

MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER NGOS IN CONSORTIUM

together we achieved more



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Good Practice Report Series:

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Credits

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Forward

The Community Legal Services Programme ends in July 2017. In the preceding five years, we have expanded access to legal services to an estimated 13.9 million Bangladeshis in an additional 16% of the country covering 1232 rural unions and urban wards. Most of our beneficiaries, over 74%, have been women and girls and survey research indicates significant increases in awareness of key legal rights and satisfaction with dispute resolution services in the communities in which we work. Our work has also improved use of legal aid assistance to the poor provided by the Government of Bangladesh. All this was possible through partnering with our NGO partners, drawing on their established expertise and building their capacities and skills to pursue high quality standards for legal service provision. Their remarkable improvements have yielded many examples of good practice that the team wishes to acknowledge and share with the broader community of stakeholders working on improving access to justice in Bangladesh and globally. This series of Good Practice reports is our attempt to do so.



Sincerely,

Jerome Sayre

Team Leader

CLS Programme

Preamble

Community Legal Services (CLS) is a five year programme funded by UKaid through the Department for International Development (DFID). CLS is implemented by a consortium consisting of Maxwell Stamp PLC, as principal contractor, with the British Council and the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (UK), as partners.

The programme aims to provide greater access to justice for poor, marginalised and socially excluded communities in Bangladesh, with a specific focus on women and girls. Its overall objectives are to improve the quality and coverage of CLS in Bangladesh, build sustainability into the CLS Programme interventions of potential grant partners, and encourage and create an enabling environment for legal services NGOs and community based organisations to coordinate their activities for improved delivery of CLS to target beneficiaries.

CLS provides grants to local and national NGO partners to deliver programme activities. NGO grantees include both specialised legal services organisations as well as development-focused organisations that are being funded to extend the reach and access of legal services for the poor.

During the course of the programme, the CLS team has recognised partners' strengths in providing different CLS modalities with a series of BEACONS awards for 'shining lights of good practice'. The awards process set a number of performance categories for good practice and research has been carried out to document each of these. This publication is one of 13 that demonstrate how good practice can be developed and results achieved that improve the quality of community legal service delivery.



what the good practice is and how it is used in the organisation

we thought differently

It is not common in Bangladesh for two organisations to come together, to comprehend, design and implement one project together. But this is what Bright Bangladesh Forum (BBF) and Ensure Legal Support through Local Movement and Action (ELLMA) did for Community Legal Services (CLS) Programme. The target group for their project was women in the slum-areas of the port city Chittagong, the second largest metropolitan area in Bangladesh.

sharing each other's strength

Both of these organisations had been working in the project area for some time, but not in the same wards of the city corporation. On several occasions, they had also worked together in past but not in the same project. The key idea behind this partnership was for the two organisations to come together to cover a larger area, thereby achieving more. And they managed to attain their goal! Together they covered five wards (4, 7, 14, 17 and 19) of the Chittagong City Corporation.

why and how the practice was developed

critical designing

The consortium was developed with the objective of making both organisations stronger. BBF took on the role of both managing the project and implementing it in one part of the working areas. ELLMA implemented the project in the remaining area. Previous experience of working together on similar causes triggered the relationship, but it was the development of mutual respect and trust that made it stronger over the project period. Now, as a consortium, they can together respond to other calls for proposals.

city legal services network

The consortium extended its efforts by forming the City Legal Services Network (CLSN) with human rights organisations like BLAST, BNWLA and institutions like the Press Club and Department of Law (University of Chittagong). This forum, with diverse entities as members, has sowed the seed of future sustainability. The idea is that when the project ends and if there is no alternative for the consortium, this forum will take on the role, as a bigger and more diverse (with different capabilities) forum, aiming at securing peoples' access to legal services.

the difference that this good practice is making to the work of the organisation

smart planning

It had not been easy initially, when the project was designed. The critical part was keeping the overall overhead/administrative cost of the project to the level it would be for a project implemented by one organisation. It would have been very easy to significantly increase these costs to provide more to each partner organisation, but the decision was taken to ensure that having partners working together did not actually cost more money, but less than funding each of the partners separately. Indeed, that attracted the evaluators when selecting their project for assistance. This was in the long run highly effective, as it also created the base of learning from each other.

learning by doing

Over the project period, both organisations met regularly to share experience and learn from challenges. When either organisation faced a challenging situation, the other came in to provide support. Together they managed to cross all the hurdles that confronted them. The finance system of BBF was welcomed by ELLMA, whilst the campaigning work of ELLMA was learned by BBF. Thus, they became partners of each other's initiatives and the shared learning was transferred into other projects as well.

next level already designed

Already the next level of the project cycle been thought through by the consortium, ensuring the advancement of women's access to justice through urban legal initiatives i.e. AWAJ-TULLI. The idea already been shared among the CLSN members and they are ready to take the idea forward, if necessary.

the difference that this good practice is making to and with other stakeholders

innovative strategy

Local elected representatives and the local administration both were engaged in the process. Project offices were set up near to the Ward Councillor's office. The Secretary to the Councillor, with other local elites, formed the Community Legal Support Unit (CLSU). This approach had two purposes – it developed ownership of the project among all stakeholders; and it will ensure that the initiative will remain 'alive' after the project period. Already, the City Mayor has agreed to provide full cooperation through his Councillors, and some of them have already offered to house the Committee's office in their own premises.

more functional DLAC

In collaboration with the ward level units, the District Legal Aid Committee (DLAC) has become more effective in the city areas across the city corporation. The CLSUs have assured regular follow-up of cases taken on by the DLAC. The DLAC is now dependent on these units to expand their client-base in the city corporation area, as well. People have become more aware of the services of DLAC. Low-income groups in the wards now know that there is a service provided by the government for their legal assistance.

the learning from the process of developing this practice and from its implementation

knowing is believing

It is very important that members of the CLSUs are equipped with necessary information, knowledge and basic skills for supporting service seekers. Building their capacity is essential to ensure that they are to be able to provide effective service to the community. Training support from the CLS has been useful to raise their level of skills. The linkage of the consortium through CLS to other projects and similar organisations has created regular opportunities for the staff teams from both organisations to learn and increase their knowledge, skills and experiences.

accountable public forum

DLAC needs to be formed with lawyers with professional integrity and their performance should be monitored by the higher authority. Areas of bad practice can be seen in some DLACs, such



as the panel lawyers asking for money from the clients when they are supposed to provide free legal service. However, it can also be seen in Chittagong, when panel lawyers have proper support, they can contribute towards an effective DLAC, which can be a people centric, proactive, and effective public forum.

awareness makes people responsive

Street theatre has proved to be the most useful tool raising peoples' awareness. More regular appearances in places beyond the project area could bring about significant changes in the community. The more people are responsive, the more they will engage to create the demand-base, for demanding services from the government. And as an output, the supply side will be growing, with better quality and proactive efforts.

partnership paid off

A working partnership with other CLS Programmes in the city supported a lot of initiatives. Where necessary, other CLS partners came together to solve problems. In addition, these relationships helped to improve the overall level of knowledge and the quality of services. The approach of different projects in contact with each other, and working together, across the district of Chittagong, has left a lasting impression on the local elected bodies, the administration and, most importantly, the local citizens, who are the users and beneficiaries of the services.

areas for further improvement if any

hurdles to crossover

BBF and ELLMA are two growing organisations. The project that they implemented as a consortium was successful in bringing people to access services. People are regularly coming to the CLSUs. The DLAC and Councillors are referring cases to the CLSU for mediation, when

appropriate. However, although Councillors are ready to house the CLSU office in their premises, the range of services to be provided still needs further discussion. The critical issue will be that of resources and funding support to provide appropriate services.

nurturing, a requirement

Follow-up of a case – whether it is solved through mediation or a case is pending in the court – is very important. Here, both of the partners are struggling. The length of the project is such that there will be cases which will not be completed within the current time frame. As is known from other projects, there are substantial risks that some clients will be turned away without any services being provided and in other cases; there will be an overturning of a decision or resolution which will not be able to benefit the members of the target group. It is recognised that the demand for effective legal resolutions is high and the responses, in terms of both access and resolution, are crucial.

one story, but the full story

A is the youngest child of her parents, with more than five siblings. Her father works as a security guard and the family lives somewhat hand to mouth with what he earns. A was introduced to S by a relative. Their relationship developed through regular communication by mobile phone. S's family went to court for a court marriage for the couple. The family was not aware that a court marriage is not actually marriage, only a commitment to marry each other. This process was undertaken by S's family without the consent of A's family, but they subsequently went to A's house to persuade her family to accept them. This happened eventually and a traditional Muslim marriage ceremony was arranged.

About two to three months after the wedding, S started making demands. He asked for furniture and also for a wedding banquet for 1000 people from the groom's side. A's family could not afford this, due to their financial position. As a result, A was subjected to both physical and mental violence and abuse from her husband's family. Seeing this, A's family agreed to arrange a wedding banquet for 200 of the groom's guests. However, S took BDT 40,000/- from them instead of letting them arrange the banquet. S had a drug habit, in fact, which he supported by extorting money from A and if she did not provide the money, she would be subjected to further abuse. And if A challenged S, she would be abused by her mother in law and sisters in law, so she could not win.

In one occasion, she was seriously injured by their torture and had to be admitted to a local hospital for injury treatment. S went to jail due to his drug addiction, local people having informed the police about him. To secure his release, A's mother in law, his mother, sold A's gold ear rings. S continued to take drugs and now threatened to take a second wife.

By this time, A had given birth to a child. Even this did not make any change in S's behaviour. A now disallowed him directly from taking a second wife. However, this led to increased violence, and finally, she was thrown out of the house, and the child, only 9-month old, taken from her by her in-laws. A went to her elder sister's house and explained the story.

This older sister, B, was a forum member of BBF in another project. She knew that there are ways of finding a solution in cases like this. She therefore contacted BBF over the phone and noted to the case worker that it was urgent to rescue the child from the in-laws family, as the child was still being breastfed and would not survive without its mother. BBF suggested that A, go immediately to one of the Community Legal Support Units (CLSUs) and tell her story. This she did, where her story was recorded on a case form, and she was requested to bring certain

documentation (marriage certificate, medical report etc.). The BBF representative referred her to the District Legal Aid Office and she was supported in going there by BBF. From the DLAC, she was referred to a panel lawyer. BBF supported her throughout this process.

The panel lawyer applied to the Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Court for a warrant to be issued against her husband and his family. The warrant was granted immediately and the police force authorised to rescue the child. This was done and the child removed from her husband and his family and restored to A. Additionally, BBF helped with the filing of a case against her husband for physical and mental torture. A continues to be thankful for the work of BBF, in rescuing her and her child.

Methodology

what was the process...

The process was divided into the following three stages:

- a. Preliminary Research
 - b. Field Study
 - c. Analysis and Drafting
- a. Preliminary Research: This was based on documents that were provided by CLS and the organisations. This covered baseline reports, periodic reports and other publications with IEC materials.
- b. Field Study: Field study was at the heart of this process. The field mission started with a dialogue with the heads of the organisations, their senior leadership and the project lead. We needed to understand why they created their projects. Then we had focus group discussions with the project teams. This was intended to learn about the excitement, enthusiasm, challenges and learning that they went through.
- Then we went out to meet with the secondary stakeholders to hear their views, their feedback and expectations. Finally we met with the primary stakeholders. All that we have read and heard was checked out in conversation with people. Our interviewees in the field gave us insights, gave hope, gave belief that this process will continue.
- c. Analysis and Drafting: It is not easy to capture peoples' lives in few pages. The hardship, the daily challenges- crossing hurdle after hurdle, in few pages. So, the story should be absorbed with information, facts and words. The full story may not be, but the told, but it is hoped that some sense, some essence of it will be conveyed by the report.

CLS PROGRAMME

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