

*Annual Report*  
*June, 2018- May, 2019*



## Empowering Linguistic Minority to Realize Rights in Bangladesh

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Council of Minorities and Namati are supporting the community-based paralegals to work in Urdu-speaking camps across five cities in Bangladesh. The paralegals are empowering their fellow Urdu-speakers to understand their rights as citizens and to obtain and use legal identity documents. Paralegals also track each case to build an empirical understanding of how relevant laws are implemented.

### Community history and context

Approximately 300,000 Bihari Urdu speaking camp dwellers have been living in 116 camps of 13 regions in urban settings across Bangladesh. In 1947, India was partitioned into two country-India and Pakistan. That partition forced the religious minorities of both countries to leave their ancestors' homes and take shelter in Pakistan or India to protect and promote their religion, culture, language and economic interests. The Urdu speaking Muslim minority of the Indian provinces of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orisha and West Bengal migrated to the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

In 1971, East Pakistan revolted against the rule of West Pakistan and fought a 9-month war of liberation, which resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh in 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971. A small section of the Urdu speaking community played an anti-liberation role by siding with the Pakistan army and therefore, at the end of the war Biharis became victims of the situation and were forced to abandon their homes, business, properties and employment. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) built large and small settlements Camps all over in Bangladesh and to provide shelter, food and medical support to the displaced Biharis. These settlements, approximately 116 in number, are commonly known as Bihari camps. Residents were in effect stateless, without identity documents to recognize citizenship in any country.

However, in 2008, the High Court of Bangladesh confirmed that the Urdu-speaking camp dwellers are Bangladeshi citizens, and this landmark verdict raises a hope among the young Urdu-speakers ending of decades-long struggle with statelessness. The landmark decision was the result of filing a writ petition by 11 camp residents on behalf of the whole community. After this 2008 verdict, the Election Commission complied with court orders to enroll camp residents in the national voter lists and issue national identity cards.

Due to lack of mass awareness on the High Court landmark verdict among the general people and government official, the camp dwellers have not only been deprived from their civil and political rights but also from their socioeconomic and cultural rights. The Urdu speaking camp dwellers are yet to enjoy the citizenship rights and have been facing difficulties to get their national identity card, enroll in voter list, passport and access to basic services provided by government and non-government service providers.

Considering their deprivation and sufferings to have full access to citizenship rights, since June 2013, in partnership with Namati Council of Minorities have been working to promote their citizenship rights considering the following objectives:

- To build an effective model for using legal empowerment approaches, specifically community-based paralegals, to facilitate the acquisition and use of identity documents to gain access to rights and opportunities part of the core content of citizenship;

- To develop robust evidence on the relationship between identity documentation and statelessness, including current government practice and discrimination that may contribute to an ongoing lack of effective citizenship, despite the possession of identity documents;
- To encourage use of this evidence for national litigation and national or international advocacy efforts related to gaining access to effective citizenship rights, if necessary.

Legal empowerment approach through community paralegal:

In order to bridge between law and real life of the Urdu speaking communities in the country, we have been providing paralegal legal support through five communitybased paralegal centers in Dhaka (Mirpur and Mohammadpur), Mymensingh, Khulna, Chittagong, and Syedpur. Camp dwellers and others who have questions or need on legal support come to our paralegal centres. 15 youths are assigned as community based paralegals to provide knowledge on law and government information to the community people and providing skills like negotiation, community education, approach of organizing and advocacy to seek concrete solutions to instances of injustice. In addition, they are serving as a dynamic “frontline” of justice service providers, paralegals focus on empowerment. They are not only working for resolving client’s legal issues but also building each client capacity that they can deal with problems related with access to justice in future.

Paralegals do outreach, every day door to door visit, organize community group meeting and community forum. At paralegal centers, paralegals provide information about the law, prepare application in the paralegal center, accompany the clients to government office to apply and they do follow up on delays and denials of the cases.

## Outreach

Every day paralegals are doing outreach inside the Camp. During the outreach they disseminate the message of 2008 high court judgment, importance and uses of the civil documentation like birth certificate, national identity card, passport, trade license and other many services. Every day they are assigned to visit at list 5 houses in their rotational weekly plan.

***Through the daily outreach paralegals reached 33,003 Camp dwellers and disseminated the message of 2008 high court judgment, uses and importance of the civil documentations in their daily life.***



KEY FACTS AND FIGURES  
June 2018- May 2019

2,502 Birth Certificates	191 Councilor Certificates	5 National Identity Cards	64 Passports	46 Trade licenses	35 Bank accounts
7 Death Certificate	60 General Dairies	501 Health Support	93 Education Support	42 Old Age Allowance	3 Disable Allowance

Activities Summary table

June 2018 to May 2019

Center	Birth Certificate	Councilor Certificate	NID Card		Passport		Trade License		Health Support	Education Support	General Dairy	Bank Account	Death Certificate	Old age allowance	Disable Allowance	Total
			New	Re-New	New	Re-New	New	Re-new								
Mdpur	839	5	-	1	-	4	3	-	74	-	3	-	-	42	3	974
Mirpur	673	16	2	-	19	15	50	5	82	24	24	7	-	-	-	881
Mym	89	50	1	1	3	-	-	-	11	1	2	-	5	-	-	157
Saidpur	279	14	-	-	-	2	-	-	4	2	26	10	-	-	-	325
Khulna	71	57	-	-	-	-	11	-	61	28	1	18	-	-	-	201
Ctg	551	49	-	-	7	14	-	-	41	38	4	-	2	-	-	666
Total	2,502	191	3	2	29	35	64	5	273	93	60	35	7	42	3	3,204

## Highlights

Birth Certificate is one of the demanding documents in the Bihari Camps. Without birth certificate no one can enrolled in the school. Since June 2019 to May 2019 paralegals assisted to the camp dwellers to obtain 2,502 birth certificate in 5 cities, Mohammadpur-839, Mirpur-673, Mymensingh- 89, Khulna- 71, Saidpur-279 and Chittagong- 551.



**Councilor Certificate** is needed to apply for passport, jobs, opening the bank account and for national identity card. 191 Councilor Certificates have been obtained with the support of paralegals in Mohammadpur- 5, Mirpur-16, Mymensingh-50, Saidpur-14, Khulna- 57 and Chittagong-49.

Bihari Urdu Speaking Camp dwellers are Bangladeshi citizen and voter they have national identity card however they facing discrimination to get passport. We have seen the different practices of the Government authorities in different places in order to acceptance of the passport applications and rejection of the passports of the Camp dwellers. Since June 2018 to May 2019 Paralegals successfully obtained 64 passports among these 29 new passport and 35 renew passports.



Since June 2018 to May 2019 paralegals have assisted to the camp dwellers to obtain 42 Old Age Allowance and 3 Disable Allowance in Mohammadpur. Poor men and women living in the camps in Mohammadpur are able to get 3 monthly allowances from the social welfare ministry of the government of Bangladesh. These allowances are helping the old age camp dwellers to survive their life.



## Testimonial

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### *Access to Passport.....*

Mr. Masum Hussain is a 32 years old a resident of Camp number- 7, Khalishpur Khulna. He is a tailor master by profession. He was very eager to start a fabric business from India to change his economic status. So that he in August 2018 he went to passport office to apply a passport. However passport authority rejected his application due to Camp address and said Bihari Camp dwellers are not able to get passport. After some days he met some passport brokers in front of passport office and the brokers offered him double cost for passport which was big amount for him to expense for passport. Soon after he discussed with his wife and then his wife suggested him to go visit paralegal center and meet with paralegal.

His wife attended community group meeting and she has learned about the 2008 court judgment and home ministry order regarding the passport for the Bihari Camp dwellers. When Mr. Masum heard about the order from home ministry then he got the confidence to reply with the support of paralegal.

According to his wife information about the paralegal support and home ministry order he visited Paralegal center and met Mrs. Naz a community paralegal in Khalishpur, Khulna and briefly described his passport rejection issued. Paralegal Naz updated him about 2008 high court judgment and citizenship laws, paralegal activities and process of passport application. Two days after paralegal completed his all paper work and went to passport office along with the 2008 high judgment and order from home ministry. After the successful submission of passport application Mr. Masum got his passport with 2 months. Now he has learned the process of passport and he got the Indian visa to start his fabric business.



## Legal Education

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Paralegals organize community group meeting, community legal forum and community advocacy meeting. They invite 10-15 women, men, boys and girls to attend the community group meeting. In the group meeting they disseminate the message of 2008 high court judgment and realize them how Biharis have ended their statelessness through the high court. In the group meeting and forum they discuss about the importance and uses of the civil documentations in their daily life. In every center every month they organize one community forum and invite 50 community members including men, women, boys and girls.

### Community Group Meeting, June 2018 to May 2019

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Center	No of Meeting	Male	Female	Boy	Girl	Total
Mohammadpur	72	37	647	104	292	1,080
Mirpur	96	46	869	121	404	1,440
Mymensingh	24	10	192	62	96	360
Saidpur	48	48	420	82	170	720
Khulna	24	22	191	50	97	360
Chittagong	96	47	854	171	368	1,440
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>3,173</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>1,427</b>	<b>5,400</b>

### Community Legal Form, June 2018 to May 2019

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Center	No of meeting	Male	Female	Boy	Girl	Total
Mohammadpur	12	12	388	70	130	600
Mirpur	12	19	392	62	127	600
Mymensingh	12	10	388	89	113	600
Saidpur	12	19	382	77	132	600
Khulna	12	27	375	71	127	600
Chittagong	12	25	359	99	117	600
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>2,284</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>746</b>	<b>3,600</b>

## Community Advocacy Meeting, June 2018 to May 2019

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Once in a year they organize community advocacy meeting and invite 40 members including men, women, boys and girls and discuss about the importance and uses of the civil documentations in their daily life.

Center	No of meeting	No of Persons (Including Male/Female/Boys/Girls)
Mohammadpur	1	40
Mirpur	1	40
Mymensingh	1	40
Saidpur	1	40
Khulna	1	40
Chittagong	1	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>240</b>

## Weekly Outreach, June 2018 to May 2019

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Every day paralegals are doing outreach inside the Camp. During the outreach they disseminate the message of 2008 high court judgment, importance and uses of the civil documentation like birth certificate, national identity card, passport, trade license and other many services. Every day they are assigned to visit at least 5 houses in their rotational weekly plan.

Center	No of Houses	No of Persons (Including Male/Female/Boys/Girls)
Mohammadpur	1,809	4,931
Mirpur	2,883	6,493
Mymensingh	1,320	5,582
Saidpur	2,147	8,100
Khulna	807	2,537
Chittagong	1,777	5,360
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,743</b>	<b>33,003</b>

## Weekly Outreach, June 2019 to November 2019 (Semi-annually)

Every day paralegals are doing outreach inside the Camp. During the outreach they disseminate the message of 2008 high court judgment, importance and uses of the civil documentation like birth certificate, national identity card, passport, trade license and other many services. Every day they are assigned to visit at least 5 houses in their rotational weekly plan.



Area	No of Families	Beneficiaries (in field)		
		Female & Girls	Male & Boys	Total
Mohammadpur	643	1448	1698	3853
Mirpur	929	1818	2035	3146
Mymesingh	400	A945	922	2933
Saidpur	603	1471	1400	2871
Khulna	300	748	578	1867
Chattogram	741	1413	1520	1326
<b>Total</b>	<b>3616</b>	<b>7843</b>	<b>8153</b>	<b>15996</b>

