



Review Report on Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

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Status Report on Goal 16

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in the Context of HLPF 2019

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Status Report on Goal 16

1. Introduction

The *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is a set of 17 aspirational “global goals”¹ and 169 targets adopted in 2015 by all the 193 UN member states. The 2030 Agenda is a plan of action emphasizing on the core principles of peace, people, planet, prosperity and partnership, which seeks to strengthen universal peace, prosperity and freedom. The goals cover the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, while the key principle of the Goals is to ‘leave no one behind’.

The global community has adopted SDGs to complete the Millennium Development Goal’s (MDG) unfinished development agenda and meet sustainability challenges. The main difference between the MDGs and the SDGs is that the new proposed development goals are universal in nature. Building on the success and momentum of the MDGs, the new global goals cover more ground. Each UN member state should work towards a sustainable world for future generations. In short, these new goals are universal and apply to all countries, whereas the MDGs were intended for action in developing countries only.²

Secondly, the fundamental difference of SDGs with MDGs, on which Bangladesh has achieved commendable progress, is a paradigm shift for quality compared to quantity alone. The pledges of inclusive society, leaving no one behind, accountable and inclusive institutions and fundamental freedoms can only be achieved through higher levels of participatory governance and corruption control. These lofty pledges on governance, accountability and anti-corruption, captured under Goal 16, are not only stand-alone targets but are meant to be mainstreamed in each of the 17 SDGs.³

As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* encourages member states to conduct regular national reviews of progress made towards the achievement of these goals through an inclusive, voluntary and country-led process. In addition, each year certain state parties volunteer to report on national progress to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Bangladesh presented its VNR in 2017 where status of Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17 were included (General Economics Division, 2017). In 2019 the HLPF is supposed to take place in July in the USA, and will cover Goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. However, Bangladesh is not going to take part in the process this year.

According to the UN, many regions of the world suffer critically from armed conflict or other forms of violence that occur within societies and at the domestic level. Advancements in promoting the rule of law and access to justice are uneven. However, progress is being made in regulations to promote public access to information, albeit slowly, and in strengthening institutions upholding human rights at the national level.⁴ Peaceful, just and inclusive societies are necessary to achieve the SDGs. People everywhere need to be free of fear from all forms of violence and feel safe, as they go about their lives whatever their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. In order to advance the SDGs, we need effective and inclusive public institutions that can deliver quality education and healthcare, fair economic

¹ For the full list of SDGs, visit <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> (13 April 2019).

² <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/> (13 April 2019).

³ Iftekharuzzaman, ‘Towards SDGs: Promoting transparency’, *The Daily Star*, 27 February 2017.

⁴ For details see, UN, 2018, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018*, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2018/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2018-EN.pdf>, and UN Economic and Social Council, 2018, ‘Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals’, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18541SG_SDG_Progress_Report_2018_ECOSOC.pdf (accessed on 15 March 2019).

policies and inclusive environmental protection.⁵ It has been argued that, SDG 16 is both an end in itself, and a crucial part of delivering sustainable development in all countries. It has in fact been seen by many commentators as being the transformational goal and key to ensuring that the SDGs can be accomplished.⁶

Only a handful of efforts have been observed to assess the progress of Bangladesh in terms of achieving Goal 16. In the last government report on the annual progress of SDGs the status of different Targets and Indicators under Goal 16 have been presented. It can be observed that among the 23 indicators of the 12 Targets under this Goal, official government data is available only on eight indicators of six Targets (GED, 2018a: 151-156). According to another report, there are readily available (green) data for four, partially available (yellow) data for five, and data not available (red) for 14 indicators (GED, 2018b: 109-116).

According to the SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017, the progress of achieving Goal 16 is under the red category, scoring 54 out of 100. The overall score of Bangladesh is 56.2 and ranks 120th out of 157 countries (Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2017: 96-97).

In 2017 Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) conducted a research with the aim to do an independent appraisal of Bangladesh's preparedness, progress and challenges toward achieving SDG 16 (TIB, 2017).⁷ The study concluded that despite having a robust legal and institutional framework for reducing corruption, corruption is rampant in the country. Although Bangladesh has achieved a good state of preparedness in terms of having a legal framework and clear institutional arrangement of the NIS institutions, there are huge gaps in implementation and practices of laws and policies. In ensuring access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms, despite having a legal and institutional structure compared to many other countries, in reality the right to information regime is yet to be fully effective. Violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms by different state organs are still going on with the support of some legal loopholes.

1.1 Objective of the paper

On the occasion of the forthcoming *National Consultation on The Progress of SDGs in Bangladesh in the Context of HLPF 2019* conference, six status reports will be prepared by the designated Partner organizations of the *Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh* on the six pre-identified SDGs – *Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, Goal 13: Climate Action, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and, Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals*. These status reports will feed into the preparation of the overview report titled the *Citizen's Review on the Progress of SDGs in Bangladesh* and will be shared at the National Consultation (to be held in April 2019).

As part of this process, six Goal Groups (GG) were formed comprising partner organizations of the Citizen's Platform. The GG working on Goal 16, "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", comprises 12 partner organizations – TIB, *Brotee, Nagorik Uddyog, Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), Action Aid Bangladesh, Bandhu Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), HEKS/EPER, Naripokkho, The British Council, DHRUBOTARA Youth Development Foundation, and World Vision.*

⁵ UN, *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: Why They Matter*, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/16-00055p_Why_it_Matters_Goal16_Peace_new_text_Oct26.pdf (accessed on 15 April 2019).

⁶ See Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development, 'UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 – importance of participatory institutions & policymaking', <http://www.fdsd.org/ideas/sustainable-development-goal-sdg-16-democratic-institutions/> (accessed on 15 April 2019).

⁷ The study covered four of the SDG 16 targets (16.4, 16.5, 16.6, 16.10) out of 12. The targets were selected as they are more directly related to preventing corruption and establishing governance. Even among the selected targets, the issues that do not falls directly under the purview of preventing corruption and establishing governance were not covered in the research. For details, see TIB, 2017.

1.2 Scope of this Paper

The report intends to cover the following areas:

- a. Assessing the progress of Goal 16 in Bangladesh including relevant policy, institutions, data and budget;
- b. Capturing the lessons learnt – best practices and challenges, particularly identified by the Partner Organizations’ programs and initiatives in the concerned areas; and
- c. Assessing the way forward for more effective delivery identifying the concrete steps the government should take and the Partners need to pursue.

1.3 Methodology

One meeting was held at TIB (acting as the Anchor organization) with other partner organizations on 12 February 2019 on planning for preparation of the review of Goal 16, where tasks were distributed. On the basis of the organizational reports received from the partner organizations following the guideline provided by SDG Platform, the draft report has been prepared by TIB, *Brotee* and *Nagorik Uddyog*.

To prepare this report on Goal 16, literature review of national and international index, survey and research reports has been done. Secondary data have been used from reliable sources (e.g. Household Income-Expenditure Survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics), different sectoral reports of Bangladesh government, and publications of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Feedbacks on the structure and content of the report have been sought from four consultative meetings – with the international development partners (held at BRAC Center Inn on 6 March 2019), government functionaries (held at CRIDAP on 7 March 2019), the media (held at CIRDAP on 9 April 2019, and the private sector (held at MCCI on 11 April 2019).

It should be mentioned that there is a dearth of data of relevant CSOs implementing of programs on different Targets of Goal 16. As a result, CSOs that are not members of the Citizens’ Platform for SDGs could not be covered in this review process.

2. Priorities of Bangladesh for Goal 16: Initiatives and Achievements

The Government of Bangladesh has taken a number of steps for SDG implementation at the national level. The Government has adopted “Whole of Society” approach to ensure wider participation of NGOs, development partners, private sector, media and CSOs in the process of formulation of the Action Plan and implementation of the SDGs. To spearhead the process, the ‘SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Committee’ has been formed at the Prime Minister’s Office to facilitate and implementation of SDGs Action Plan.⁸ The General Economics Division (GED) of Planning Commission⁹ under the Ministry of Planning is the SDG Focal Point in charge of the implementation of the national SDG implementation process. Besides, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister is the Convener of the ‘SDG Implementation and Monitoring Committee’ and the GED is the Secretariat.

⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/14854bangladesh.pdf> (accessed on 10 March 2019).

⁹ The General Economics Division of Planning Commission under Planning Ministry of Bangladesh, <http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/> (accessed on 10 March 2019).

A number of measures has been undertaken for the implementation of SDGs in Bangladesh up to 2030. These include a mapping of the ministries¹⁰, a data gap analysis¹¹, developing a National Monitoring & Evaluation Framework¹², developing an Action Plan to achieve SDGs¹³, and developing a Needs Assessment and Financing Strategy.¹⁴

However, before the adoption of the SDGs, Bangladesh developed a ‘National Sustainable Development Strategy’ in 2013 to be implemented during 2010-2021 which included a strategy to improve governance. The objective of good governance sector strategy in the document was to ensure an effective parliamentary system, sound law and order, pro-people, efficient public service delivery, independent, free, transparent and accountable legal and judicial system, strengthened local governance, and a corruption-free inclusive society with social justice in all fairness. The strategies focused on strengthening institutional capacity, reforming key institutions, controlling corruption, enhancing efficiency of planning and budgeting, financial sector monitoring, promoting e-governance, ensuring access to information, and reviving value and ethics in the society (GED, 2013).

2.1 Progresses achieved/ attained so far

2.1.1 Target 16.1 on ‘significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere’:

Some sort of improvements are observed with regard to Target 16.1. It has been reported that in 2015, the rate of homicide victims per 100,000 population dropped to 1.8 with 1.4 for male and 0.4 for female (Indicator 16.1.1 on number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age). Over the past couple of years this indicator registered an annual average decline at 4.26% (GED, 2018a: 153). However, with regard to the proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months (Indicator 16.1.3), the occurrence of violence is ongoing. It is reported that according to the Violence against Women (VAW) Survey 2015, 57.7% of the ever-married women experience any form of violence by their husband. Proportion of women subject to any form of violence in the previous 12 months is 38% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-BBS, 2016). Proportion of them experiencing physical or sexual violence is 54.2% and 26.9% in the previous 12 months (GED, 2018a).

¹⁰ GED, 2016, *Mapping of Ministries by Targets in the implementation of SDGs aligning with 7th Five Year Plan (2016-20)*, Ministry of Planning,

http://plancomm.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/plancomm.portal.gov.bd/files/19da51a5_b571_4158_beaefc3e798c1f7/A-Handbook-Mapping-of-Ministries_-_SDG_-7-FYP_2016.pdf (13 April 2019). The lead, co-lead and associate ministries against each target of the SDGs have been mapped out. This document is expected to reduce duplication of efforts, enhance synergy and help formulate action plans.

¹¹ GED, 2017, *Data Gap Analysis for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Bangladesh Perspective*, Bangladesh Planning Commission, http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final_Data-Gap-Analysis-of-SDGs_Bangladesh-Perspective_23_02_2017.pdf (accessed on 13 April 2019). Bangladesh Planning Commission conducted a review of various means of data generation in the country, through which it has analyzed the data availability and status of data generation in Bangladesh regarding the indicators to measure achievement of SDGs. This analysis is the base for tracking the SDGs achievement in Bangladesh. It is also playing a pivotal role in formulating a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for SDGs.

¹² SDG Tracker, a2i under Prime Minister’s Office of Bangladesh, <http://a2i.pmo.gov.bd/data-to-policy/sdg-tracker/> (accessed on 13 April 2019). This has been developed with a macro level web based data repository system to facilitate data collection, analysis, progress tracking and reporting. The SDG Tracker of a2i under the Prime Minister’s Office has been tracking Bangladesh’s progress towards attainment of national development goals, particularly the SDGs, through a web-based information repository.

¹³ GED, 2016. The Government has developed this action plan for implementation of the SDGs in alignment with the 7th FYP.

¹⁴ For details see GED, 2017, *SDGs Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective*, Bangladesh Planning Commission. Bangladesh may require around US\$ 928.48 billion worth of additional resources for full implementation of SDGs. Of this US\$ 796.09 billion would come from domestic sources and US\$ 132.39 billion from external sources for the whole period (2017-2030). The annual average total additional spending required would be US\$ 66.32 billion in course of SDGs implementation (2017-2030). The average additional amount required annually from foreign grants and aid, and FDI is US\$ 2.55 billion and US\$ 6.91 billion respectively for the whole period while domestic spending need estimated at US\$ 56.86 billion.

According to Amnesty International at least 671 rape cases were reported by media in 2016, about 818 incidents of rape took place in 2017 (Amnesty International, 2017; Ain O Salish Kendra-ASK, 2018). In 2017, the number of sexual harassment increased in different educational institutions and workplaces – 255 women (of whom 12 committed suicide) were sexually harassed by miscreants. Altogether 13 people including three women were murdered for protesting sexual harassment. In addition, 168 people were assaulted for protesting sexual abuse. Ten women became subject to *salish* and *fatwa* in 2017. Among them, three women were ousted from the village, three became victims of *hilla* marriage and *dorrah* (beating in public) and four were physically assaulted. A total of 303 women were tortured for dowry and among them, 145 were killed and 10 committed suicide. Moreover, 442 women went through domestic violence in 2017 of which 270 women were killed by husbands and in-laws, 34 women were killed by their own family and 58 women committed suicide due to torture. In 2017, 43 female domestic workers were exposed to torturers. Among them, 26 died in their employers’ houses. Alarming, 32 women became victims of acid throwing and one died for the same.

According to the Global Peace Index (GPI) Bangladesh scores 2.084 and is ranked 93rd among 163 countries in 2018 (see Table 1).¹⁵ Moreover, according to SafeAround Bangladesh ranks 88 among 160 countries with the score 49 out of 100.¹⁶

Table 1: Bangladesh in the Global Peace Index (2016 – 2018)

Year	Rank (out of 163 countries)	Score (Out of %)
2018	93	2.084
2017	84	2.035
2016	83	2.045

However, no government data is available on conflict related deaths per 100,000 population (Indicator 16.1.2), and the proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they leave (Indicator 16.1.4).

2.1.2 Target 16.2 on ‘end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children’:

There has also been a little progress in terms of achieving Target 16.2. It is observed that the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violation against children are going on. According to ASK report, 1,675 children were killed and became subject to cruel tortures. Among them 339 were murdered, 117 committed suicide and 37 died mysteriously. Besides, 565 children became victims of sexual harassment, rape and stalking in 2017 (ASK, 2018). The proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (per cent) (Indicator 16.2.3) was 3.45 for females (GED, 2018a: 153). A baseline survey in 31 districts conducted by World Vision Bangladesh in 2018 shows that 50.8% children aged 0-4 years and 51% children aged 5-17 years experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by their caregivers in the past month (World Vision Bangladesh, 2018). It has been reported that the government has made significant progress in adopting rules of ‘Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012’ in January 2017 and drafting an implementation roadmap for the 2015-17 national action plan. However, decrease in the government’s investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of trafficking crimes requires proper attention towards addressing the issue.

However, as of December 2017, number of victims of human trafficking has decreased to 0.58 from the baseline 0.85 in 2015 for every 100,000 population. This indicator recorded an average 17.4 percent rate of decline annually during the 2015-2017 period (GED, 2018a). *Jatiyo Sangsad* adopted

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Peace_Index (accessed on 10 March 2019).

¹⁶ SafeAround has compiled and analyzed data from several public sources to make a Safety Index that allows to rank the world’s countries by safety (100 = perfectly safe; 0 = very dangerous). These sources take in consideration all kind of threats such as mugging, crime, road death toll, occurrence of terrorist attacks and wars, to build their own ranking of world’s most dangerous cities. For details visit <https://safearound.com/danger-rankings/country-danger-ranking/> (accessed on 10 March 2019).

the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 on 27 February 2017, with a special provision allowing a boy or a girl to get married before reaching the statutory age limit in some exceptional cases. The provision for lowering age to girls (16 years) with consent of parents or guardian could legitimize the current tradition of marrying of girl's child at a young age could increase the rate of child marriage.

2.1.3 Target 16.3 on 'promote rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all':

Achieving this Target is still a far cry. According to the 2017-2018 WJP Rule of Law Index by the World Justice Project, Bangladesh rose one position for overall rule of law performance (from 103 in the 2016 WJP Rule of Law Index) to 102 out of 113 countries in the 2017-2018 edition. Its score places it at 4 out of 6 countries in the South Asia region, 24 out of 30 among lower middle income countries, and 102 out of 113 countries and jurisdictions worldwide.¹⁷

According to a study, access to justice in Bangladesh is still difficult, especially for the poor and the marginalized. Costs and corruption in all parts of the system and interference by the political forces and powerful social elites make it difficult for the poor and vulnerable groups to access justice, while delays with investigation by the police and frequent court adjournments increase the cost both in terms of lawyers fees but also in terms of lost work and productive hours and travel and related costs. As a result, the majority of Bangladeshis continue to rely on the informal system when faced with a conflict or dispute, and even when the victim of a crime. In this regard, the traditional forms of *salish* remain the most commonly used and provide a cheap, fast and relatively simple means of justice for most in the country (UKAid, UNDP, and Government of Bangladesh, 2015).

In 2015, 72.7% of the women who experienced violence from their partner never reported their experience to others. Only 2.1% victims reported to local leaders and 1.1% sought help from police. Since 2015 impressive progress has been achieved in this area. Although an annual target of providing legal aid to 37,000 beneficiaries by 2020 was set, in 2017 legal aid has been provided to 80,000 beneficiaries. Due to this service performance, new legal aid support target of 90,000 litigants per year has been set for the year 2020. Up to 2017, 16,000 cases have been settled through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) on an average per year against the 7 FYP annual target of settling 25,000 under ADR by 2020 (GED, 2018a: 154). Moreover, available data suggests that currently the proportion of un-sentenced detainees is quite high (79% in 2015) in Bangladesh, about double the target rate for 2030 (GED, 2018a: 154).

2.1.4 Target 16.4 on 'by 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime':

With regard to this Target, not much has been attained. To prevent money laundering and illicit financial flows, the country has developed adequate legal¹⁸ and institutional framework¹⁹ and capacity consistent with international standards and good practices (TIB, 2017a).

¹⁷ This index measures rule of law adherence in 113 countries worldwide based on more than 110,000 household and 3,000 expert surveys. Featuring primary data, the WJP Rule of Law Index measures countries' rule of law performance across eight factors: Constraints on Government Powers, Absence of Corruption, Open Government, Fundamental Rights, Order and Security, Regulatory Enforcement, Civil Justice, and Criminal Justice. https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/ROLIndex_2017-2018_Bangladesh_eng.pdf (accessed on 10 March 2019).

¹⁸ The laws and rules include the 'Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012' (amended in 2015), the 'Money Laundering Prevention Rules, 2013', and 'Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Circulars/Guidelines' for different entities.

¹⁹ The institutional framework includes the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC), the Bangladesh Police (Special Branch and Criminal Investigation Department), National Board of Revenue (Tax and Customs), the Attorney General's Office. Moreover, the National Coordination Committee (NCC) for preventing money laundering and combating financing of terrorism (16 members with the Finance Minister as Convener), a Working Committee comprising 23 relevant agencies, and a National Taskforce on Stolen Asset Recovery have also been formed.

However, despite the legal and institutional preparedness, a significant amount of money has been laundered in recent years and illicit financial flows have been increasing. According to the Global Financial Integrity (GFI) some \$5.9 billion was siphoned out of Bangladesh in 2015 through trade mis-invoicing. The GFI found Bangladesh as one of the top 30 of countries, and ranked second in South Asia by dollar value of illicit outflows in 2015 (GFI, 2019). Moreover, the Swiss National Bank shows that money parked by Bangladeshis in Swiss banks is worth around Tk 4,064 crore or 481.32 million as of 2017.²⁰ In November 2017, International Consortium of Investigative Journalist Published “Paradise Papers”, which gave evidence that some businessman and business houses have sent money offshore accounts illegally.²¹ Another form of illicit flow outside Bangladesh is through different programs such as the Malaysia Second Home. A total of 3,746 Bangladeshis has availed the investment opportunity in Malaysia that accounted for 10.50 per cent of the total beneficiaries until August 2017. Bangladeshis’ participation in this project is found third largest after China (9,902) and Japan (4,372).²²

Against this backdrop, there have been a few initiatives from Bangladesh to return the money. On 1 February 2019, Bangladesh Bank sued Rizal Bank in US court to recover US\$ 66 million of stolen funds. The Bangladesh Bank filed a case with the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York against the Philippines’ Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) and others, including several top executives, for their involvement in a “massive and multi-year conspiracy” to steal its money.²³ On 10 January 2019, a court in the Philippines convicted a former branch manager (Maia Deguito) at RCBC of money laundering, in the first conviction over the Bangladesh Bank reserves heist in which \$81 million was stolen nearly three years ago. The Makati Regional Trial Court sentenced Deguito to a jail term ranging from 32 to 56 years, with each count carrying four to seven years. She was also ordered to pay a total of about \$109 million in fine.²⁴

2.1.5 Target 16.5 on ‘reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms’:

For achieving Target 16.5, the Government of Bangladesh recognizes combating corruption as critical to progress towards realizing the *Perspective Plan – Vision 2021*,²⁵ the *7th Five Year Plan (7FYP)*²⁶ and *SDGs*. Furthermore, the 7FYP asserts that ensuring good governance requires establishing strong administrations and institutions, and that without a strong anti-corruption strategy the ability to implement Vision 2021 and the underlying five-year development plans will be seriously compromised.

²⁰ *The Daily Star*, 28 June 2018 <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/bangladeshis-swiss-banks-deposits-drop-taka-4064-crore-1596886> (accessed on 26 February 2019).

²¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradise_Papers (accessed on 15 March 2019).

²² *The New Nation*, 26 February 2019 <http://m.thedailynewnation.com/news/167572/3746-bd-natls-invested-in-malaysias-second-home-scheme> (accessed on 26 February 2019).

²³ *The Daily Star*, 2 February 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/bb-files-case-ny-court-over-cyber-heist-1696027> (accessed on 26 February 2019).

²⁴ *The Daily Star*, 11 January 2019 <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/banking/news/philippine-court-jails-ex-bank-manager-over-bb-cyber-heist-1685536> (accessed on 26 February 2019).

²⁵ In the Vision 2021 it has been asserted that “the Government is determined to confront and root out the scourge of corruption from the body politic of Bangladesh ... (and) intends to strengthen transparency and accountability of all government institutions as integral part of a programme of social change to curb corruption.” See Planning Commission of Bangladesh, *Perspective Plan 2010-21*, <http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/perspective-plan/> (13 February 2019).

²⁶ “Promoting good governance and curbing corruption” is listed high among 12 development goals identified by the 7FYP, which also commits to strengthen the democratic governance process to ensure participation of all citizens and sound functioning of all democratic institutions. See Planning Commission of Bangladesh, *7th Five Year Plan: FY 2016 – FY 2020*, http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/7th_FYP_18_02_2016.pdf (13 February 2019).

Bangladesh apparently have a robust legal²⁷ and institutional²⁸ framework to fight corruption. Bangladesh became a party to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2007, and since then it has continued to fulfil the commitments of this Convention through enacting and amending relevant laws and policies. Institutions including the National Board of Revenue (NBR), the Election Commission (EC), Information Commission (IC), and stakeholders such as the civil society, media and international community provide supporting but important roles in combating and preventing corruption in Bangladesh through playing the roles of watchdogs.

The government has undertaken a number of initiatives for promoting integrity and good governance. The Executive has formulated guidelines for cabinet meeting (summary formulation and presentation, participation in meeting, and procedure of implementing decisions), published best practices in service sector, started Access to Information (a2i) project, established the Governance Innovation Unit, started video conferencing with Deputy Commissioners, and sending encouraging mail to the best performing DCs based on an annual assessment under National e-service System (NESS) and Union Information Service Centre (UISC), introduced Fortnightly Confidential Report (FCR) for the DCs to report to the Cabinet Division by using Information Exchange Management System (IEMS).²⁹ It also formulated the Integrity Award Policy 2017³⁰, started signing Annual Performance Agreement (APA) between the Cabinet Division and other ministries and departments, and formed an Expert Pool for annual performance management in ministries/ departments.³¹

Moreover, the government introduced the Public Administration Award in 2015.³² In order to make government jobs more attractive and decrease corruption, the salary and allowances were doubled in the Pay Commission of 2015. The government introduced loan facilities (interest-free BDT 3 million) for the positions of Deputy Secretaries and above for buying cars and maintenance allowances (monthly BDT 50,000). Other incentives include Bengali New Year allowance, allowance for buying mobile phone, house loan with minimum interest (5%), increasing pension rate, redefining pensionable job duration (5 to 25 years), and extending retirement age (up to 59 years) (TIB, 2019).

However, despite the presence of a robust legal and institutional anti-corruption structure, widespread corruption exists in the country, which is reflected in different national and international indices and surveys. According to the nation-wide household survey conducted by TIB on a regular interval it is observed that the proportion of households experiencing corruption and bribery while taking services from both public and private sectors and institutions continues to be quite high. The 2017 survey reveals that 66.5% households became victims of corruption while receiving services from different public and private sectors or institutions, which is almost similar to that of the findings of the 2015

²⁷ Major laws and rules applicable for combating corruption include the 'Penal Code, 1860', the 'Code of Criminal Procedure Act, 1898', 'The Anti-Corruption Act, 1947', 'The Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947', 'The Anti-corruption Commission Act, 2004' and 'The Anti-corruption Commission Rules, 2007', 'The Government Servant (Conduct) Rules, 1979', 'The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Provide Protection), 2011', and the 'Crime Related Mutual Legal Assistance Ordinance, 2012'. Moreover, GOB has five policies that support transparency and accountability. These include RTI policy, National Integrity Strategy, Citizen's Charters and Grievance Redress System.

²⁸ The major anti-corruption institutions in Bangladesh comprise the ACC, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OCAG), BFIU of Bangladesh Bank as the anti-money laundering department, the Judiciary, law enforcing agencies, and the Parliamentary Standing Committees.

²⁹ For details see

http://cabinet.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/cabinet.portal.gov.bd/publications/5ab9615e_241a_4c7b_869b_048ce6212195/BestpracticesCopy.pdf (14 March 2019).

³⁰ For details see

http://cabinet.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/cabinet.portal.gov.bd/notification_circular/dcd10ed2_ed24_438b_9998_4ba8ee486b62/Award_GO.pdf (14 March 2019). This award was first given during 2017-2018 for officials from both the field and central levels.

³¹ For details see

http://cabinet.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/cabinet.portal.gov.bd/notification_circular/86f0b16f_bd42_4f28_af42_dec5a6dede98/Expert%20Pool0001.pdf (14 March 2019).

³² On 23 July 2016, 30 officials were awarded for the first time, while 26 officials in 2017, and 39 officials and three institutions were awarded in 2018.

survey (67.8%). However, the extent of bribery paid by households (on an average of Tk. 5,930 for services) has decreased in 2017 compared to 2015 (49.8% in 2017 compared to 58.1% in 2015). The nationally estimated amount of bribe paid to different service sectors was found Tk 106,889 million which is 21.2% more than that of 2015, 3.4% of extended national budget of 2016-17 and 0.5% of GDP for the same year (TIB, 2018). Using identical indicators, results of three surveys of 2012, 2015 and 2017 show corruption level remains the same in almost all sectors.

The perception on the existence and spread of corruption in different international surveys and indices also reflects a similar picture. In Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2018, Bangladesh scored 26 points on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), ranking 149th from the top out of 180 countries (TI, 2018). It may be noted that Bangladesh has continued to score below 30 since the development of this index, which indicates that Bangladesh is a corruption-prone country.³³

Two other indicators, the World Bank's Control of Corruption and the World Economic Forum's assessment of Irregular Payments and Bribes, paint a similar picture. The World Bank scores Bangladesh 19.23 for 'Control of Corruption'.³⁴ Among 15 areas of the business environment, firms in Bangladesh are more likely to rate political instability to be the biggest obstacle to their daily operations, followed by electricity, access to finance, and corruption (World Bank Group, 2013). Moreover, 47.7% of the surveyed companies reported bribery incidence (percent of firms experiencing at least one bribe payment request). According to the Global Competitiveness Ranking, Bangladesh scores 28 for the indicator on 'incidence of corruption', and is ranked 120th out of 140 countries for 2018 (World Economic Forum, 2018a).

In general the efforts for tackling corruption has not been up to the expected level. The investigation rate compared to complaints was low, and the rate of conviction was also low. The conviction rate of ACC's cases of corruption during 2012-2015 were below 40% on an average (in 2014 the conviction rate was the highest in four years – 46%). The ACC suffered from backlogs of corruption cases. Corruption investigations by the ACC lacked adequate efficiency and professionalism, which is reflected in the time taken for completing investigations, and lack of proper evidence for filing a case (TIB, 2017: 28-29.).

Over the last few years, the ACC has undertaken a number of initiatives. The ACC adopted its Strategic Plan and shared with stakeholders for feedback in 2018. It revised its organogram proposing the establishment extending at all district levels and sent to the Cabinet Division for approval. The ACC formed its own armed force unit and established prison cell. It also sent a proposal of engaging district administration in anti-corruption activities to the Cabinet Division for approval. It also formed its Internal Discipline Unit. The Legal Department of ACC was strengthened – 20 lawyers were excluded from the list of panel lawyers due to lack of their proactive role in pursuing corruption cases. Instead, five young and energetic lawyers have been included in the panel. The ACC also introduced a 'Hotline-106' for widening ready access to prospective complainants. Any complainant can lodge complaints by making toll-free calls from any phone.

Some progress have been attained in terms of curbing corruption thanks to a number of initiatives undertaken by the ACC over the last two years. As a result of such initiatives, Tk 3,590 million was recovered out of the money forged from Basic Bank in 2016. In 2015 the number of allegation received by ACC was 10,415. In 2016 and 2017 this number was 12,990 and 17,953 respectively. The average conviction rate in corruption cases has been increased. During 2013-2015 the conviction rate

³³ Bangladesh was earlier placed at the bottom of the list for five successive years from 2001-2005. The score of Bangladesh has been somewhat static around 24-27 over the period 2011-18. For details, see Iftekharuzzaman, 'Bangladesh descends in corruption ranking: Zero tolerance – what next?', *The Daily Star*, 30 January 2019. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/governance/news/bangladesh-descends-corruption-ranking-1694551> (accessed on 11 March 2019).

³⁴ It is a Percentile rank among all countries (ranges from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest) rank). See World Bank, *The Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2018 Update*, info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx?fileName=wgidataset.xlsx (accessed on 11 March 2019).

was 37%. In 2016 and 2017 the conviction rate of the cases filed by ACC was respectively 54% and 68%. ACC high officials were instructed to arrest all listed accused corrupt persons. As a result of such strong position, 182 persons accused of corruption were arrested in 2017. The ACC identified nine key sectors including education, health, Department of Roads and Highways, Dept. of Public Works, Chattogram Port Authority, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, Income Tax Dept., Dept. of Customs and VAT to explore and monitor corruption (ACC, 2018).

However, despite having taken some recent initiatives, the ACC has not been able to show its ability and political will to take actions against the high level politicians and public officials. Policies related to transparency and accountability in public institutions are regularly flouted. The willingness of the government to pursue anti-corruption measures is often challenged and questioned.

2.1.6 Target 16.6 on ‘Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels’:

With regard to Target 16.6, Bangladesh already have a good state of preparedness in terms of having legal frameworks and clear institutional arrangements for the NIS institutions. There are many laws to determine effective functioning, transparency, and accountability of these institutions. The Constitution of Bangladesh clearly spells out the formation, function and accountability mechanism of main organs of the state i.e., the parliament, judiciary, and executive. The Constitution also provides clear ideas about formation and function of some basic institutions, which includes the LG, EC, and OCAG. However, the Constitution does not cover directly about other institutions taken into consideration in the NIS. Other than the Constitution, there are a huge number of laws and policies having the determinations of the functions of the said institutions. The major laws, as well as their specificities in determining effective functioning, transparency, and accountability, are shown in Annex 1.³⁵

All NIS institutions are endowed with well-defined institutional arrangement. A few institutions like the Parliament, the Executive, and Public Administration are siphoned with adequate human resources. Some institutions such as the Parliament, Executive, LGIs, OCAG, EC, PA, LEAs, and ACC occupy adequate infrastructure for effective functioning of their businesses.³⁶

According to the first indicator set against the Target 16.6, the selected institutions are expected to have the capacity to make effective use of the resources allocated for their functioning. It is observed that a few institutions such as LEAs, the Executive, NHRC, Public Administration and the Judiciary have a good capacity of expenditure of allocated budget (Table 2).

Table 2: Non-Development and Development Expenditure of 2016-17 (excluding loans & advances, domestic & foreign debt, food account operations and structural adjustment expenditure) (in Million BDT)³⁷

Institution	Expenditure	Budget	%
Parliament	2310	2950	78.30
Executive	12990	14380	90.33
Judiciary	14030	16720	83.91
Local Government	153880	213220	72.17
Public Administration	16940	20200	83.86
Law Enforcing Agencies	181710	199640	91.02
Election Commission	6320	12900	49.0

³⁵ For details see TIB, 2017, *op. cit.*, pp 28-29.

³⁶ For details see *ibid.*

³⁷ Compiled and analyzed from data collected from websites of the Ministry of Finance, National Human Rights Commission, https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/e9e8a8c8_8a8b_4536_a18b_fc5ca696650a/St_2_en.pdf, <https://mof.gov.bd/site/page/f9aab5cd-f644-47bb-bb94-a70cb64c15ce>, http://nhrc.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nhrc.portal.gov.bd/page/cb8edec9_5aee_4b04_bf2a_229d9cd226a0/Bangla%20Annual%20Report%20Ok%202017.pdf, http://infocom.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/infocom.portal.gov.bd/annual_reports/fe587ac3_3cd6_43f1ad66_e6859e5db502/Annual%20Report%202017.pdf (accessed on 13 March 2019).

Information Commission	2461.40	3500	70.33
Human Rights Commission	59.87	69.64	85.97

A number of initiatives were taken to increase the effectiveness and excellence of the courts (TIB, 2017b).³⁸ The Bangladesh Judicial Rules 2017 was adopted for lower court judges.³⁹ The Government Employment Act 2018, and the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre Act 2018 have been enacted, while the Model Recruitment Policy 1987 has been updated. Furthermore, due to the student movement for reforming in the quota system in public service recruitment process government abolished the quota system for the appointment of 1st (9 Grade) and 2nd (10 to 13 Grade) class government officials on 4 October 2018.⁴⁰

However, there are huge gaps in implementation and practices of laws and policies. Subtle gaps are there in the laws, which create a scope of dismantling independent status of them in a real sense.⁴¹ Real independence of the NIS institutions is far reaching unless laws are formulated and enacted to cut off the dependency on the Executive. Many transparency and accountability initiatives are prevalent on paper. There are significant gaps in implementation especially in the areas of human rights violation, corruption and holding the powerful political elites accountable. Controlling attitude and practices are evident in the Executive to use and control LEAs, ACC, EC, media, civil society and business by means of shaping legal framework as well as by creating disabling climate. Independent institutions suffer from mistrust and inefficiency which is derived from faulty appointment procedures of the chiefs and members of institutions, which is mostly made on political consideration. There are shortages of human resources and budget as well as capacity constraints in many of the NIS institutions, which might hamper true progress of the institutions for being effective, transparent and accountable in a true sense.

For instance, during the Police Week 2019, police officers received medals for their “bias attitude” and “unnecessary use of force” during student’s “Safe Road Movement 2108”, “Quota Reform Protest 2018” and making arrest of a photojournalist for the alleged “anti-state interview”. During October 2018, a huge number of “fake cases” was lodged just before the National Election of 2018. Up to October 2018 a total of 3,60,314 individuals were accused and 4,650 were arrested in 4,135 cases all over the country. In these cases, police reported persons who were not present at the place of crime, even staying abroad or dead.⁴² During the 284 days of anti-drug campaign starting in 2018, a number of 312 were killed in the so-called “cross-fire” with different law enforcing agencies, and among the confronting drug dealers.⁴³ The 11th National Parliamentary Election and city corporation elections held in the last year were heavily criticized due to widespread anomalies and violations of electoral code of conduct by the candidates, political parties as well as the ruling government.⁴⁴

A number of regressive legal reform has taken place in the last few years. It is feared that Articles 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, 43 and 58 of The Digital Security Act 2018 and Article 57 of the ICT Act 2017

³⁸ These include construction of court building project, formation of case management committee, determination of time limit for case disposal, directives for disposal of cases on priority basis, introduction of Judicial web portal and the use of information technology in court management, e-judiciary project, introduction alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and legal aid services etc. See for details, TIB, 2017b.

³⁹ *Dhaka Tribune*, ‘Judges’ service rules gazette published, lower courts still in president’s hands’, 12 December 2017, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2017/12/11/gazette-lower-court-judges-service-rules/> (accessed on 12 March 2019).

⁴⁰ *UNB*, ‘Govt. issues gazette abolishing quota in 1st and 2nd class govt. jobs’, 4 October 2018, <http://www.unb.com.bd/category/bangladesh/govt-issues-gazette-abolishing-quota-in-1st-and-2nd-class-govt-jobs/3549> (accessed on 12 March 2019).

⁴¹ For details see TIB, 2017a, *op. cit.*, pp 28-29.

⁴² For details see TIB, 2019.

⁴³ *Daily Prothom Alo*, 10 March 2019.

⁴⁴ *The Daily Star*, ‘National polls under international spotlight’, 31 December 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh-national-election-2018/bangladesh-election-2018-under-global-spotlight-1681045> (accessed on 12 March 2019). Moreover, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Gazipur, and Barisal city corporation elections were held in 2018. Showdown outside the polling stations, ballot stuffing, casting fake votes was common scenario of city corporation elections.

are against the spirit of Article 39 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, and thus can be misused (Amnesty International, 2018). Furthermore, Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB) proposed a Bank Reporting Act in April 2018, which will prevent newspapers to publish reports about corruption and malpractices by the bank and financial institutions.⁴⁵ The Government Employment Act 2018 was enacted with a provision of receiving government permission before arresting a public servant, which is discriminatory and thus against the spirit of the Constitution.

Control by the government over the media has increased during the last two years. They are proactively practicing self-censorship. Facebook and Twitter have removed Bangladesh-based 30 pages and account for broadcasting fake and confusing news. Later they said that the government of Bangladesh was involved with these pages and accounts, which were used to broadcast fake news against the leading opposition party.

2.1.7 Target 16.7 on ‘Ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels’:

A few attempts have been made by the government for achieving this Target. The portion of females in public services (from first class up to fourth class) is around 28% of the total work force (13,62,298), among which the portion of first class female officials is 20% (30,042 out of 1,54,681), and the highest (34%) is in the second class category (40,563 out of 1,17,878).⁴⁶ It may be noted that there are ten females at Secretary or equivalent positions, which is 13% of this level staff. In the administration, there are 78 female Additional Secretaries (15% of 533), 97 Joint Secretaries, 202 Deputy Secretaries, 360 Senior Assistant Secretaries and 435 Assistant Secretaries. At the field level there are one Divisional Commissioner, six Deputy Commissioners, 20 ADCs, 113 Upazila Nirbahi Officers, and 105 Assistant Commissioners (Land) who are females.⁴⁷ It may also be noted that in 2010 there were 2,27,114 female staff in government services.

Bangladesh has some achievements with regard to reducing gender gap. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2018, Bangladesh score 0.721 and rank 48th out of 149 countries globally (World Economic Forum, 2018b: 21). Bangladesh was ranked 64 scoring 0.704 among 145 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2015.⁴⁸

2.1.8 Target 16.9 on ‘By 2030, providing legal identity for all, including birth registration’:

There have been a major progress with regard to achieving this Target. According to a survey, 37% of the children under 5 years of age have been registered, while in 2001 registration rate for this age group children was 10%,⁴⁹ thanks to the ‘Birth and Death Registration Project’ began in 2001 with UNICEF support under the Local Government Division. A new birth and death registration act was adopted in 2006. In 2009, Birth and Death Registration Information System (BRIS) was initiated to provide electronic registration. All these contributed to significant improvement in birth registration for all in the country.

2.1.9 Target 16.10 on ‘Ensuring public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms’:

In ensuring Target 16.10, Bangladesh fares well with regard to legal and institutional structure compared to many other countries. Some fundamental freedoms such as equity, rights to life and livelihood, freedom of thoughts and conscience and freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and rights to property have been ensured in the Constitution of Bangladesh. Besides, other rights (such as information rights) have been confirmed according to the relevant laws. Bangladesh has signed or ratified (partially / completely) some international

⁴⁵ *The Daily Star*, ‘Banking Sector: TIB worried at proposal for reporting law’, 3 April 2018.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Public Administration, Statistics of Civil and Staff, 2017.

⁴⁷ *Daily Prothom Alo*, 10 March 2017.

⁴⁸ *Daily Prothom Alo*, 19 November 2015.

⁴⁹ BBS and UNICEF, 2014, *Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2012-2013, Progotir Pathay: Final Report*, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and UNICEF Bangladesh, Dhaka, cited in GED, 2019, *Bangladesh SDGs Progress Report 2018*, Planning Commission of Bangladesh.

declarations and charters regarding various rights.⁵⁰ Moreover, Bangladesh adopted the Right to Information Act, 2009 to protect people's access to information. Under this Act, a statutory independent body has been formed which is accountable to the head of the state. Besides, the 'Strategic Plan 2015-2021' and guidelines for the implementation of the Proactive Information Discloser, 2014 have been formulated.

In the field of information rights, the score and ratings of the country are moderate. According to the Freedom in the World Rating, Bangladesh scores 47 in 2017 and 45 in 2018 out of 100, which means there exists "partially open" freedom of expression (Freedom House, 2019). The World Press Freedom Index shows that Bangladesh scores 48.36 in 2017 and 48.62 in 2018 out of 100 with 146th position in both years among 180 countries; no change has been made here (Reporters without Borders, 2019). The Global Right to Information Rating shows that Bangladesh secures 107 points out of 150 with 24th position among 111 countries which remains unchanged in 2019 (Center for Law and Democracy, 2018). The IC Report 2015 shows that 6,181 RTI applications were received in 2015, among which information were delivered to 5,954 applications (96.33% of the applicants). In 2016 6,369 RTI applications were received, among which information were delivered to 6,082 applications (95.49% of the applicants). In this year 183 appeal (91.04% of total appeal) were resolved by the concern authority out of 201 (Information Commission, 2017). APAs signed between Cabinet Division and other ministries have included the provisions of the Proactive Information Disclosure Guideline in 2014 where clear instructions were provided regarding the kinds of information one should provide in government websites.

However, in reality the right to information regime is yet to be fully effective. Violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms by different state organs are still going on with the support of some legal loopholes. In spite of having appropriate legal framework, there is a tendency to diminish fundamental freedom in Bangladesh. For example, LEAs are alleged for extrajudicial killings. A total of 195 people in 2016, were subject to extrajudicial killings by LEAs. In 2016, LEAs were accused of abduction, kidnapping and murder of 97 people. In 2017, 162 people were killed by law enforcement agencies through crossfire, gunfight, and shootout. Besides, 53 people died under jail custody in 2017, among them 33 were prisoners and 20 were convicted prisoners (ASK, 2018b). In a statement to the authorities in February 2018, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances said that the number of enforced disappearances had risen considerably in recent years. Reports suggested that more than 80 people were forcibly disappeared during 2017 (Amnesty International, 2018). During the period between January to October 2018, 437 persons were victims of extrajudicial killing (ASK, 2018b). Moreover, in 2017, there were at least 30 assaults on journalists, including the February murder of a reporter for the daily newspaper, while he covered political unrest. In August, the journalist was arrested for satirical reporting of the death of a goat on Facebook. In early September, police detained two Burmese journalists reporting on the Rohingya crisis and held them for a week before releasing them on bail (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

In September 2018, the government passed the Digital Security Act, designed to monitor all electronic communications. This new law was supposed to address abusive provisions in the Information and Communication Technology Act. However, the new law still retains similar provisions and contains new sections to criminalize free expression. Meanwhile, hundreds continued to face charges for their social media commentary. Human rights groups remained under pressure, due to restrictions on accessing foreign funding. Journalists reported threats and intimidation to prevent any criticism of the government (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

In 2018 the ruling party and their student wing allegedly attacked university and school students with sticks and machetes who launched a protest demanding road safety. However, authorities took no action against those carrying out the abuses, but instead detained the protesting students. A

⁵⁰ Among them, UDHR (Human Rights), ICCPR (Civil and Political Rights), CRC (Child Rights), CEDAW (Elimination of Discrimination Against Women), UNCRMW (Rights of Migrant Workers), ILO Conventions (Labour Rights) are notable.

photojournalist was arrested by members of the Detective Branch hours after he gave a media interview describing the violence he witnessed during the protests (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

There are allegations of misusing of some articles of the law against the publication of information and opinion. For example, the preventive part of Article 14 of the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 2016 limits the freedom of expression and independence of NGOs and CSOs. In 2018 the Digital Security Act was enacted by ignoring the concerns expressed on sections 8, 28, 29 and 31. It was deemed against the main spirit of the constitution and restrict free-thinking, freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Moreover, the National Online Mass Media Policy 2017 and the Bangladesh Press Institute Act, the National Broadcasting Act, drafted as upcoming laws are feared to increase government control and restriction on the freedom of expression.

2.1.10 Target 16A on ‘Strengthening relevant national institutions for building capacity at all levels to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime’:

With regard to Target 16A, there have been some progress. In accordance with the provision of National Human Rights Commission Act 2009, a statutory independent National Human Rights Commission was established, with an aim to contribute to the embodiment of human dignity and integrity as well as to the safeguard of the basic order of democracy so that inalienable fundamental human rights of all individuals are protected and the standards of human rights are improved in the country. The Commission is now implementing its Second Five Year Strategic Plan (2016-20) where it identified 17 Pressing Human Rights Issues with Priority Areas for 2016-2020. In 2016 the Commission responded to 692 cases of human rights violation of which 665 were submitted to the Commission by the defenders themselves and the rest 27 were *Suo Moto* action by the Commission. Larger number of violations consisted of violence (108), jobs (56), dowry (21), killing (20) and abduction (10). The number of complaints resolved in 2016 stood at 503 (GED, 2018: 155).

2.1.11 Target 16B on ‘Promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies’:

There have been a little progress with regard to this Target. The NHRC along with a few CSOs has worked closely with the National Law Commission to prepare a draft of Anti-Discrimination Act. However, the proposed act is yet to get approval by the cabinet and the Parliament.

2.2 Priorities given to issues of SDG 16

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that the government has undertaken a multi-pronged approach to achieve SDGs. Necessary exercises of mapping of relevant bodies and gaps in data have been conducted, along with preparing monitoring mechanisms and tracking tools. The needs assessment of funds and possible sources have also been exercised.

It may also be observed that the government has adopted the approach of promoting integrity and good governance among the public administration. A number of initiatives have been undertaken in this regard. However, the government is yet to develop specific strategy and plan of action for achieving a number of Targets under Goal 16. Despite different initiatives, the government planning lacks adequate emphasis on SDG 16, as there is significant gaps in baseline data.

3. Engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in program delivery and advocacy

A number of CSOs in Bangladesh are implementing different programs for achieving different Targets of Goal 16. Most of these CSOs have been implementing their programs much longer before the SDGs have been adopted, while a few have designed new programs and started to implement since the adoption of SDGs.

3.1 Target 16.1 – ‘significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere’

CSOs such as NU, ASF, Bandhu, and Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK) have been implementing programs on Target 16.1. The Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB), a platform for CSOs in Bangladesh,

is working for the promotion and protection of human rights in the country, through using national and international mechanisms to protect and promote human rights. The HRFB works to inform the public on human rights concerns and to raise voice and accountability at the national level engaging with stakeholders, including the government, civil society and media.

These CSOs along with others not mentioned above are working to reduce all forms of violence and related death. They collect and document information related to human rights violations. Some of the CSOs are working with the poor and marginalized communities (such as *Dalits*) to reduce domestic violence and other forms of violence and thereby building peace through using traditional conflict resolution system and human rights and legal education. The CSOs impart education on human rights that also help reduce violence in the community. Community human rights activism is developed to address the rights of the citizens and environmental promotion through community forums. They have shown many instances of taking collective actions to protect and improve of peoples' rights. Some of the CSOs are also facilitating to promote human rights defenders among the marginalized communities. Theater is used as one of the methods for disseminating information and raising awareness on human rights.

3.2 Target 16.2 – ‘end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children’

CSOs including NU and ASK are working on achieving Target 16.2. The CSO platform that has been formed with child rights organizations work together for protecting and promoting child rights. These CSOs involve and work to promote and establish child rights, and directly work on many awareness raising programs such as educating parents, children, teacher about abusing, harassment, trafficking and torture. Awareness raising and training program at the community level includes the risk of trafficking and how to prevent trafficking from the community. They also follow and make others aware about strict policy to prevent abuse and exploitation at the internal and external level. They are playing an active role through advocacy and mobilization for policy advocacy. For instance, World Vision Bangladesh initiated a campaign titled “It takes me to end physical violence against children at home, school and workplace”. In two years the campaign reached 62,200 children across the country. The engagement of children includes association building, child led research, child led dialogue, participation in story book competition. A number of 2,200 child forum have been formed with more than 50,000 boys and girls who are promoting the message of the campaign, building their own agency and sensitizing the community.

A secured, safe and child friendly day care facilities are being provided to the children of female garment workers and informal sector women's worker through day care support. Some CSOs also runs ‘drop-in’ centers in the city for working and street children. Drop-in centers provide them a safe place to share the problems they face and can learn how to protect them from the risk of violence and torture.

3.3 Target 16.3 – ‘promote rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all’

On Target 16.3, a number of CSOs including Bandhu, BLAST, ASK, BROTEE, ASF, NU, Wave Foundation and HEKS/EPER have been working for long, while a number of CSOs including TIB has been playing a supporting role. CSOs like BLAST, ASK, Brotee are playing a cardinal role in furthering SDG 16.3 by providing access to justice in Bangladesh, with an enhanced focus on inclusion of marginalised and socially excluded communities. Their main programs are raising awareness, providing free legal advice through properly qualified lawyers, para-legals and facilitators, facilitating alternative dispute resolution (ADR) through mediation, providing advice and representation for individuals whose disputes cannot be resolved through mediation, and making referrals for clients to governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations working on legal aid. Some CSOs such as Bandhu provide investigation support in relevant cases, particularly with regard to violation of rights of *hijras* (hermaphrodites or third gender people).

In 2018, BLAST launched the seminal legal aid application ‘Sromik Jigyasha’ (Worker’s Query) targeted at increasing access to justice in the RMG sector for workers, which can be downloaded on

Android mobile phone devices. Since about 65 percent of garment workers use smart phones, they can easily use this app to access legal advice, information and services and so far over 10,000 users have already logged in to the app.⁵¹

The CSOs organize courtyard meetings, training sessions, rights fairs and networking meetings for the purpose of increasing community awareness on rights. Some CSOs use social media to raise public awareness among lawyers, students, civil society groups and rights activists. These efforts not only provided knowledge on rights, remedies and services to relevant groups at the local and national levels, but also created opportunities for improving referrals and coordination between service providers in government and within the social sector. Some CSOs have been operating mobile legal clinics, especially in Dhaka urban slum areas, providing legal information and advice to individuals who live far away from any legal aid office. TIB is implementing Advocacy and Legal Advice Centers (ALAC)⁵² with an aim to provide the poor and marginalized to get access to justice and challenge corruption.

Success Story 1: A story of embezzlement unveiled

Md. Fahad Hossain Anik was student of Business Administration (Honors final year) at Munshiganj Govt. Harganga College and a Cadet Sergeant of the College Platoon of Bangladesh National Cadet Corps (BNCC). Md. Russell Kabir was an Assistant Professor of Botany Department and the Professor Under Officer (PUO), In-charge of the BNCC Unit at the same institution. Assuming few irregularities Anik had been trying to get a financial statement of the expenditure of BNCC funds from Mr. Kabir. But he evaded such requests of Anik.

Anik discussed the apprehension with Rakesh Das, a friend of his in the same institution and a member of Youth Engagement and Support (YES) group affiliated with the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Munshiganj, set up by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) as a part of its effort to strengthen the social movement against corruption in Bangladesh. Rakesh, trained on Right to Information (RTI) Act, shared this issue with CCC, Munshiganj and sought advice. Later, Anik filed an RTI application addressed to the Principal of the college following CCC's advice in January 2017.

Consequently, on 11 January 2017, Md. Russell Kabir provided the requested financial statement. The statement unveiled truth that there was an embezzlement of fund. Later a three members Investigation Committee headed by Professor of Chemistry Department Md. Abul Kalam Azad was formed by College Authority. According to the report of the enquiry committee, Md. Russell Kabir was accused and dismissed from the position of Professor Under Officer (PUO). Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies Md. Shamim Ur Rahman replaced him.

3.4 Target 16.5 – ‘reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms’

CSOs including TIB and NU have been implementing programs for achieving Target 16.5. TIB has a robust program for preventing corruption and raising awareness against corruption. Its activities include in-depth research on the state of effectiveness, transparency and accountability of different public and private sectors and institutions, civic engagement at local level for raising awareness among the common people against corruption at local level service delivery institutions, and policy advocacy for legal, institutional and policy reforms at the national level. The main objective of

⁵¹ Shadman Malik, ‘Sromik Jigyasha: Legal aid at RMG workers' fingertips’, *The Daily Star*, 22 February 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/sromik-jigyasha-legal-aid-rmg-workers-fingertips-1705774> (accessed on 15 April 2019).

⁵² It is a support center to receive complaints of corruption from victims and witnesses of corruption, scrutinize the complaint, and render assistance and advice on the basis of merit. Key activities include receiving complaints in person or by phone calls, reaching out to affected communities, ensuring confidentiality, providing advice on how to seek redress including, where appropriate, and making referrals to other legal support groups. See <https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/index.php/en/about-us/what-we-do/engaging-people/advocacy-tools> (accessed on 17 March 2019).

research is to shed light on the governance deficits and corruption of different sectors and institutions alongside the burden of corruption imposed on the people seeking public services and prescribes solutions. As a part of civic engagement TIB organizes different categories of local level volunteer groups.⁵³ Different activities at local levels include Satellite Advice and Information Desk⁵⁴, Mothers' Gathering, advocacy meetings, monitoring of programs and activities of different service providing institutions education, health, local government, land etc. Using these tools, citizens raised questions and/or demands against corruption and irregularities along with ensuring good governance and better services. On the other hand, NU's community forum is proactive to identifying the most deserving families in order to have access to social safety net programs without briberies and nepotism.

3.5 Target 16.6 – 'Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels'

CSOs such as TIB, *Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik* (Sujan), BROTEE, NU, HEKS/EPER, AAB, World Vision, Democracywatch, *Sushasoner Jonny Procharavizan* (Supro) implement programs for developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (Target 16.6). One of the focus areas is the democratic process and institutions of Bangladesh, under which research on the Parliament, monitoring of elections and electoral process, role of democratic institutions such as political parties are regularly carried out that are targeted to developing effective, accountable and transparent democratic institutions. Local communities are engaged in the process of putting pressure on local institutions to be more transparent and accountable. This is done through different social accountability tools, setting up complaint redress mechanisms including installing complaint boxes, introducing complaint and RTI register which enhanced the accountability mechanism and improved quality of services in targeted institutions.

3.6 Target 16.7 – 'Ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels'

CSOs including HEKS/EPER, The British Council, AAB, NU, TIB, Wave Foundation and Democracywatch are involved in ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels under Target 16.7. This is done through open budget, *ward shava* (ward meeting), face the public/ public hearing, and multi-stakeholder meetings. The local level community groups formed by different CSOs provide the community people the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of the local level institutions, and help improving transparency and accountability of the respective institution.

Success Story 2: Project tracking and public hearing in Brahmanbaria created opportunity for a river protection embankment's post implementation maintenance

In Brahmanbaria, a river protection embankment was built by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Brahmanbaria on a huge community demand. As the regular part of CF project tracking of the CFG team of TIB, CFG research team has tracked the project before the very last time of the project and found it a faulty project in terms of quality issue. The research team immediately responded to the project implementer organization and shared the study findings and convoked them to an open public hearing with the authority for conveying public evaluation about the project as well their requirements from the project. CFG team successfully conducted a public hearing on this project with the local BWDB authority and community people. Through the public hearing, community people raised some significant issues where they demanded to start maintenance work immediately in the damaged areas of the embankment. The authority committed that they will check the actual length of the embankment and do some maintenance work by December 2017. With the maintenance work, the authority made a commitment to establish three

⁵³ Known as the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Youth Engagement and Support (YES), *Shwachhatar Jonno Nagorik* (Swajan) and YES Friends.

⁵⁴ Satellite AI-Desk is a useful tool to provide relevant information and advice to citizens including women, poor and marginalized at their doorsteps, which contributes to raise voice against corruption and irregularities. In the ongoing project phase of TIB, approximate 74,000 people including poor and marginalized received service related and other required information and advice from AI-Desk.

sloping roads around the embankment for easy transportation of crops from the downside of the embankment.

Besides the maintenance work and building slopping roads, the Executive Engineer committed that he will arrange this kind of public hearing in BWDB's future projects in these areas. He also assigned an information officer by the joint advocacy work of TIB's CFG and CE division and sent him in a capacity development training for district level information officers arranged by TIB. He also committed that he and his office will prioritize public information disclosure in their future projects and consider establishing information board in the community areas as must.

3.7 Target 16.9 – ‘By 2030, providing legal identity for all, including birth registration’

CSOs such as NU are working with the government for promoting legal identity for all, including birth registration by 2030 (Target 16.9). The Birth and Death Registration Act, 2004 provides for registration of every child born in Bangladesh irrespective of race, color, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth. CSOs working with *dalits*, linguistic minorities, plantation (tea) workers, marginalized groups, and poor and informal sector workers who are left out to register their birth through raising awareness about birth registration and offer support to government efforts to improve access to registration services. They also work to get the civil documents such as passport, National ID, License, etc. for linguistic minorities (particularly Bihari community), who are often denied legal identity by the authority.

3.8 Target 16.10 – ‘Ensuring public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms’

TIB, MJ, MRDI, Sujana, NU, Democracywatch, Right to Information Forum (RTI Forum) and other CSOs are implementing programs to achieve the Target 16.10. Information disclosure mechanism is an effective tool in this regard, which contributes to disclose information for the citizens proactively, and basis on demand. TIB has a significant contribution to assign designated officer in almost 100% of its working institutions and introduced displaying citizens' charter, information board, sign, different symbol etc. for the citizens as the part of RTI Act, 2009.

Moreover, CSOs including ASK and Odhakar regularly collect information on the status of fundamental human rights and freedom of expression, and publish regular reports. Through these programs a repository of information has been developed, which is often cited and used by international organizations.

3.9 Target 16A – ‘Strengthening relevant national institutions for building capacity at all levels to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime’

NU has been active in strengthening relevant national institutions for building capacity at all levels to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime (Target 16A). It is working with National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as member of different thematic committees of NHRC to prevent and promote human rights. Also working closely with IC, representative from CSOs work as core trainer of the Commission.

3.10 Target 16B – ‘Promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies’

For promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies (Target 16B), HEKS/EPER and NU have been advocating for enacting Anti-discriminatory act since 2012. They submitted the first draft to the law commission of the Anti-Discrimination Act 2014. Later on NHRC and some other CSOs worked closely to the National Law Commission to prepare a final draft of the law. Unfortunately the proposed act is still pending to get approved by the cabinet and parliament. CSOs are also working with designated authorities to have national development strategy, separate ministry and human rights commission to look after the affairs of *dalit* and *adibashi* people. In light with that end, a 13 points declaration has been adopted through a national convention.

The above discussion on different activities of CSOs pertaining to different Targets of Goal 16 demonstrates that CSOs are playing an important role along with the government in achieving Goal 16. Most of the CSOs are providing support to the poor and marginalized groups, covering a wide

spread of population, and thus contributing in promoting the ‘Leave No One Behind’ approach of the SDGs.

4. Impact of CSO activities on Achieving Goal 16

It is seen that different CSOs have been providing important support to the government initiatives for achieving Goal 16 through the following.

4.1 Institutional, policy and legal reforms

Through research and advocacy activities of the CSOs, a number of institutional, legal and policy reforms have been possible over the years. NIS institutions such as the ACC and the IC that are crucial for establishing good governance and combat corruption have been established as a result of intense advocacy by some CSOs. Important institutional reforms were made in the Election Commission and the Public Service Commission thanks to knowledge-based advocacy from the CSOs. The Parliament, the Judiciary and the OCAg took different reforms in terms of practice within these institutions.

A number of policies such as the Gold Policy 2018, a Uniform Policy of Recruitment and Promotion/Upgradation of Teachers for All Public Universities, 2017, The National Drug Policy, 2016, laws such as the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004, The Right to Information Act 2009, Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Provide Protection), 2011, four regulations and The Food Safety (Technical Committee) Rules, 2017 were adopted as a result of continuous CSO advocacy. In many instances they were directly involved in the formulation of the respective acts. Due to persistent efforts from ASF along with other human rights based organizations, Bangladesh government enacted two laws in 2002 – one that heightens criminal penalties and improves criminal procedures and another that controls the availability of acid. The Revision of The Labour Law, 2006 incorporated a number of issues pertaining to the RMG sector, while the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) were revised taking into considerations different suggestions from CSOs working in this area. The Accreditation Council Act, 2016 was drafted with a view to ensuring standards in higher education in both public and private universities in the country and still awaiting for approval of the Cabinet. An office order was issued in August 2016 with 19 instructions for ensuring transparency and accountability of the locally raised (LR) funds at the DC offices in all districts.

Change of institutional practices have been evident in different public institutions such as the ACC, OCAg, Bangladesh Telephone Communications Limited (BTCL), National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), and Department of Immigration and Passport. In case of ACC it took different measures to reform its institutional arrangements, such as discarding inactive panel lawyers from ACC’s panel and replaced by five new lawyers, and formation of an Internal Discipline Unit. The OCAg of Bangladesh directed the Local and Revenue Audit Directorate in February 2017 to include seven most corrupt sectors in its audit program on a priority basis in accordance with the findings of ‘National Household Survey 2015’ report released in June 2016. The Case Management Reforms Committee and Monitoring Committees of the Law and Justice Division, Ministry of Law were reconstituted and reinforced to identify and address the reasons for delay in disposal of cases in the Courts of all tiers. As part of bringing the courts under ICT network and recording the testimony of witnesses, audio recording system was piloted in Sylhet District Court.

In line with TIB recommendations the government took various measures to prevent question leakage in public examinations.⁵⁵ Law enforcers arrested 153 people in 52 cases filed over question leak since the start of SSC examinations in 2018. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) decided to

⁵⁵ The government stopped the activities of the coaching centers ahead of the SSC examinations on 1 February 2018 and closed these coaching until the exams end. The examinees were instructed to enter their respective exam halls at least 30 minutes before the exams begin. Students and teachers were not allowed to carry smartphones inside the exam centers. It was also instructed to arrest anyone carrying a mobile phone within 200 meters of the centers during the exam.

transfer Office Assistants at the Upazila Education Offices who had been working for five years or above in a single station. According to the study recommendation on NCTB, some measures were taken such as Ministry of Education called for all audit reports of NCTB to verify audit objections raised by the OCAG in December 2017. ACC prepared a list of 20 corrupt NCTB officials, among whom 8 were transferred. NCTB identified the subject teachers responsible for making the errors and took steps for correction.

A number of initiatives have so far been undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to improve the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of healthcare providing public institutions.⁵⁶ The Department of Immigration and Passport (DIP) circulated some office orders to stop undue practices in passport offices. The DIP also established two new offices in Dhaka city to reduce overload and pressure on passport services. Public hearing on passport services was extended to local level offices to ensure transparency and accountability in the service delivery. The DIP also took action against four officials for their involvement in corruption and irregularities.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) formed a committee to carry out an inquiry into the allegations suggested by a study conducted by TIB. The government appointed an observer for each of the private universities to curb absolute monopoly of the Trustee Board in the decision making processes. Higher official from both the Ministry of Education and UGC made unscheduled visit to private universities and thereby took measures on identified irregularities. The UGC issued show cause letter to the universities on account of circulating admission notices of unapproved subjects. The UGC introduced a unified reporting format (Private University Regulation Form) to ensure university's financial accountability. The UGC also adopted a monitoring system to monitor the use of part-time teachers in private universities.

The NGO Affairs Bureau issued a letter to all NGOs in 2018, directing to take necessary measures in light of the recommendations proposed in a TIB study on 'NGOs of Bangladesh Funded by Foreign Donations: Governance Challenges and Way Forward'. The Ministry of Land circulated some directives to improve governance and reduce corruption through proactive disclosure of information in land offices. The Cabinet took a decision that permission will be required from concerned authority for the use of land for any development or industrial purposes.

The private sector also underwent a number of institutional reforms and change in practice. For instance, the readymade garments (RMG) sector has adopted a number of initiatives in response to different CSOs' continued research and advocacy. These include providing service contract papers to the workers as well as ID card containing emergency phone number, issuing an order to the factory owners to appoint female welfare officers to address gender issues, building capacity of all factory inspectors for curbing corruption in supply chain and formulating a code of ethics for the inspectors, and developing a Workers Welfare Fund for RMG workers in July 2016 with the contribution of 0.03% export value of the RMG manufacturers.

Success Story 3: Successful campaign for Dalits

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) effectively responds to discriminatory practices towards Dalit communities and considering the Dalit issue to be included in the coming NHRC strategic plans. For instance, two Dalit persons were qualified in the primary

⁵⁶ These include introduction of an online mechanism for submitting complaints and feedback about health services, display of service-related information at the hospitals through hanging of citizen's charter, notice board, information board etc., introduction of biometric machines for ensuring the presence of doctors and 'Hello Doctor' program to monitor doctors' presence in hospitals through surprise phone calls twice a month by Ministry officials, written instructions in health institutions to stop harassment of brokers, introduction of online licensing application and renewal processes for private healthcare institutions, and formation of different inspection committees for different levels down to Upazila level.

4.2 Information dissemination

Through research and advocacy campaign on different issues covered under Goal 16, the CSOs have been providing a great contribution on information dissemination. Different media are utilized for this purpose, which include street theatre, production and airing of television commercials, information fair, and competitions in different mediums.

For information dissemination and awareness building CSOs including

TIB, ASK, is facilitating local theatre groups on developing story-based street theatre production and organizing public shows highlighting the corruption and irregularities in the fundamental sectors like health, education, local government, RTI etc. in Dhaka and CCC areas. Information fairs are also organized at the local level where all the government service delivery institutions take part. The Satellite AI-Desks organized by TIB's local level volunteer groups play an important role in disseminating information on different public services including education, health, local government, and land related services.

Television commercials and documentaries helps enhancing knowledge as well as creating awareness against corruption. TVCs for RTI on land, anti-bribery in recruitment, graft liability upon women, ALAC animation were developed and successfully aired on the private television channels.

TIB arranges national level anti-corruption competitions such as debate competitions, cartoon competitions, photography competitions and moot court competitions. Investigative Journalism (IJ) Award and Fellowships and Training are also playing important roles in anti-corruption knowledge generation and awareness raising through their investigative reports on corruption issues.

4.3 Raising awareness

selection of Bangladesh Police Trainee Constable. But the recruitment was repealed through a Government notice to them on January 2016. Despite of qualifying in the primary list, they were dropped from the final recruitment list only for not having their own land which was a vital condition for getting police job in Bangladesh. NU drew attention to the NHRC and media about this discriminatory issue and a national leading daily newspaper published this news which had a great impact. NU continued their lobbying with higher authorities through NHRC. At last Bangladesh Police cancelled their order in this reporting period and there is the process of recruiting them.

Success Story 4: *Sromik Jigyasha* – Legal aid at one's fingertips

Rekha, an RMG worker, was upset to learn that some of her colleagues had been unfairly dismissed from a factory in Tejgaon without any good reason or prior notice. Furthermore, they were not even paid their dues and forcefully removed from the factory when they asked for it. Rekha immediately brought out her phone and lodged a query through *Sromik Jigyasha*, a mobile phone application she had recently come to know of through an awareness programme, where she also received basic induction on how to use the application. A paralegal explained to Rekha the applicable laws and told her that there was a good chance that her colleagues' dismissal was unlawful. Thus Rekha was advised by a paralegal to ask her colleagues to visit BLAST's Dhaka office with their relevant employment documents. After their visit, the paralegal helped the workers send a stern legal notice to the relevant authority. To their utter surprise, Rekha's colleagues had been handed their overdue salaries within a few

Awareness raising by different CSOs are done through social mobilization, engagement and advocacy at community level on governance and anti-corruption.

days. Rekha and her colleagues now pledge to spread news of the app among their peers and use it anytime they feel the need to avail the protection of the law.

Multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder

prevention campaign has contributed to significant reduction of the number of violence against women over the years. Activities have been designed to contribute for changing gender stereotype at all level to prevent acid and other forms of gender-based violence.

Men and boys engagement through transformational changes created a good practice to address reduce gender based violence in Bangladesh. Through *kabigaan*, folk music, *baul* song, inter-community dialogue on peace and social cohesion CSOs try to reduce violence and promote peace building.

ASF's multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder prevention campaign has contributed to significant reduction of the number of acid attacks over the years. Before the ASF prevention campaign started in 2002, there were over 500 recorded attacks. In 2010 the number decreased to around 153, which nevertheless remains a grave concern with one attack in every two and half days. In 2015 the number of acid attack was 59 and victimized 74, in 2017 it was 48, and in 2018 it was 22.

Due to programs implemented by *Brotee*, 84,169 (32% indigenous and 65% women) villagers now about different laws including family laws, legal services available to them, and human and land rights related issues. Women's capacity and confidence have increased against domestic violence as 441 cases are filed and proceeded by them. Around 1400 youth leaders (of which 30% are indigenous and 50% are girls) are playing a vital role as defenders of human rights and legal service provides to vulnerable communities.

As a result of CSOs' continuous campaign, corruption has taken a central place in the public discourse, as a result of which we can see the inclusion of anti-corruption commitments in electoral manifestos of the major political parties over the last two decades. Emphasis has been given on anti-corruption by the ruling parties. This has been manifested through the declaration of 'Zero Tolerance' by the present government. Moreover, good governance and anti-corruption have been given importance in different state policies and five-year plans.

4.4 Legal support

Many CSOs provide legal support for ensuring access to justice especially for the poor, women victims of acid/ domestic violence, marginalized, ethnic/ *adibashi* and *dalit* communities. Such legal support is provided in the forms of mediation, litigation, consultation and advice, and referral.

During January 2016 and 31 December 2018, BLAST settled 6,503 disputes through mediation, out of the 17,863 cases undertaken. Out of the settled disputes, 2,176 pertained to recovery of money, which resulted in the recovery of BDT 12,67,65,045 for women and men who sought remedies against various issues like claims for dower, maintenance, workplace compensation and others. During the same period, BLAST provided a full range of litigation services on civil, criminal and constitutional matters in 34,333 cases in various levels of court, out of which 14,407 were disposed and the rest remain pending. Out of the disposed cases, 5,563 pertained to recovery of money in family related disputes (e.g. maintenance, dower and family property cases) or workers arrears (e.g. salary, benefits and compensation etc.) which resulted in the recovery of a total of BDT 9,51,34,255 for clients who could not otherwise have afforded to pursue their cases in court.

The total number of phone calls and written complaints received by *Bandhu* during 2013 and 2018 are 3,171 and 287 respectively. Among these 13 cases of serious nature have been referred to National Human Rights Commission, and another 17 cases referred to various panel lawyers. As a part of its commitment to address the human rights and social justice of this community, *Bandhu* initiated Bandhu Panel Lawyer in 64 districts with an objective to provide the community members with an easy access to information and assistance on legal issues through them. Now, 205 lawyers are

providing pro bono legal support. In two districts, *Brotee* has provided legal support to 2,669 belonging to *adibashis*.

Through the ALAC program of TIB, 697 number of citizens received services of which 304 complaint resolved positively and 74 issues referred to the Government Organizations and likeminded NGOs for further specific support as of September 2018.

4.5 Capacity building

The capacity building of community people and youth has been possible due to different CSO interventions all over the country. Such capacity building interventions are centered on right to information, legal and human rights, labor rights, and different social accountability tools. Such initiatives are targeted to community people especially children, women, youth, and marginalized people. Capacity building of public officials are also provided through training and orientation. For instance, TIB provided training to a section of the ACC officials on research methodology, data collection and analysis, and investigation techniques on anti-corruption.

The British Council, through PRODIGY project has developed the knowledge and skills of more than 800 young people directly and more than 1,300 likeminded youth indirectly to engage the wider community through volunteer activities, including youth club activities, theatre performances, internships with local government, community radio programs and public dialogues, creating platforms and channels to ensure that the wider community has access to government information. These trained young people have been delivering 110 social action projects in 25 locations aiming to increase civic participation in local government's activities. Under another project, 42 Multi Actor Partnership (MAP) formed in 14 districts and all the 1050 MAP members (Male: 593, Female: 456, Transgender: 1) trained on leadership, communication, advocacy, social accountability tools and social action project. For instance, Platforms for Dialogue, a European Union funded project in partnership with the Cabinet Division of Bangladesh, is implemented through the British Council in 21 districts across the country. P4D's objective is to promote a more enabling environment for the effective engagement and participation of the citizen and civil society in Government decision making and accountability mechanisms. Similarly Wave Foundation provided youths leadership capabilities through training and workshop, and some 600 youth leaders undertook 40 Social Action Projects following training.⁵⁷

HEKS/EPER Bangladesh has successfully facilitated process to ensure access to get their rights and entitlements from public resources leading by community leaders. As of now around 10,000 (ten thousand) one fourth of the total targeted groups have got public services which includes health advices, medicine, education support, safety net allowances, latrine and tube-well, employment, infrastructure development.⁵⁸

TIB has different groups of volunteers. Among them the capacity of YES members are developed with regard to utilizing RTI Act, running advice and information desks, collect data for research, and do advocacy campaigns using different methods.

4.6 Community participation

Many CSOs implement programs for which community participation has increased in monitoring and decision-making of public representatives, public service delivery organizations (health, education, land etc.) through formation of committees/ groups at the grassroots. For instance, under the Social Engagement for Budgetary Accountability (SEBA) program DW is trying to increase budgetary transparency of Union Parishads by ensuring free flow of information in line with Union Parishad Act, 2009, Union Parishad Operations Manual and RTIA, make the Union Parishad representatives more accountable to the people for planning, budgeting and using Union Parishad fund and ensure

⁵⁷ Wave Foundation, *Annual Report 2016-17*, https://wavefoundationbd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/annual-repport-15-16_wave.pdf (accessed on 11 March 2019).

⁵⁸ HEKS/EPER project database.

more inclusive planning and budgeting by Union Parishad through greater participation of cross section of people especially women, poor and marginalized groups.

To enhance democratic practices within service delivery organizations (UP, Hospital, Educational Institutions etc.) HEKS/EPER has started practice monitoring of governance performance through using social audit, community score card and open budgeting. In addition to that partners working for *dalit* and *adibashi* has also been working with local-regional and national administration to establish culture of accountability which eventually ensure access of marginalized people into public services.

The public hearing on climate finance issues organized by TIB has made face to face conversation between implementing authority and community leaders and peoples possible, where authority acknowledged the implementation gaps and committed to overcome. More than 80 projects implemented by GO and NGO have been tracked under the Tracking Climate Change Adaptation/Mitigation Project aiming to assess the quality of fund utilization at the ground. Tracking report is used to engage with local implementing authority for effective changes in disclosures of information, participation and grievance redress mechanism.

5. Key lessons learnt

5.1 Engaging authorities pays off

It can be observed from many CSOs' experience that most of the authorities are willing to work with the CSOs to achieve Goal 16. Collaborative programs have been evident with various, ministries, departments and institutions. For instance, various ministries and institutions invited TIB to give an in-depth hearing to relevant research findings and discuss way forward. Also engagement with authorities for conducting a study – from the concept formation level to sharing of findings for validation – substantially increased. Local level diagnostic studies followed by advocacy initiatives would influence local authorities to bring about practice level changes. Moreover, private sector players were found cooperative in providing necessary support to TIB research and study based advocacy. Partnerships with the ACC, IC, NHRC, National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO) under Law and Justice Division, Acid Crime Case Monitoring Cell of Ministry of Home Affairs, Asian Centre for Development (ACD) are good examples of such cooperation. Establishing partnership with legal aid organizations and enhancing coordination between partner organizations has been effective to increase reach and impact of referral services for legal assistance. It is necessary to strengthen cooperation of duty bearers during the litigation process to ensure that survivors are well informed, aware of their rights, have willingness to seek legal support and have increased access to justice.

5.2 Political environment jeopardizes partnership activities

In few cases it is difficult to influence policy level changes in key institutions of the state e.g. the parliament, judiciary etc. Transition of authority often hampers the ongoing partnership relation. Frequent follow-up requires to make the partners (govt. authority) move forward. Sometimes dealing with government institutions and officials might be difficult to achieve the target/smooth implementation. Possible instability i.e. authority approval or unforeseen schedule clash or venue might remain. High demand and expenditures based proposals for collaborative debate programs often minimizes the scope of joint initiative.

5.3 A section of Government officials are reluctant to work with CSOs

A section of government officials is reluctant in working with CSOs. The contribution and attribution of CSOs particularly in achieving Goal 16 are hardly mentioned or recognised in government's documents. It is more visible when it comes to the issue of corruption, irregularities and mal-governance in the part of public offices. Government's strategy in addressing corruption at present is not to identify the corrupt but rather to give motivation through encouraging good practices and improving service quality by the public officials. According to the government, the data generated by the BBS is dependable and there is no need to engage any NGO (TIB, 2017).

5.4 Dearth of official data

The data gap analysis reveals that there is no government data on corruption and bribery (Target 14.5), institutional effectiveness and accountability (Target 14.6), and fundamental freedom and access to information (Target 14.10) (GED, 2016). Partial information is available on some issues such as all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere (Target 16.1), abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children (Target 16.2), rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all (Target 16.3), money laundering and recovery of stolen assets (Target 16.4), legal identity for all, including birth registration (Target 16.9). The collection, retention and preservation of records are not standardized. This constitutes one of the main challenges to the implementation of the RTI Act. Some NGOs seemed even less prepared than government offices when the question of providing information came under the RTI Act 2009. Information is often disseminated without understanding the needs of the users, or the contexts in which they can access and use the information. Many information systems exist to provide information to the poor that are not demand driven, overlook local knowledge, misunderstand the role of intermediaries and do not monitor usage.

5.5 Government's reluctance in corruption data generated by CSOs

The elected governments have so far been suffering from a 'denial syndrome' when it comes to admitting the existence of corruption in different public sectors and institutions, revealed by non-government and international organizations through their surveys and research reports. In general their responses are more political than academic. Instead of taking measures against corrupt practices, a segment of the government always tends to deny such reports, terming the findings as 'false', 'ill-motivated', 'politically biased' and/or 'part of a conspiracy' (TIB, 2017a). Moreover, many government officials are still used to a culture of secrecy. It is taking time for them to adapt to a culture of openness ushered in by the RTI Act 2009.

6. Way forward

The government should consider the following for effective delivery of different government and CSO programs.

Legal reforms recommended by CSOs with regard to limitations existing in different laws pertaining to ensuring human rights, protection of freedom of speech and expression, right to information, right to life and livelihood, and strengthening NIS institutions should be sincerely considered by the government. There should be regular exchange of ideas and opinions before any new law enactment or legal reform, so that it is ensured that the main spirit of the Constitution and international standards are not compromised. The laws containing clauses that are against the spirit of freedom of speech and expression, human rights, and equality before law must be revised, and new laws promoting good governance, transparency, accountability and anti-discrimination should be enacted.

The institutional and financial capacity of NIS institutions should be increased for better performance. Positive and negative incentives must be ensured for the transparency and accountability of public institutions.

The Government should ensure generating data currently not available for the Targets and Indicators under Goal 16. For instance, the BBS should conduct a nation-wide survey to determine the baseline on the state of corruption and bribery, people's satisfaction and trust on NIS institutions. For this the Government should sincerely consider engaging the CSOs in this exercise and utilize their expertise.

The CSOs should develop more partnerships with the government on different issues. These may include capacity building, data generation, service delivery, information dissemination etc. with the aim to achieve different Targets of Goal 16.

The participation of youth volunteers and social workers should be increased from both the government and CSOs. Their capacity should be strengthened to promote good governance, transparency and accountability of different institutions, to act as a driving force against corruption,

human rights violation, violence against women and children, and to promote peace and justice in the social sphere. Content on non-discrimination, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, in particular rights to consent, and to choice should be incorporated into school and madrasa curricula and curricula for training of concerned teachers.

Special attention should be given to gender-based violence. The coordination among different public and CSO stakeholders should be increased. All the socialization media needs to be more proactive role to prevent and respond GBV and ICT based tools could be used to report, respond and referral linkages and need more Gender responsive budgeting. The participation of youth volunteers and social workers in police stations should be ensured who can provide support to those victims of rights violations who are particularly vulnerable, such as persons with disabilities and women and girls who have faced sexual violence. An online complaint recording mechanism (e.g. a dedicated website) must be developed, especially for cases pertaining to violence against women (where social stigma deters complaints). This mechanism must treat the personal information of the complainant with due confidentiality. Relevant actors within law enforcement agencies and medical institutions should receive sensitisation training so that they respond to victims of rights violations with due care and diligence, which includes providing interpretation or accessible information for those with disabilities. Training exercises aimed at creating gender-sensitivity for judges and lawyers must be provided, particularly when they are dealing with victims of sexual violence.

Legal aid and service providers including state (NLASO) and non-state actors (BLAST and BRAC etc.) who are working across the country should work together to create a central database which identifies and measures the reach and operations of legal aid and services.

To ensure sustainable development of *dalits* and *adibahsis* who are lagging behind for various reasons need institutional mechanisms. For that, the model of Chittagong Hill Tracts can be followed for creating a separate ministry and or human rights commission. Special allocation should be within the system of social safety net programme so that they can get it easily. Special initiatives should be taken in areas where *dalit* and *adibashi* people are living so that they get affirmative benefits of education.

7. Conclusion

From the discussion, it is evident that the CSOs are playing an important role along with the government to achieve different Targets of Goal 16. CSOs are playing such roles both as watchdogs and through implementing programs. In some cases they have been successful in keeping the government policy making on the right track, while on the other hand providing direct support through different activities. Most of the CSOs are providing support to the poor and marginalized groups, covering a wide spread of population, and thus contributing in promoting the ‘Leave No One Behind’ approach of the SDGs. This is time that the government should realize the need of CSOs in achieving the SDGs, particularly Goal 16, and recognize their contribution and attributions.

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Annex 1

Existing laws determining efficiency, transparency, and accountability of selected institutions

Institutions	Effective functioning	Transparency	Accountability
Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Parliament Secretariat Act, 1994 ▪ The Rules of Procedures (ROP) ▪ Representation of the People Order (Amendment) Act, 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Right to Information Act, 2009 ▪ Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Rules of Procedures (ROP) ▪ The Members of Parliament (Determination of Dispute) Act, 1980
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Rules of Business 1996 ▪ General Financial Rules (GFR) ▪ The Prime Minister's (Remuneration and Privileges) Act, 1975 ▪ The Special Powers Act, 1974 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public Interest Information Disclosure (Protection) Act, 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Rules of Business 1996
Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Code of Civil Procedure 1908 ▪ The Supreme Court (High Court Division) Rules, 1973 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules 1979
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ City Corporation Amended Act-2011 ▪ Upazila Parishad Amended Act-2011 ▪ Upazila Parishad Program Implementation Rules-2010 ▪ Municipality Amendment Act-2015 ▪ Municipality Amended Act-2010 ▪ Union Parishad Act-2009 ▪ Union Parishad Tax Schedule Rules-2012 ▪ Union Parishad Accounts & Audit Rules-2012 ▪ Village Court Act-2006 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Local Council Servants (Efficiency and Discipline) Rules 1968 ▪ The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Public Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Government Employment Act 2018 ▪ The Government Servant (Conduct) Rules 1979 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Government Servants Conduct Rules, 1979 ▪ The RTI Act 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947 ▪ The Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1985 ▪ The Public Servants (Dismissal on Conviction) Ordinance, 1985 ▪ The Government Servants (Review of Penalties) (Dissolution of Review Board) Ordinance, 1978 ▪ The Government Servants Conduct Rules, 1979
Law Enforcing Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Police Act, 1861 ▪ The Police Regulations, Bengal, 1915 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 ▪ The Evidence Act, 1872 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Police Act, 1861 ▪ Civil Rules and Orders [Annual Confidential Report – ACR)

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Institutions	Effective functioning	Transparency	Accountability
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	
Election Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Election Commission Secretariat Act, 2009 ▪ The Election Commission (Office staff) Recruitment Rules, 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 ▪ The Election Commission Secretariat Act, 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Election Commission Secretariat Act, 2009 ▪ The Election Commission (Office staff) Recruitment Rules, 2008 ▪ The Election Officer (special rules) Act, 1991
Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Comptroller and Auditor-General (Additional Functions) Act, 1974 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Code of ethics ▪ The Comptroller and Auditor-General (Additional Functions) Act, 1974
Anti-Corruption Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Anti-Corruption Act, 2004 ▪ The Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Anti-Corruption Act, 2004
Information Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The RTI (Information Disclosure and Dissemination) Rules, 2010 ▪ The Disclosure of Public Interest Information (Protection) Act, 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009
Human Rights Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009
Political parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Political Parties Ordinance, 1978 ▪ The Political Party Registration Rules, 2008 ▪ The Conduct of Election Rules 1972 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Representation of the People Order, 1972 ▪ The Political Party Registration Rules, 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Political Parties Ordinance, 1978 ▪ The Political Party Registration Rules, 2008 ▪ The Conduct of Election Rules, 1972
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution of Bangladesh ▪ The Press Council Act, 1974 ▪ The Information and Communication Technology Act, 2013 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Information and Communication Technology Act, 2013 ▪ The Press Council Act, 1974
Civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Foreign Donation Regulations Act, 2016 ▪ The Societies Registration Act, 1860 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RTI Act, 2009 ▪ The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Protection), 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Foreign Donation Regulations Act, 2016
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Financial Institutions Act, 1993 ▪ The Securities and Exchange Commission Act, 1993 ▪ The Companies Act, 1994 ▪ The Bankruptcy Act, 1997 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Financial Institutions Act, 1993 ▪ The Companies Act, 1994 ▪ The Bankruptcy Act, 1997

Annex 2: Success Stories

Success Story 1: Women empowerment through rights awareness

Jorina (29) is her parents' only child. After her father's sudden death, she and her mother left their village home in Bhola, a coastal district, and moved to Beribadh, a densely populated slum in Dhaka city. They both found work in a garments factory. One day Jorina met Badsha (45) while walking to the factory. They married soon afterwards. But Badsha changed after the wedding; he stopped working and pressurised Jorina to give him money. When she refused, he became violent and abusive. Jorina also discovered that Badshah was already married and had seven children with his previous wife, and that he had had vasectomy and could not have any children with her. Jorina tolerated Badsha's behaviour in the belief that if she left, she would be destitute. When she met a SHOKHI change maker in her community, she found out that if she divorced him, she could still claim her dower and maintenance. Once Jorina understood her legal rights, she sought a divorce. She submitted an application to the paralegals at the SHOKHI Hub for legal aid to secure her dower and maintenance. Based on her application, SHOKHI issued a letter to Badsha calling him to attend a mediation session. In the end, Jorina recovered Tk 25,000 as her dower from Badsha through mediation.

Success Story 2: Rights ensured for a trans-gender

Morjina is a trans-gender of Mymensingh who managed to buy a small piece of land worth three decimals. In the meantime, she also adopted a child. However, seeing this fact, her nephew realized that if that child continues to reside with them, he won't be able to inherit land property from Morjina. This selfish greed turned him into a hostile person. Making this an excuse, he physically abused Morjina, tortured her brutally and also threatened that if she did not transfer the land to him he will kill her. Morjina felt forlorn, helpless and deserted. Seeing no other way, she contacted one of the DLLG (District Level Lawyers Group) of Bandhu and shared the matter. After listening to all the facts, they met the Additional Super of Police and then considering the seriousness of the matter he forwarded the complaint to Officer in Charge (OC) of the local police station. Then the OC filed the First Information Report (FIR) and assured to verify the matter efficaciously.

Bandhu's DLLG member kept continuous communication with the OC to get the updates. When the perpetrator became aware of it, they placed a request of apology. When Morjina learnt about it, she agreed to sit for an open discussion. On May 15, 2014 a meeting was held between both the parties in presence of Bandhu representatives, DLLG member and other relevant personnel. After having a long discussion, finally the perpetrator signed a letter of apology when he committed not to breach the security of Morjina in future at any cost and also provided compensation to Morjina as he abused her physically. Finally, the case was withdrawn and now they are living in harmony.

Success Story 3: RTI applied as the tool of Investigative Journalism

Md. Obaidur Rahman, a journalist of Dinajpur, came to know regarding extreme corruption by selling fake stamps in the city where the government losing huge amount of revenue. Being refused by different authorities to provide information, Obaidur Rahman came to CCC, Dinajpur for getting suggestion how to collect the information regarding fake stamps. CCC, Dinajpur, suggested him to submit application for information to the local district administration according to the RTI Act, 2009. Taking required technical assistance from local CCC, Obaidur Rahman applied RTI to the Information Officer of the District Administration asking information about fake stamps mentioning serial numbers of the sold stamps and name of respective vendors, but he was refused.

Later on, as per advice of CCC, he appealed to the Deputy Commissioner directly and received required information on 12 May 2015. According to the information, it was proved that the stamps

were fake. Considering the information and taking into account, the Deputy Commissioner cancelled the license of the four respective vendors on the same day for their involvement in such type of corruption and irregularities.

According to the information provided by the authority, due to take measures by the local administration, fake stamps selling has been totally stopped and revenue generation has been increased significantly than the previous fiscal year. As per information of accounts and audit section of the district administration, additional BDT 2.5 million was collected from the same source within 40 working days after taking measures.

Success story 4: Youth strengthening local democratic institution

Being considered an important institution for local level democracy, the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009 allows the local people to participate in the decision-making process of the UP. According to this law, each UP is supposed to form 13 Standing Committees (SC) to look after particular issues (e.g. finance, agriculture, health, sports). Each SC is required to co-opt five to seven members representing the local community. However, dysfunctionality of the SC is commonplace across the country, and the Fulbaria UP in Mirpur Upazila was no exception. Although all the SCs were established in 2016, they did not have any resolution books, indicating that the meetings were not organised regularly. However, the UP Act 2009 requires each SC to have a meeting in every alternate month. Also, none of the SCs have a member under 30 years of age.



After an analysis of the problem of dysfunctionality of the SC and the potential opportunity for young people to join the SCs in the vacant membership position, the young people linked to ALO in Kushtia, who attended training on democracy and leadership at Global Platform Bangladesh, had several meetings with the elected UP representatives. Their continued and intensive negotiations with the Chairman and the members opened an opportunity for 26 young people to represent the community at the SCs. Two young people were included in the vacant positions of each of the 13 SCs. Ten of the young people included in the SCs come from the youth groups of ALO while the remaining 16 young people come from the community in general.

While the UP Chairperson and the members believe that the newly recruited young members of the SCs will contribute to transform the UP into a vibrant local democracy institution, the community people including the youth community expect that the young people will represent their voice in the UP decision-making processes. The young people who have been appointed as members of the SCs also feel sanguine about their future role and believe that they will be able to contribute to transform Fulbaria UP into an accountable and youth-responsive institution.

Success story 5: Young people facilitating community-led development planning

The people of Bamunia UP have traditionally seen the UP Chairperson and members developing plan for the UP since independence of the country. The UP representatives have never asked them what they wanted to see in the plan of the UP. Hence, the UP plan ever hardly reflected the aspirations of the community.

However, a recent initiative of the young people has altered the practice to some extent. In July 2018, a group of young people associated with Udayankur Seba Sangstha (USS), analysed local development issues and reflected on the development planning process that the UP follows. Based on their initial analysis, they decided to conduct a community-led mid-term review the five-year plan of the UP. When they shared their idea with the UP representatives, they acknowledged that the opinion of the community members was not solicited in the development planning process, and the Chairperson of the UP agreed to the proposal for the review of the plan.



It led to the start of a new chapter. Together with the youth group members, the UP representatives consulted community people in each Ward (constituency of each UP member) of the UP to understand their problems and seek their opinion on the development of plan. Based on the community consultation, the UP representatives in cooperation with the young people developed new projects on a priority basis for all nine wards. While sharing her feeling from her engagement with the planning process, Tanjilla Begum, a woman from ward 2, said, “I have never seen in the life that a UP member openly involves the community members in the project selection process”.

By the end of August 2018, the UP representatives revised their five-year plan by incorporating nine new projects and announced the revised budget. Within a few days the new projects were approved. Later, ward level project implementation committees were formed with one youth representative included in each committee. The youth group members and the community people will be monitoring the implementation process as they were directly involved in the project development process. Both the community people and the UP representatives are very happy to see this kind of initiative of the youth. The chairperson of the Bamunia UP appreciated the leadership of the young people for facilitating the development of nine new projects. The young people who led the community-led project development process believe that the relationship developed between the community and their elected representatives through the plan review process will contribute to increasingly enhance the culture of accountability among the UP representatives. They also hope that this example might have a ripple effect on the other service providing institutions in the neighbourhood.

Success story 6: Working with the NHRC

ASK has been advocating to establish an independent structure for the children following UPR and CRC recommendations since 2012. In 2016, the organisation joined the NHRC to work in tandem for this reason i.e. establishment of National Commission for the Rights of Children (NCRC). They have drafted a law which, in 2015, they shared with different stakeholders at various levels. It includes opinions from experts and other related stakeholders. The draft law was submitted to MoWCA in June 2016. MoWCA accepted the law and called two inter- ministerial meetings, where the then State Minister, MoWCA and the Chairperson, NHRC were present.

The then state minister reaffirmed the government’s commitments for the children and opined that as children make up a large portion of the population, the demand for an independent structure to overview the rights of children is logical. Later, the ministry formed a review committee to work further on the law. ASK also consulted the Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights (PCCR) and members present in the meeting also supported the issue.

Success story 7: Engaging Stakeholders

As part of the Promoting Citizens' Access to Information project, MADI facilitated the setting up of a civil society group called Jagrata Nagorik Committee (JANAK) in 6 upazilas in each of Jessore and Barisal districts, committed to an open, information-centric society. The members of the committee of Chowgacha, Jessore played an important role in organizing and publicizing the activities at the RTI camp and the issue of RTI in general. Government officials and elected representatives were engaged as part of the sensitization. The Deputy Commissioner of Jessore and the upazila Nirbahi Officer of Chowgacha remained engaged throughout the process and lent their support.

The Shinghajhuli Union Parishad Chairman Rezaur Rahman Rendu turned into a strong supporter of information disclosure from his position of maintaining culture of secrecy. He extended all out support and cooperation at each step of organizing the camp which contributed substantially to make it a success. As a result of his positive mind-set he disclosed his budget and the beneficiaries of 5 areas of safety net programs including Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF). He wrote them on the walls of the Union Parishad and the villages of the union for all to see. This has been a demonstration of courage and commitment by an elected representative. "I don't want to be involved in corruption and I don't want anyone to indulge in corruption after me," he said.

Success story 8: Farida the Light House of Awliabad

The Local Governance Support Program (LGSP-II) is a milestone project implemented by the Government of Bangladesh that has created immense scopes for the Union Parishads to play an active role in rural development & community engagement at all level. Under SEBA Project DW trained up Community Support Groups & UP bodies, Ward Committee and Scheme Supervision committees on Social Accountability Tools, LGSP-II & Right to Information Act 2009 to engage its success.

Farida, a member of Community Support Group of Parkhi UP, ward # 9, played an extra ordinary role to monitor LGSP-II scheme implementation in her area. She wanted to know from the ward member about the number of schemes planned and implemented within her ward including budget allocation for the schemes in Fiscal Year 2014-2015. After continuous demands from Farida, UP member disclosed the information on schemes and allocation to her. Farida has received a copy of estimation of the schemes and with the assistance of other members of Community Support Group she has monitored the scheme on reconstructions of a road in Aowliabad village.

She also requested the Scheme Supervision Committee of her ward to play their assigned role proactively as per UP operational manual. Farida said "This is my responsibility not as a woman but as a citizen". She thanked SEBA to enhance her knowledge on UP activities & motivation to play the role as a concerned citizen. The people of Aowliabad are now encouraged to look after the development initiatives in their area. Farida is now regarded as the 'Light House' of the village.