should, in theory, provide citizens with a voice in decision-making, provided that elections are free and fair. The first free and fair election in Bangladesh occurred just after independence in 1972; however, the country had to wait until 1991 before its second free and fair election, as a consequence of the coups and political turmoil that took place over nearly two decades following independence.³⁴ The Perspective Plan of Bangladesh notes that:

“... realizing the Constitution’s democratic ideals begins with peoples’ effective participation as a symbol of good governance, which is an outcome of cumulative inputs from free and fair elections, transparency and accountability of public institutions, independence of judiciary, an effective parliament, an independent media, decentralization of power and fiscal authority, equitable access to basic services, and quality education and health care.”³⁵

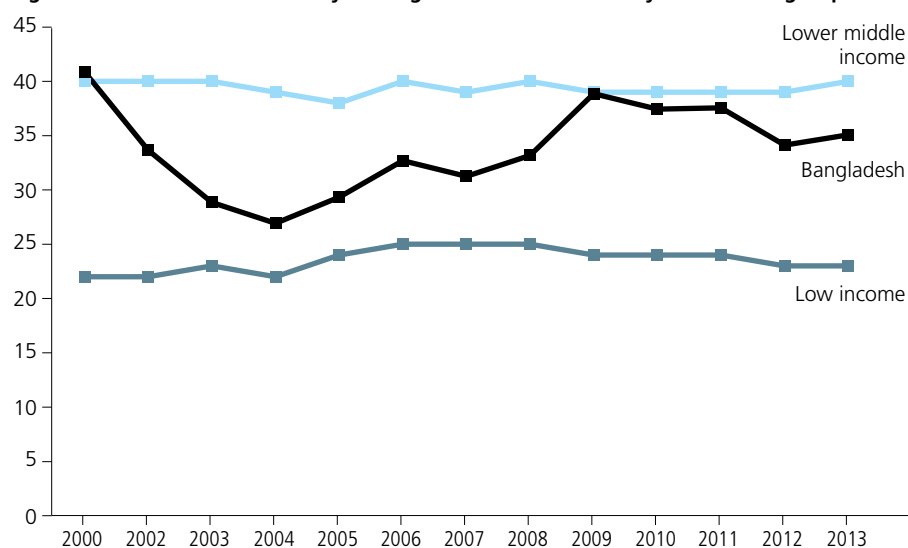
The state of democracy in Bangladesh is partly advanced, given the country’s income level, but it also faces serious challenges. Bangladesh is nearly equivalent to the average of lower MICs for the measure of voice and accountability, a Worldwide Governance Indicator. These voice and accountability trends are displayed in Figure 3. The performance of Bangladesh for this indicator was not consistent during the previous decade; it experienced a large drop from 2000 to 2004, and a rise in the late 2000s. Bangladesh ranked 35th out of 100, a number close to the average ranking for MICs, which measured at 40 in 2013. The strong improvements in the late 2000s likely derive from the quality of the parliamentary election of 2009, which was overseen by the caretaker government

³⁴ Jahan R (2012), ‘The Parliament of Bangladesh: Challenges and Way Forward’, Centre for Policy Dialogue, CPD-CMI Brief No. 1, p 2, (www.cmi.no/publications/file/4425-the-parliament-of-bangladesh.pdf).

³⁵ General Economics Division (2012), ‘Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010–2021’, (http://bangladesh.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bangladesh.gov.bd/page/6dca6a2a_9857_4656_bce6_139584b7f160/Perspective-Plan-of-Bangladesh.pdf).

and which introduced a national voter ID card and ‘cleaned’ the registered voter lists (an initiative described below).

Figure 3: Voice and accountability in Bangladesh and countries by two income groups



Source: Author analysis of Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2014.

However, there are increasing concerns regarding the state of democracy in Bangladesh, particularly following the national elections in January 2014 and the municipal elections in April 2015. In the former, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the main opposition party – boycotted the elections, claiming that the conditions for a free and fair election were not present.³⁶ In the latter, there were widespread allegations of fraud, with the BNP pulling out on the day of the election, citing vote rigging and intimidation.

Moreover, the space for media and rights-focused NGOs to operate is limited. In 2013, Freedom House rated freedom of the press in Bangladesh to be ‘partly free.’³⁷ The case of Odhikar, a human rights organisation, demonstrates that the government is willing to use the current legal framework to prosecute civil society leaders. Odhikar released a report on the killing of 61 members of the Hefazat-e-Islami – a fundamentalist Islamic group – by security forces on 5–6 May 2013. After its publication, the director and secretary of Odhikar were put in jail at different times, charged with distorting images and information. Both have been released on bail, and were awaiting trial at the time of writing.³⁸

There is also a low level of decentralisation in the Government of Bangladesh, with few functions assigned to local governments. Expenditures by sub-national governments represent from 3 to 4 per cent of total national expenditures.³⁹ Ministries, directed by the prime minister and the cabinet, maintain central control over essential government functions. Opportunities for elected representatives in local government to influence government policy, spending, and activities are limited. Since Bangladesh was established, a variety of efforts have been undertaken by administrations to establish different types of local governments, but without a consistent vision and often with political considerations in mind. While the Zia government of the late 1970s and early 1980s pushed for a village-level government system, the Ershad government sought to empower the Upazila sub-district level of government in the 1980s; this was then abolished by the BNP government in 1991.⁴⁰

³⁶ BBC News (2014), ‘Bangladesh’s bitter election boycott’, 3 January, (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25588564).

³⁷ Freedom House (2013), ‘Bangladesh – Freedom of the Press 2013’, (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/bangladesh#.VXH7Uc4Q7zl>).

³⁸ Odhikar (2013), ‘Assembly of Hefazate Islam Bangladesh and Human Rights Violations’ (Dhaka: Odhikar Fact Finding Report).

³⁹ World Bank (2009), Facts about Local Government System in Bangladesh, (<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/223546-1214948920836/5174107-1229027894612/FactsaboutLocalGovernment.pdf>).

⁴⁰ Lewis D, Hossain A (2008), ‘Understanding the Local Power Structure in Rural Bangladesh’, *Sida Studies*, No.22, pp 33–35, (<http://personal.lse.ac.uk/lewisd/images/Lewis&H-SidaStudies-22.pdf>).

There are various other participatory mechanisms for citizens to influence government at the local level. Sectors such as education and health, among others, have created participatory forums in which parents and patients can be involved in official decision-making and provide feedback. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has experimented with the use of technology when addressing grievances. Citizens can text their complaints into a system that logs them for the central ministry, who can then seek to respond.⁴¹ The highly centralised government in Bangladesh limits the effectiveness of direct citizen participation, but the available space can still lead to important improvements in the quality of service delivery.

SDG target 16.7 on inclusive, participatory, responsive, and representative decision-making is highly relevant to Bangladesh. As presented in the excerpt above, it is enshrined as a key principle of the Constitution of Bangladesh and is also emphasised in the country's overarching development plan. Participation in local decision-making can greatly improve government performance, offering citizens the opportunity to provide input and hold government accountable for its actions.

In sum, while Bangladesh has made significant strides forward, as captured in a variety of the current MDG indicators, other fundamental aspects of development – including peacefulness, justice, and inclusion – require significant efforts if the 2030 Agenda is to be implemented in Bangladesh in its entirety. These aspects of development are not just inherently valuable – as they enable citizens to live in safety and security, and also claim their constitutional rights, as described above – they are also necessary in order to achieve better economic and social development. Indeed, peace enables economic growth, justice resolves disputes, and citizens' participation enhances good governance.

The inclusion of these areas in the 2030 Agenda will help bring about greater emphasis on them by stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and the international community. Nonetheless, progress towards meeting these targets will not come about as a mere consequence of their inclusion within the new development framework. Networks of support for their prioritisation will need to be built. Champions of these issues must be identified and mobilised, whether they are ministers looking to drive reform, civil servants trying to address specific challenges, or civil society activists calling for change. Context-specific indicators will need to be identified and data gathered to track progress. Yet, perhaps most importantly, action will have to be taken. Fortunately, Bangladesh already has a rich set of initiatives that it can build upon. These are described in the next section.

Members of the community from Saibaria village come together to discuss the location of a new Community Safety and Security Centre to be built.

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⁴¹ Government of Bangladesh, 'Complaints-Suggestions through SMS', (www.dghs.gov.bd/index.php/en/component/content/article/84-english-root/health-eservice/106-complaints-suggestions-through-sms).

2

Existing initiatives to achieve the targets

Introduction

THIS SECTION PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF 20 INITIATIVES in Bangladesh that are focused on the three SDG targets on violence, justice, and citizen participation. While there are a number of other initiatives that address these SDG targets, the ones highlighted in this section were selected balancing two criteria, as the most prominent examples and as illustrative of the wide variety of approaches that already exist. Core government institutions are not highlighted – such as elections, security forces, and courts – though support programmes to these institutions are included.

These 20 initiatives take a variety of approaches and are executed by different actors, such as government entities, NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), and others. These initiatives also exist at both the national and local levels. Two initiatives are highlighted for particular attention as strong examples: the Property Rights Initiative and the Village Courts Initiative.

Table 4: SDG target-related initiatives in Bangladesh

SDG targets	Initiatives
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community-based policing ■ Victim support centres ■ Stop Violence Initiative ■ Community security project ■ Property Rights Initiative (PRI) ■ Conflict Prevention through the Counter-Radicalisation of Youth ■ Local Trust-builders Network in Chittagong Hill Tracts
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legal aid – NGO ■ Public interest litigation ■ Legal aid – government ■ Maduripur Mediation Model ■ Activating Village Courts Project ■ Case coordination committees
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ School Management Committees ■ Union Parishad Standing Committees ■ Women leadership development ■ National voter list and voter ID cards ■ Female representation in parliament ■ Female representation in local government councils ■ Quotas for the civil service

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

Community-based policing – NGO and government – local-level project

From 2010 to 2013, the Asia Foundation implemented a community-based policing project, which builds on a previously conducted pilot. The foundation sought to establish citizen–police collaboration with the goal of improving public safety, which is key to SDG target 16.1 on reducing violence. It did so by supporting joint activities between communities and the police, as well as training and other support for citizens to hold the local police accountable. The programme was conducted in 518 villages and municipalities, which were found in 124 Upazilas in two divisions of Bangladesh. The programme evaluation suggests positive results, with an increased sense of security and frequent examples of cooperation in terms of joint patrols, phone calls with systematic responses, and informal interaction between communities and the police.⁴²

Victim support centres – government, NGO and multilateral organisation – local-level project

Since 2009, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported the Police Reform Programme of the Government of Bangladesh, with the goal of improving human security in the country. One notable component of this programme is the establishment of eight victim support centres, with an additional six planned, which provide various forms of assistance to victims of crimes, especially women in cases of violence. These centres are located in the division capitals of the seven divisions of Bangladesh, along with several outside these more urban areas. The forms of assistance include advice on lodging complaints, counselling, rehabilitation, and many more. The government establishes the centres with the assistance of ten partner NGOs. The advice, complemented by the other services, can aid the police to follow up on incidents of violence, thus addressing SDG target 16.1 on reducing violence. The programme has served at least 3,200 victims since its inception.⁴³ While this element of the programme shows promise, the wider programme has been critiqued for adopting a top-down technical approach to police reform that does not sufficiently incorporate citizen perceptions in the design of new forms of policing in the country.

Sexual harassment or 'eve teasing' of girls on their way to school is a regular occurrence on streets such as this one in Satkhira.

The abuse, which includes cat-calling and taking images on mobile phones, impacts on the day-to-day lives of women and girls and has resulted in some girls no longer attending school.

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⁴² Melloul K, Islam S (2014), Final Performance Evaluation of Community Based Policing Project (USAID), (http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00k744.pdf).

⁴³ Women Support and Investigation Division, (<http://dmpwsid.gov.bd/view/details/achievements>).

Stop Violence Initiative – NGO with communities and government – national-level programme

The Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) at BRAC has undertaken the Stop Violence Initiative, which seeks to prevent violence, as well as enhance reporting and provide victim support, which contribute to SDG target 16.1 on reducing violence. The programme primarily works via local participatory bodies called *Polli Shomaj*, with more than 13,000 having been organised to date. The initiative has a number of components. First, the programme mobilises the community to prevent violence through awareness raising, via the *Polli Shomaj*, community theatre, district multi-stakeholder meetings, as well as other activities. Second, the CEP identifies and reports on violence against women in the community, with reports being consolidated by BRAC offices. Finally, it offers support for women survivors of violence, including medical and legal aid, shelter, and psychological and other rehabilitation services. This initiative is a national programme that is active in 55 of the 64 districts, with extensive activities in nine particularly vulnerable districts.⁴⁴

Community security project – national and international NGO with government – local-level project

The CEP at BRAC, with support from Saferworld, is conducting a project on community security in five districts. This project works directly toward SDG target 16.1 on reducing violence. Within these five districts, BRAC organises Community Action Committees (CACs), which conduct participatory appraisals of community security, followed by community action plans. Various stakeholders, including the local government and police, then take these plans forward. The committees also seek to transform the relations between the police and local government on the one hand, and the community on the other.⁴⁵ An external mid-term review of the programme has demonstrated positive results, including an increased willingness among community members to address security concerns, improved participation and security of women, and improved response by local government officials in all programme locations.⁴⁶ At a recent policy event hosted by BRAC and Saferworld in Dhaka, the programme was widely praised by government, local government, and community representatives, who in each case called for a deepening and widening of the scope of the programme.⁴⁷

Children work on their homework in Bagerhat district. Safety concerns related to children's education include the harassment of girls on the way to school, drugs, and DVD shows that children skip school to watch.

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⁴⁴ BRAC, 'Addressing Violence Against Women', (<http://cep.brac.net/addressing-violence-against-women>).

⁴⁵ BRAC (2013), 'BRAC–Saferworld launches Community Safety and Security Project', 22 May, (<http://cep.brac.net/news-media/2013-03-11-03-50-20/174-brac-saferworld-launches-community-safety-and-security-project>).

⁴⁶ Saferworld (2015), 'Community Security: Experiences from Bangladesh', (www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/900-community-security-experiences-from-bangladesh).

⁴⁷ Saferworld, BRAC (2015), 'Dhaka event sheds light on safety and security issues in Bangladesh', 15 June, (www.saferworld.org.uk/news-and-views/news-article/671-dhaka-event-sheds-light-on-safety-and-security-issues-in-bangladesh).

Property Rights Initiative – NGO – local-level programme

The Human Rights and Legal Aid Services (HRLS) programme at BRAC executes the 'Property Rights Initiative' (PRI), which was launched in 2011 with pilots in two districts of Rangpur. The programme seeks to enhance the rule of law and reduce conflict as it relates to property, mainly by providing services to the public on land possession and titles.⁴⁸ By resolving disputes before they become violent, the programme makes a critical contribution towards SDG target 16.1 on reducing violence.

HRLS has developed a Land Entrepreneurship Model within the PRI. This model includes training on government-certified land measurement, which is provided to a set of local land entrepreneurs. Based on the training, these land entrepreneurs conduct quality land measurement as a service to individuals in their communities. The programme provides free services for ultra-poor households.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the land entrepreneurs monitor human rights in their respective communities and report any cases to the legal aid clinics of HRLS.⁵⁰

The pilot was successfully completed over an 11-month period. While a formal impact evaluation had not been completed at the time of writing, data from a recent study by Pabhu et al. do suggest positive impacts of the programme. The study estimated that, as of November 2012, 11,212 land surveys had been conducted, 866 free surveys, while BDT3,044,122 had been earned by land entrepreneurs. In addition, 2,045 assists with Land Offices and Property Rights had taken place, 2,295 certificates were provided, and 18 Khas land applications were completed. HRLS will scale up PRI to four other northern districts in the subsequent phase of the programme. Altogether, the next phase will reach approximately 1.8 million households.⁵¹

The proper registration of land, complemented with a clear understanding of the procedures and documentation, are important for reducing the incidence of violence in Bangladesh and promoting SDG target 16.1 on reducing violence. In the survey of Pabhu et al., 82 per cent of beneficiaries felt that land measurements would prevent the occurrence of land conflict in the future. Similarly, the survey identified a statistically significant reduction in the incidence of arguments, shouting, and harassment as relates to property disputes when comparing survey results from six months prior to the initiative and results from six months afterwards.⁵²

A case of the Property Rights Initiative in action

(Excerpt from HRLS)⁵³

Zakir Ahmed was a timber trader from Kismat Holdia village of Sundarganj Upazila under Gaibandha district. For over 15 years, he was locked in conflict with his paternal cousin over property issues arising from inherited land that Zakir's father left behind 20 years ago. Zakir inherited 8 decimals of land from his father, but he believed he was entitled to more property. The situation became increasingly complex with the claims of multiple inheritors of the same property, some of whom had already sold off their land. In this mounting conflict, Zakir along with other family members fell prey to [violence] from his cousin and his associates. Zakir later lodged a complaint with the police. Unfortunately, Zakir lost business capital in order to meet legal costs and was eventually compelled to [close] his business. In these desperate times, Zakir sought work as an agricultural day laborer.

Zakir soon sought justice by presenting his case to local influential leaders who felt his case was genuine. These local elites referred Zakir's case to the Union Parishad, who organised an arbitration session. During the arbitration session, Zakir's rivals physically attacked his wife Monira and grandmother after the second party failed to produce legal documents before the Parishad. The two women were seriously injured in this incident and hence Zakir filed a criminal case with the local police station. Later police officials also requested the second party to submit

48 BRAC, Property Rights Initiative, (<http://hrls.brac.net/property-rights-initiative>).

49 BRAC defines the 'ultra poor' as those living with under US\$0.50 cents per day. See: BRAC (2015), 'Does Your Organization Actually Empower Women?', (<http://tup.brac.net/media-news>).

50 *Op cit* BRAC, Property Rights Initiative.

51 Pabhu J, Norman T, Yunus FM (2014), 'Motivation & Performance: The Land Entrepreneur Program', BRAC Working Paper

52 *Ibid*.

53 HRLS (2015), Case Studies of PRI Beneficiaries, The stories were developed by the programme and shared with the author.

legal documents supporting their claim, but again they were unable to produce such documents to the authorities.

Eventually, Zakir's wife Monira, who is also a BRAC Village Organization (VO) member and a *Polli Shomaj* member, came to know about the new Property Rights Initiative (PRI) launched by BRAC HRLS. She learnt that this initiative provides legal awareness and legal aid support on property rights issues to poor and vulnerable people, especially women. Both Zakir and Monira eagerly visited a nearby HRLS legal aid clinic and were guided by the local HRLS Field Officer (FO) based there on the process of lodging a complaint. Zakir described his experience of receiving these essential services by saying: "everything was going to happen sequentially and peacefully, which, to be very honest, was beyond our expectation". After submitting all the necessary documents requested by the FO, the clinic sent two notices within a span of 15 days to Zakir's cousin inviting him to resolve the ongoing dispute via an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). In two consecutive ADR sessions, both parties presented their documents and placed their arguments before the FO handling the case. The FO, along with the local influencers from the previous arbitration at the Union Parishad, carefully analysed these documents and deliberated over the arguments made by both parties. In addition, the FO reviewed relevant land laws and procedures around adverse possession and recovery of possession to all those present.

The ADR was completed and in November 2011, a mutually agreed resolution was adopted in favour of Monira and Zakir. The opponent handed back to the couple their rightful possession of land. Soon after recovery of their land, the couple decided to build a house on it. Monira pointed out that "the second party and his supporters accepted BRAC's services after noting HRLS' previous track record in resolving disputes centred on family issues and violence against women through ADR and litigation". She further added "we did not pay any fees for the services we received, this is really praiseworthy". A contented Zakir says that "this land has immense value, far beyond its monetary worth; I have established my right to my paternal property".

Conflict Prevention through the Counter-Radicalisation of Youth – civil society and NGO – local-level project

The Youth Forum for Bangladesh Leaders, under the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, has undertaken an initiative on Conflict Prevention through the Counter-Radicalization of Youth since 2013. The project engages various stakeholders involved with youth and children, with a view to prevent conflict and consolidate peace in Bangladesh, and therefore addresses SDG target 16.1. The main activities include capacity building, networking, advocacy, and dialogue. The project is particularly focused on diminishing youth participation in radical violence and conflict; it also seeks to develop peace-building activities. The Youth Forum has diverse members: male and female students from around the country who are enrolled in schools, colleges, madrasahs, and universities. A network of 13 different local partners implements these activities. Thus far, there have been 30 trainings for students from secondary schools, colleges,

A youth action committee in Bagerhat district meets at dusk. These meetings are used to discuss local safety and security concerns, and decide on action plans to address these issues.

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and religious schools, with the gender ratio of students attending roughly even. While it is difficult to measure the impact of such trainings and other activities on violent groups, anecdotal evidence suggests that young people are becoming aware of the dangers of joining violent groups and the need to develop better support systems to address this.⁵⁴

Local Trust-builders Network in Chittagong Hill Tracts – government and multilateral organisation – local level

The Local Trust-builders Network forms a part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Development Facility. The ‘trust-builders’ are trained in mediation, in an effort to reduce intra- and inter-community tensions in an area that has experienced a civil war in the past, and continues to suffer a variety of tensions, as described in the previous section. Such a reduction in tension, and the prevention of violence, addresses SDG target 16.1. These trust-builders have connections with local politicians, the police, public administration, and community groups. There are currently more than 100 trust-builders, representing a variety of ethnic groups, as well as both men and women. The Local Trust-builders Network is part of the CHT Development Facility, which is managed by the Government of Bangladesh with support from UNDP and a variety of other development partners.⁵⁵

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all

Legal aid – NGO – national-level programme

Bangladesh is home to the largest non-government legal aid programme in the world, the HRLS programme of BRAC. Legal aid services provide a critical avenue for access to justice, especially among the poor, given the challenges they face in terms of time, familiarity, and the costs associated with the process. As a result, legal aid will assist Bangladesh to meet SDG target 16.3 on access to justice and the rule of law. HRLS has been running for nearly three decades, and is executed through 517 legal aid clinics in 61 out of the 64 districts of Bangladesh. The programme includes a variety of interventions, such as legal education, legal aid service provision via legal aid clinics, rescue operational support, counselling, legal referrals, staff training, and capacity building.⁵⁶ The legal aid and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) interventions, launched in 1998, work hand in hand. If the case can be resolved through ADR, then the local BRAC legal aid agent will follow this route; however, if no resolution can be reached, then the case is recommended to the formal court system, where appropriate, with a staff lawyer being provided to the client in cases of need.⁵⁷ In 2013, the programme conducted 10,381 ADRs and filed 5,598 cases in court.⁵⁸

Public interest litigation – NGO – national-level programme

Established in 1993, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) is a multifaceted legal organisation that covers a variety of topics such as family, land, and criminal law, among others. Similar to HRLS, it uses alternative dispute resolution and provides legal aid for the court system through its panel lawyers. However, it also conducts public interest litigation (PIL), which is another critical component of access to justice for the poor and therefore crucial for SDG target 16.3. BLAST began its PIL efforts in 1996, and has submitted 82 petitions to the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. The PIL work has

⁵⁴ Youth Forum For Peacebuilders, (<http://yfpb-bd.org>).

⁵⁵ UNDP Bangladesh (2015), ‘Bangladesh: Empowering People for Peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts’, 30 April, (<https://europa.eu/eyd2015/en/undp/stories/bangladesh-empowering-people-peace-chittagong-hill-tracts>).

⁵⁶ Overview of BRAC’s human rights and legal services programme, (<http://hrls.brac.net/overview>).

⁵⁷ BRAC, ‘Legal Aid Services’, (<http://hrls.brac.net/legal-aid-services>).

⁵⁸ Rose J, Hasan M (2014), ‘Situation Assessment of Justice and Legal Empowerment in Bangladesh’, for BRAC, p 16, (www.sails-law.org/img/sit_assess_v4.pdf).

Shahidul Islam and his wife Taslima work their land. They have lived in the area their whole lives, but have no evidence that proves legal ownership. When the land was linked to redevelopment by the government to improve water and sanitation after flooding, a local 'godfather' claimed the land was legally his. This claim was backed up by the local government administration, although the people living there stress this was due to corruption. Shahidul was left with few options.

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advanced a wide variety of causes for the poor and marginalised, including slum dwellers' rights, incarcerated children's rights, women's rights, the rights of indigenous groups, and many others. Such work has enhanced the rights of many marginalised groups and provided them with access to justice on a larger scale.⁵⁹

Legal aid – government – national-level programme

A government institution, the National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO), provides legal aid as stipulated in the Legal Aid Services Act of 2000. As with HRLS, legal aid works toward SDG target 16.3 on access to justice and the rule of law. NLASO has offices in all districts of Bangladesh, with an associated District Legal Aid Committee (DLAC), as well as committees at the Upazila (sub-district) and Union Parishad (most local layer of government administration) levels. The legal aid initiative provides services to the poor, defined as having an average annual income of under BDT 150,000, or approximately US\$2,000. It also provides services to children and women who are victims of abuse, among others. Legal aid is available for both criminal and civil cases, especially family cases regarding dowry. In 2015, NLASO administered legal aid to nearly 25,300 individuals, with women comprising nearly 14,500 of these.

Maduripur Mediation Model – NGO with government – local-level programme

Founded in 1974, the Maduripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) has coined an approach named the Maduripur Mediation Model (MMM), in which it engages with the local *shalish*. The approach of MLAA, which has been exported to other countries, represents a means of engaging local justice institutions to ensure both impartiality and access for the poor and marginalised, thus working toward SDG target 16.3. Its work focuses primarily on the NGO *shalish*, which includes the following interventions. First, MLAA facilitates mediation in the proceedings, instead of arbitration. Second, MLAA trains members of the *shalish* panel, and also enables an open selection process for these members. It furthermore encourages – and at times requires – that women engage in the selection process for the *shalish* panel, both with a vote and as candidates. Third, MLAA ensures documentation of the proceedings. Fourth, MLAA complements these interventions with legal services such as legal aid and ADR, or even with initiatives to empower local actors, especially women, outside the process so that they exert greater influence in the *shalish*.⁶⁰ MLAA reports that it has facilitated 11,040 cases via MMM, with 8,706 resolved.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), (www.blast.org.bd/who).

⁶⁰ Maduripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA), 'MLAA at a Glance', (www.mlaabd.org/profile.html).

⁶¹ *Op cit* Hasan, p 16.

Activating Village Courts Project – government, multilateral and NGO – local-level project

The village courts are a form of informal justice institution that are officially recognised in legislation, namely the Village Courts Act of 1976, which was revised in the Village Courts (Amendment) Act of 2013. According to the village courts model, the *shalish* panel is composed of certain members of the Union Parishad. The Union Parishad chair becomes the chair of the panel. Meanwhile, the two parties select one Union Parishad member for the panel, along with one more recognised citizen, for a total of five members. Where the case for the *shalish* relates to minors or women, at least one member of the panel should be a woman. As per legislation, village courts may process civil cases and minor cases up to a maximum value of BDT 75,000 (nearly US\$1,000).⁶²

The Activating Village Courts Project, conducted by the Local Government Division of the Government of Bangladesh and supported by UNDP and the European Union (EU), seeks to bolster village courts in 351 Union Parishads. By supporting this form of alternative dispute resolution, the project seeks to improve access to justice among marginalised groups, and thus addresses SDG target 16.3. The project consists of four main components. First, it seeks to update and improve the legal framework for village courts. Second, the project conducts training through a variety of NGOs for relevant stakeholders, including local UP members, as well as police, administrative staff, and judges. Third, the project raises the awareness of the general public of the village courts. Finally, the project monitors these interventions, and especially the performance of the village courts in the project sites. Evaluations show that the village courts in the project have managed more than 70,000 cases, with over 4,000 cases having been referred from district courts.⁶³

Two examples of village courts in action

(paraphrased from excerpts from Government of Bangladesh, Local Government Division, 2012)⁶⁴

Ajibul Islam, a day labourer in a rural area, saved BDT 20,000 (approximately US\$280) and bought a five decimal parcel of land from his neighbour. However, after payment, the neighbour intentionally refused to officially sign off ownership of the land. The situation continued for four years. Ajibul took his grievance to village leaders, but they failed to help in his case. After learning of village courts, he filed his case on 3 March 2011, with the Union Parishad chairman forming the court on 11 April 2011. Upon hearing the case, the village court members decided in favour of the complainant, with official possession of the land passing on to him soon afterwards.

Chobi Rani has a parcel of land 1.50 decimals that is located near her home. A neighbouring farmer would allow his cow to graze on that parcel, which then damaged the paddy seeds and destroyed many of her crops. She approached her village leaders, but failed to get a response. She then filed a case with the village court. On 1 February 2011, the Union Parishad chairman informed them that they would hold a hearing the next day, and they quickly arranged for their representatives to be present. After the hearing, the village court fined the accused BDT 300 (around US\$4) as compensation for damaging the crops, which was promptly paid to the victim.

Case coordination committees – government and bilateral donor – local-level project

Implemented primarily via the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Law and Justice, with the support of GIZ, this project promotes case coordination committees in seven districts; the committees include government officials, NGOs, and several other relevant stakeholders. These committees seek to improve the criminal case process in terms of their efficiency, which improves access to justice, captured in SDG

⁶² *Op cit* Government of Bangladesh (2010).

⁶³ UNDP, 'Through village courts, justice for all in Bangladesh', (www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/ourstories/through-village-courts-justice-for-all-in-bangladesh.html).

⁶⁴ Government of Bangladesh (2012), 'A Compilation of Success Stories from Village Courts' (Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives), (<http://villagecourts.org/Publication/Case%20Story%20Book.pdf>).

target 16.3. Seventy per cent of all prisoners have not yet had their ‘day in court’, partly due to the enormous case backlog.⁶⁵ The case coordination committees seek to improve the process of case management through improved communication between the various relevant stakeholders. For example, criminal cases are often delayed, with the accused in jail, due to communication failures between the courts and the police, who need to produce witnesses in court. The committees have addressed this impediment to justice by bringing together the police and court officials, along with paralegals working on the case, to prepare adequately so that the process runs smoothly. Through this initiative, and complemented by paralegal work, more than 4,000 prisoners in five district prisons have been released.⁶⁶ Findings from these committees are also shared with the ministries and parliamentarians, with a view to improve policy.

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

School Management Committees – government – local level policy

School Management Committees (SMCs) represent an important avenue for inclusive citizen participation in the delivery of government services at the local level. SMCs are school-based decision-making bodies responsible for school stipend distribution, the planning and execution of funds, and general oversight of the school, among others. While decisions are not fully driven by parents, the committees do provide an important forum for parents to provide input into a critical government services, and thus contribute to SDG target 16.7 on participation in decision-making. SMCs are made up of 11 members, including the head teacher, local school patrons, parents, Member of Parliament (MP) appointee, and others. The performance of SMCs is quite varied, leading to differing effects on the quality of schooling. At times, they have proved to be effective in school management, often when parents are highly involved, despite the fact that some parents seek to use their participation in the SMC to establish a political career.⁶⁷ Other times, SMCs have been found to be corrupt, especially in non-government schools, where they are responsible for hiring teachers and face few checks and balances.⁶⁸

Union Parishad Standing Committees – government, NGOs and private sector – local-level policy and project

Several initiatives have been launched to increase citizen participation at local level. For example, citizens can give feedback through Union Parishad Standing Committees, which form part of local government and have a variety of themes, including education, health, and women’s and children’s rights. UP Standing Committees monitor service providers, provide them or the Union Parishad with feedback, and develop plans for service providers based on local input.⁶⁹ These committees have been supported with training under the Strengthening Democratic Local Government project, with trainings conducted in 450 Union Parishads of three divisions. Although citizens may attend the committee meetings and provide feedback to members, they are excluded from voting in committee decisions.⁷⁰ While a comprehensive evaluation had yet to be made public at the time of writing, studies point to some positive examples emerging from the committees.⁷¹

⁶⁵ GIZ, Justice and prison reform for promoting human rights and preventing corruption, (<https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/15042.html>)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Financial Management Reform Program (2007), ‘Governance, Management and Performance in Health and Education Facilities in Bangladesh: Findings from the Social Sector Performance Qualitative Study’ (Dhaka: Bangladesh).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Kabir M et.al (2014), ‘Improving Services: The Role of Union Parishad Standing Committees’, Unnayan Shamannay, (www.usshamunnaybd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SDLG-Booklet-Bangla-English.pdf).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Members of the *Polli Shomaj* attend their weekly meeting in rural Jessore, during which they discuss social issues in their communities.

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National voter list and voter ID cards – government, multilateral organisation, and bilateral donors – national programme

Starting in 2007, the Government of Bangladesh undertook a major project to ‘clean’ the voting roles, and develop a national voter list, providing each eligible citizen with a picture voter ID card. Fair elections are an essential component of citizen input into government decision-making, captured in target 16.7, as they form the most basic of mechanisms for citizens to express their political views. The Bangladesh Election Commission was the lead government agency in this effort, with substantial assistance from the army and a supporting team of more than 300,000 enumerators, primarily composed of schoolteachers. Through the process of re-registering, the government discovered more than 11 million false names, which they subsequently removed (this figure was determined by the number of previously registered voters in excess of the number provided by census data). Upon completion of this initiative, Bangladesh experienced the highest electoral turnout in its history, with 80 per cent of eligible voters coming to the polls. The initiative was supported by UNDP, along with a number of bilateral development partners.⁷²

Women leadership development – NGO and government – local-level programme

As described above, the CEP organises rural communities into democratic grassroots institutions called *Polli Shomaj* (community-based organisations), with more than 12,000 organised to date. One goal of this work is to develop their leadership, such that women members can effectively engage in public affairs. Such efforts are needed to ensure the participation of women, which contributes to SDG target 16.7 on participation in decision-making. The CEP carries out this initiative through leadership training, as well as providing women with the opportunity to participate in BRAC committees and other community meetings. According to one analysis of elections in 2003, *Polli Shomaj* members who were candidates in the election won 1.6 per cent of the total number of the Union Parishad positions.⁷³

⁷² The International Republican Institute (2008), ‘Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections: December 29, 2008’, ‘Election Observation Mission Final Report’, (www.iri.org/sites/default/files/fields/field_files_attached/resource/bangladeshs_2008_parliamentary_elections.pdf).

⁷³ Alim A (2007), ‘Facilitating Good Governance at the Grassroots: BRAC and the Women Members of the Union Parishad’, BRAC Research Report, (http://research.brac.net/reports/Women_UP_Member.pdf).

A woman crosses a makeshift bridge across the Buriganga River inside one of the slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh in July 2007. More than 90 per cent of slum people live below the poverty line, while nearly 40 per cent are below the hardcore poverty line.

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Female representation in parliament – government – national level policy

Female representation in parliament has increased over time. Such representation is an important component of SDG target 16.7 on participation in decision-making, as it raises the likelihood that women's interests will be represented in government decision-making. Various iterations of the constitution have increased the quota for women in parliament. These reserved seats are divided among the political parties according to the proportion of seats each win in an election.⁷⁴

Table 5: Proportion of female Members of Parliament (MPs)

Parliament	Quota	Directly elected	Total women MPs	Total Representation (%)
First (1973–75)	15		15	4.8
Second (1979–82)	30	2	32	9.7
Third (1986–87)	30	5	35	10.6
Fourth (1988–90)		4	4	1.3
Fifth (1991–95)	30	4	34	10.3
Sixth (1996–96)	30	3	33	10.0
Seventh (1996–2001)	30	8	38	11.5
Eighth (2001–06)	45	7	52	15.1
Ninth (2009–13)	50	19	69	19.7
Tenth (2014 – present)	50	20	70	20.0

The Ninth Parliament (2009–13) experienced two major changes. First, 19 female MPs were elected directly. This was a historic achievement, because in all preceding parliaments, no more than eight elected MPs were female. Second, the quota was increased from 45 to 50 seats. The Tenth Parliament has one more elected female representative than the Ninth, raising female representation in parliament to 20 per cent – the highest in Bangladesh history. However, it remains difficult to achieve the

⁷⁴ Quota Project, Bangladesh, (www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=BD).

meaningful political participation of women, as a result of male-dominated societal structures, and difficulties in achieving equal access to power as a result of societal, economic, and cultural challenges.⁷⁵

Female representation on local government councils – government – national-level policy

In common with parliament, local government councils – called Union Parishad councils in Bangladesh – have a quota for female representation, although in this case women are directly elected in their constituencies. As with parliamentary representation, this quota contributes to SDG target 16.7 on participation in decision-making. According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance in 1983, every Union council shall have one chairman, nine general members, and three women members. Each Union Parishad has nine wards. The three reserved women members are elected directly, one for each three-ward unit. There are 4,550 Union Parishads in Bangladesh, meaning that, at the local level, there are 13,650 women elected under this provision. Among city corporations, one third of councillor seats are reserved for women, for a total of 66 seats.⁷⁶ Yet, challenges to women's meaningful participation at the local level remain. Many women face paternalistic and discriminatory attitudes from male representatives and male chairmen.⁷⁷

Hiring quotas in the civil service – government – national-level policy

The Government of Bangladesh has a policy of quotas on recruitment of civil servants, the ratios of which were established in 1985. Within the quotas, just 45 per cent are appointed on merit, 30 per cent for freedom fighters (and, if appropriate candidates from this category are not available, their wards), ten per cent for women, five per cent for ethnic minorities, and the remaining ten per cent for under-represented districts. The quotas being applied to women, ethnic minorities, and under-represented districts contribute towards SDG target 16.7 on participation in decision-making. Freedom fighters are individuals who fought in the resistance against Pakistan during the Liberation War of 1971. The distribution of quotas has been in place since 1985, although the freedom fighter quota has been extended to the grandchildren of such individuals.

Women represented 22 per cent of the civil service in 2011, exceeding their allocated quota but far from gender parity.⁷⁸ There have been observations that the representation of these groups is not maintained among the senior levels of the administration. For example, in 2011, women represented only 3.9 per cent of all ministry secretaries, the highest-level civil servant.⁷⁹

75 Panday PK (2013), *Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh: Institutional Reforms, Actors and Outcomes* (Springer)

76 CAPWIP, 'State of Women in Urban Local Government, Bangladesh Report', p.6 (www.capwip.org/readingroom/bangladesh.pdf).

77 Panday PK (2008), 'Representation without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh', *International Political Science Review*, 29 (4), (<http://courses.arch.vt.edu/courses/wdunaway/gia5524/panday08.pdf>).

78 UNDP (2012), 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh: A Bangladesh Case Study' (Bangladesh: UNDP).

79 *Ibid.*

3

The way forward

LOOKING FORWARD, GOAL 16 AS A WHOLE – and targets 16.1, 16.3, and 16.7 specifically – presents an opportunity to focus more intensely on violence reduction, access to justice, and inclusive citizen participation in Bangladesh. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda could serve as a launching pad for a national process to focus on these issues as core development enablers and outcomes.

Bangladesh will not be starting from a blank slate. This report has demonstrated that there are already a number of relevant initiatives being implemented in Bangladesh. The review presented a total of 20, with six or seven initiatives under each of the three targets; and it is clear that many more initiatives exist, often at a small scale, across the country. They will all need to be leveraged and built upon going forward.

Box 1: Monitoring Goal 16 in Bangladesh

The SDGs and targets will be accompanied by a set of indicators to monitor progress. Policymakers need to know where to focus their attention, to strengthen the “basis for evidence-based decision-making”.⁸⁰ Civil society groups, parliamentarians, the media, and other stakeholders need the framework to hold them to account.

The Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG indicators is currently developing a set of global indicators to monitor the world’s progress as a whole. In addition to this, countries are expected to set their own national and context-specific indicators to complement the global set agreed by the IAEG.

Getting the national indicators right

This process should not be rushed: the complex nature of the issues contained in Goal 16 – including violence, justice, and governance – demand sensitively selected indicators. Most importantly, it will need to be acknowledged that single indicators alone rarely tell a full, fair story about progress. Goal 16 targets will need to be monitored at the national level using a collection of indicators that measure:

- Capacity – is governmental and social capacity being developed to enhance peace and prevent violent conflict?
- The ‘objective’ situation⁸¹ – do statistical measures of actual societal situations show that improvements are being achieved?
- Public perceptions – does the public feel that improvements are taking place?

When combined and triangulated, each indicator type can validate the other and highlight the interconnections between the multiple facets of peace, governance, and justice, even within an individual target focused on a single issue. Three-sided indicator sets can provide a valuable

⁸⁰ UN Economic and Social Council (2015), ‘Report of the Friends of the Chair Group on broader measures of progress’ – E/CN.3/2015/2, p 11.

⁸¹ The inverted commas here indicate that the definition of some indicators as ‘subjective’ and others as ‘objective’ is problematic. All quantitative measures have an element of subjectivity, and the potential for bias and imperfect recording of phenomena. See, for example, UN Development Programme (2007), *Governance indicators: A Users’ Guide* (New York: UNDP-BDP), pp 5–6.

picture, whereas single indicators risk creating perverse incentives and misleading results.⁸² Bangladesh's national indicators, thus, should seek to complement the global ones in a way that can tell a full story of progress.

Setting quantified targets

In contrast to other goals in the 2030 Agenda, Goal 16 targets are not quantified. To know when targets have been met at the national level, benchmarks can be set at the indicator level. Targets would be considered met at the national level when the agreed benchmarks at the indicator level have been reached. This can be demonstrated using target 16.1 for Bangladesh in the year 2020. As with the MDGs, colour coding could be used to ascertain whether Bangladesh has achieved the target (green), is on track to meeting it (orange), or is unlikely to meet the target (red).

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

Global indicators	Baseline 2015	National target 2030	Progress in 2020
Violent homicides per 100,000	2.7	2	2
Percentage of population subjected to physical, psychological, or sexual violence in previous 12 months	18	10	16
Percentage of people who report that they feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live	82	90	73

Example national indicators:

Number of people per 100,000 displaced by conflict	4	0	2.3
Number of violent protests every year	870	250	463

Multistakeholder data production

CSOs, private companies, and multilateral bodies should also be actively consulted as part of the process of selecting national indicators: they have experience and important perspectives to contribute, while their buy-in will be critical for legitimising the monitoring process.

However, their participation must go further than indicator selection. Given the potentially contentious nature of the issues contained in Goal 16, it is crucial to ensure that multiple stakeholders in Bangladesh take part in the actual monitoring and validating of the story of progress. While the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and other official data providers will play a central role in the production of data for indicators, the potential of the 'data revolution' lies in the wealth of non-official data producers, including civil society groups and citizens themselves.⁸³ Their potential should be harnessed by empowering them as active data producers, especially given the capacity constraints faced by official data providers.

For more on monitoring Goal 16, see Saferworld (2015), *Measuring Peace from 2015: An indicator framework at work*

Speaking to the UN General Assembly in September 2015, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated that her government would integrate the SDGs into its seventh five-year development plan.⁸⁴ While it is unclear how this has been done, the seventh development plan now includes a focus on issues related to people's security, violence against women, access to justice, the rule of law, and people's participation in governance. Indeed, on the latter issue, the new plan states that one of three priorities for the

⁸² Scheye D, Chigas E (2009), 'Development of a Basket of Conflict, Security and Justice Indicators', Online pp 7, 13, 16–17, 19; UN (2010), *Monitoring Peace Consolidation – United Nations Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking* (New York: United Nations), p 40. On the importance of public confidence and perceptions surveys, see also World Bank (2011), *World Development Report 2011* (Washington, DC: World Bank); and Overseas Development Institute (2015), *Asking people what they think: Using perceptions data to monitor the post-2015 development framework* (London: ODI). See also UN Development Programme (2007), 'Golden Rule 1: Use a range of indicators', *Governance indicators: A Users' Guide* (UNDP BDP), p 12.

⁸³ The UN Secretary General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (2014), *A World that Counts: Mobilizing the data revolution for sustainable development*, (www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-World-That-Counts2.pdf).

⁸⁴ Statement by Hon. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the UN Summit on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, (www.albd.org/index.php/en/resources/articles/3017-statement-by-hon-prime-minister-sheikh-hasina-at-the-un-summit-on-the-post-2015-development-agenda).

Women in Bankda, Satkhira turn the camera on the photographer. Having no legal proof of their historic ownership of the land, the community is considered landless and could be evicted at any time.

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country is a “broad-based strategy of inclusiveness with a view to empowering every citizen to participate fully and benefit from the development process”.⁸⁵ Taken together with the initiatives identified in this report, it is clear that there is not only a need but also ample opportunity for Bangladesh’s government and other stakeholders to place a special focus on Goal 16.

Making use of Goal 16

At the same time, the existence of Goal 16 offers several opportunities that can be leveraged by those actors working on issues related to violence reduction, access to justice, or citizen’s participation. Actors including government officials, civil society activists, donors, and even private sector actors should not only assess what they will do to help Bangladesh meet Goal 16, but also how Goal 16 can help them in their own work. For example, the 2030 Agenda and Goal 16 specifically could be used to ...

1. **...cut across silos:** The many interlinkages between the issues addressed under the three targets analysed highlight the need to avoid working in silos when working to advance violence reduction, governance, or justice. For example, a lack of access to justice to resolve property disputes is linked to the incidence of violence, while participation and the wider health of Bangladesh’s democracy is linked to levels of political violence. Furthermore, the reality is that many existing initiatives will potentially contribute to meeting more than one of the targets. One example is BRAC’s HRLS programme, which seeks to enhance the rule of law and reduce conflict, thus advancing SDG targets 16.1 and 16.3. The implication is that Goal 16 – and indeed the 2030 Agenda’s cross-cutting commitment to peaceful, just, and inclusive societies – should be seen as a platform to cut across silos, not as an additional reason to strengthen them.
2. **...promote multistakeholder cooperation:** The 2030 Agenda calls for the formation of multistakeholder partnerships.⁸⁶ Given its scale, improved coordination and cooperation between different actors will be critical to meeting the 2030 Agenda’s goals and targets: the state cannot do this alone. NGOs, social organisations, occupational platforms, UN agencies, and donors can all play a role. For example, given that there

⁸⁵ Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (2015), Seventh Five Year Plan FY2016– FY2020: Accelerating Growth, Empowering Citizens,

⁸⁶ The 2030 Agenda notes that multi-stakeholder partnerships: “will facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the goals and targets, bringing together Governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources”. See United Nations General Assembly (2015), ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, (www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E).

are different sources of legal aid, if the government can vastly scale up its programme, then NGOs might focus on particular types of legal aid that are not covered under the government programme. Indeed, the present review of the 20 initiatives also highlights high levels of existing cooperation between various actors. For example, six of the initiatives include high levels of cooperation between government and NGOs. Three involve government, NGOs, and UN agencies, while three others involve other configurations of cooperation. There is, however, room for improvement. Forming platforms for discussion on Goal 16 could help facilitate coordination and create opportunities for cooperation on projects, as well as on lesson learning and knowledge exchange. Nonetheless, existing coordination efforts should not be replicated unnecessarily and sectoral silos should be avoided.

“We engaged in partnership with a wide range of local and international actors. We also developed numerous innovation and development solutions across sectors.”

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on what helped Bangladesh meet the MDGs⁸⁷

3. **...monitor progress and drive accountability:** Genuine ownership of the new development agenda will require the active participation of civil society in the follow-up and monitoring process of the 2030 Agenda. This includes consultations with the government on what context-specific national indicators need to be developed, and on setting benchmarks to determine where Bangladesh aims to be by 2030 (see Box 1). National consultative processes already undertaken could be built upon – one example is the proposal by the People’s Forum on MDGs (PFM).⁸⁸ Furthermore, the promise of Goal 16 is the production of new data on issues that have not traditionally been tracked. The creation of data on levels of violence or people’s participation in governance could be used by a range of actors to hold the government to account for its commitments.
4. **...learn what works and what does not:** While many initiatives to promote peace, governance, and justice already exist in Bangladesh, more needs to be learnt in terms of what works and what does not. In-depth evaluations and lesson learning will be required in order to identify which of these initiatives merit further support and scaling. The monitoring framework linked to the SDGs, as well as the follow-up and review process, could be used to scrutinise whether or not different initiatives are having the desired impact. Learning should be facilitated through new Goal 16 platforms or relevant platforms that already exist.
5. **...focus beyond the state – and innovate:** Achieving Goal 16 in Bangladesh will require work to improve the main state institutions – but will also require a number of creative initiatives that go significantly beyond this. Simply focusing on increasing the capacity of state institutions such as the courts, the police, or election commission will not suffice. Creating a stronger society – for example, through support for informal dispute resolution – will need to complement support for stronger institutions. Furthermore, approaches to implementing Goal 16 should focus on outcomes for people, not the outputs of the state. This will mean drawing people into the initiatives, as active participants and agents of change rather than passive recipients. Goal 16 can provide a catalyst for multistakeholder innovation in this area. There are already significant numbers of citizen-led initiatives, which seek to use open data, technology, and other forms of innovation to open up decision-making to wider scrutiny. Combining such initiatives with the perspectives of traditionally marginalised and conflict-affected communities could lead to new approaches to increasing levels of citizen participation and accountable governance.

⁸⁷ *Op cit* Hon. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

⁸⁸ Campaign for Popular Education (2013), ‘Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda: Perspectives and Recommendations from Bangladesh Civil Society’, September

6. **...think long-term:** The preponderance of projects within the initiatives reviewed raises questions over whether a sufficiently long-term view is being taken to address development challenges that require sustained action. Long-term engagement is needed for two main reasons. One is that programmes such as those focusing on legal aid are needed over a sizeable period of time; these issues are not resolved quickly, given the slow progress of the legal system. A second reason is that improving the capacity of government institutions or that of social actors also takes time. Systemic changes are needed within the security and judicial institutions, as well as within democratic institutions. These changes will not be achieved by short-term projects that seek to achieve immediate results. The vision for the SDGs, with targets that are gradually met over the next 15 years, should form the basis upon which to have discussions on sustainability and long-term planning.

ANNEX 1: List of interviewees

- Anna Minj**, Director, Community Empowerment Programme, BRAC
- Faustina Pereira**, Director, Human Rights and Legal Aid Services, BRAC
- Manzoor Hasan**, OBE, Executive Director, South Asia Institute for Advanced Legal and Human Rights Studies
- Dr Dalem Barman**, Vice Chancellor, ASA University
- Palash Kanti Das**, Assistant Country Director, UNDP
- Rigan Chakma**, Lecturer, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh
- Richard Miles**, Principal Advisor, GTZ
- Tahera Yasmin**, Senior Programme Advisor, GTZ
- Mila Cerecina**, Programme Fellow, Programme in Criminal Justice Policy and Management
- Ms Tasneem Athar**, Director, CAMPE
- Mr Tapon Kumar Das**, Deputy Director, CAMPE
- Mr KM Enamul Hoque**, Deputy Director, CAMPE
- Dr Mostafizur Rahaman**, Programme Manager, CAMPE
- Joby George**, Chief of Party, Save the Children
- Thomas George**, Community Development and Planning Specialist, UNICEF
- Dr ATM Shamsul Huda**, former Chief Election Commissioner, Bangladesh Election Commission

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COVER PHOTO: A cyclist spreads political messages on the streets of Satkhira. The area experienced significant political violence in the run-up to and during the January 2014 elections, including road blocks, picketing, vandalism, arson and attacks on minority communities. © SAFERWORLD/TOM MARTIN



SAFERWORLD

UK OFFICE

The Grayston Centre
28 Charles Square
London N1 6HT, UK
Phone: +44 (0)20 7324 4646
Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647
Email: general@saferworld.org.uk
Web: www.saferworld.org.uk

BANGLADESH OFFICE

House # 369, Flat 6A
Road 28, New D.O.H.S. Mohakhali
Dhaka-1206, Bangladesh
Phone: +88 (0)29 851 268

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