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Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to Provide Legal Aid Special Reference to the Activities of BLAST: A Study on Rajshahi District

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Abstract

This research paper is aimed to focus on legal aid provided by the NGOs in Rajshahi district. The main purpose of the research is to find out the effectiveness of dispute resolution process by the NGOs. It is assigned to the government and non-government organization to provide legal aid and to comply with the laws. But it is showed that several NGOs are working on the project of providing legal aid. And these NGOs trying their best to create awareness among the people of Rajshahi. These NGOs provide legal advice, attorney's fees, process fees and relevant costs to those persons, who are unable to access to justice due to their poverty and other socio-economic factors. In this research, it has been found that most of the litigants belong to middle class or lower middle-class families and they come here without a lawsuit for getting amicable settlement or because of their financial condition. They come to know about this service by internet, area-based awareness, newspaper etc. It is found from the opinion of the respondents that the role of NGOs are very satisfied and specially BLAST in Rajshahi district. The paper suggests some ways to improve the services of NGOs by strict steps of the government, by enhancing the fees of panel lawyers, by providing training, by fact finding activities of NGOs and by making it compulsory by the government to telecast special program featuring legal aid services.

Keywords: *Legal Aid, Access to Justice, Human Rights, Bangladesh Legal System, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), Legal Aid Services Act 2000*

1. Introduction

In a democratic country like Bangladesh, every person who are incapable of seeking justice for financial problem, helplessness and other socio-economic reasons, they have the right to access to justice. The people who are not conscious about their social and legal rights, they suffer a lot when they want to file a suit. In order to provide legal aid service in free of cost to poor and vulnerable people of the society, the government has passed Legal aid services Act, 2000. Later the government has formed Nations Legal aid services Organization, Regulations 2011 and Legal aid regulations 2014. Under this Act, National Legal aid committee and its subordinates of this committee with the chairmanship of the district and session Judge. Besides these,

government legal aid officers, there are many non-government organizations which are providing legal aid services to those people who are badly in need of it. Such as

- Bangladesh Legal aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
- AIN o Salish Kendra (ASK)
- Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers Association (BNWLA)
- Sachetan

In Rajshahi district, there are many legal aid offices, which are working under the control and supervision of the government. At the same time, there are many non-governmental offices. And they are providing justice to the poor and vulnerable people. Some of those nongovernmental Offices are BLAST, BNWLA, ASK, Sachetan. And these NGOs are determined to ensure the rights of the people of Rajshahi district. The main task of BNWLA is to create equal opportunities and equal rights for every woman. The NGO Sachetan is giving legal awareness to the people in Rajshahi, to get legal aid Services. ASK, in Rajshahi is providing legal aid support to disempowered particularly women, Working children and workers. Its goal is to create a society based on equality, social and gender Justice and rule of law. Among these NGOs in Rajshahi, BLAST is a prominent human rights NGO in Bangladesh and also in Rajshahi. When BLAST was established in Bangladesh, it envisaged a society based on the basis of rule of law, where every person would enjoy their rights without distinction of any kind. Such as race, color, sex etc. BLAST is giving legal services to poor and needy people in Rajshahi district through mediation and other process. It is one of the aims of the research to visit some non-government offices, including BLAST to find out that, what extent the NGOs are able to provide legal aid dispute resolution to the people of Rajshahi district.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Bangladesh a significant number of people are still deprived of their constituent rights of access to justice because of poverty, oppression, exploitation, illiteracy etc. As a student of law, the researcher has seen that, there are several mechanisms to solve this problem. For example, legal aid service. It's an essential tool for ensuring access to justice especially for poor people. There are many government offices as well as NGOs, which are working to help the poor. But it is never seen that, to what extent the NGOs are working or they are fruitful regarding on the point of arbitration, mediation or conciliation or mitigating the disputes of rural and illiterate people in Rajshahi district. And, in Rajshahi rarely any research has been done about the working progress of BLAST or any other NGOs. So, the present study tries to find out to what extent the BLAST is providing legal aid services to people and to what extent it is fruitful.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is about the legal aid service in Rajshahi district providing by BLAST. In doing so, the study concentrates on the activities of BLAST. The following objectives are set for the study:

I. To find out the effectiveness of dispute resolution procedure by NGOs
II. To assess whether people are aware or not about the process of NGOs
III. To investigate about the types of disputes asked for settlement before NGOs
IV. To find out how mediation, conciliation and other settlement is provided by NGOs in Rajshahi district, and to what extent they are effective.

2. Methodology

This research is primarily empirical research which is mostly based on primary sources of data. There are some secondary sources also. It approaches mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. To assess the basic information about the activities of NGOs; open-ended questionnaire has been provided to the NGOs officers. Close ended questionnaire offered to the litigants, whether the NGOs are effective or not.

In case of qualitative method, the researcher has gone through several books, articles, journals etc. and analyzed on that topic. Face to face interview technique is also used in doing this research.

Primary sources of this research include;

- The oral statements of BLAST officers,
- The statement of assigned officers,
- The Statement of parties of Salish,
- Legal Aid Act,2000,
- Experiences and ideas of beneficiaries taking legal aid services,
- Other records.

Secondary sources of this research include;

- Various documents,
- Book reviews,
- Articles.

3. Literature Review

In order to complete the research, the researcher has read many books, newspapers, articles, journals etc. The review of some of them is shown as follows;

- Khatun, Armin, in her paper "Mediation Process in the Code of Civil Procedure: Problems and Perspective" has opined that this paper is aimed to focus on the lacunas with a narrative discussion about mediation as one of the most effective ways of dispute resolution mechanism and providing some recommendations on how the problems can be solved by amending the existing provisions or inserting the new one. The Code of Civil Procedure (CPC), 1908 of Bangladesh has introduced mediation in 2003 and made it mandatory in 2012.reluctance of the lawyers to mediate and a few other flaws in the procedure affects a successful mediation.
- Hoque Mahmudul, Dr. A.B.M., in his book "Alternative Dispute Resolution in Bangladesh: Challenges and Prospect [2015]" has opined that use of ADR may truly be seen as a necessary step towards ensuring access to justice. In recent years different techniques of ADR is being used more and more, not as a means for ascertaining the true rights of parties or a genuine accommodation of their differences, but as procedural battlegrounds. A similar trend has been seen in the courts. The regular justice system through litigation in the courts of law has lost much of its high moral ground not only because of external influence of different kinds but also corruption whether real or perceived. The natural choice in this context has been in favor of ADR. The writer has accumulated huge materials on ADR in this book. He has given a thorough and meticulous treatment to different forms of ADR practice in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the region.
- Choudhury, Jamila Ahmed, in her book "Legal Aid and Women's Access to Justice in Bangladesh: A drizzling In the Desert [2012]" has opined that woman still remain as the most deprived section compared to the male. Discussions made in this paper demonstrated that women in Bangladesh get better access to legal aid through NGOs. While providing legal aid, NGOs are performing better than government, not only by providing quicker resolution of disputes through out-of-court mediation but also by granting legal aid to their clients for settling cases through mediation.
- Hossain Sara, (HED) BLAST, identified that BLAST is providing legal aid services to poor and vulnerable people and it is also raising awareness among these people and it is trying to solve family disputes through mediation, conciliation etc. It is also trying its best to ensure the rights of children, women etc.
- Annual Report of BLAST identifies that, BLAST is working for the poor people, especially women and those who are the victims of some form of social exclusion inherently and vulnerable segment of society for fulfilling their constitutional guarantee by establishing rule of law-based society. In the rural and remote areas, poor people are always victims of brutal physical torture and regular mental harassment. So, in the working process of BLAST, oppressed, poor people living in the rural areas are normally targeted for providing legal aid.

4. Justification of the Study

The researcher has gone through several books, journals, records, reports. And, after analyzing those things, the researcher has analyzed that, there are several researches available on legal aid and BLAST, where the writers of the experts have researched about many topics of BLAST. But in this books or researches there are no information of BLAST of Rajshahi district. There are so many literatures available in the country, but still, it is very justified to conduct research on this topic. And, being a student of law, it is very justified to do research on legal aid point of provided by non-governmental organization including BLAST.

5. Scope and Limitation of the Study

5.1 Scope of the Study

For this research, the researcher makes attempt to visit in Rajshahi BLAST unit and some other NGOs. Although it has branches all over the country. The researcher has taken interview of BLAST officers, the parties of Salish etc. And the researcher has analyzed the answers.

5.2 Limitation of the Study

The research is done in a limited scope. It is confined to Rajshahi only. There are many NGOs in Rajshahi. The researcher has gone to some of these NGOs. But it was not possible to collect much information from all of these NGOs. It has been possible to gather necessary information from BLAST, about their awareness programme and effectiveness. But in this research, the paralegal activities of BLAST is not included. In this study the data of government legal aid offices is not included. It's also a limitation of the study.

6. Relevant Laws of Legal Aid in Bangladesh

The legal aid system in Bangladesh is grounded in a combination of constitutional guarantees, statutory enactments, subordinate legislation, and institutional frameworks designed to ensure access to justice for economically and socially disadvantaged individuals. The evolution of legal aid in Bangladesh reflects a broader constitutional commitment to the rule of law and equality before justice, while also revealing the practical challenges of translating rights into effective institutional mechanisms. A critical examination of the relevant legal framework demonstrates both significant normative progress and persistent implementation gaps.

At the constitutional level, the People's Republic of Bangladesh establishes the foundational principles of justice, equality, and protection of law. Article 27 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law, forming the cornerstone of non-discrimination in the justice system. Article 31 further ensures the right to protection of law, which has been interpreted broadly by courts to include access to judicial remedies. Article 35 provides procedural safeguards in criminal trials, including protection against arbitrary punishment and assurance of fair trial rights. Most significantly, Article 44 guarantees the right to move the High Court Division for enforcement of fundamental rights. These provisions collectively form the constitutional bedrock for legal aid, even though the Constitution does not explicitly mention "legal aid" as a standalone right.

Judicial interpretation has played a crucial role in expanding the meaning of access to justice. In *Secretary, Ministry of Finance v. Masdar Hossain* (1999), the Supreme Court emphasized judicial independence as a prerequisite for fair justice delivery, indirectly reinforcing the need for accessible legal representation. Similarly, in *Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) v. Bangladesh* (2011), the Court acknowledged the importance of legal representation in safeguarding fundamental rights, particularly for marginalized groups. These judicial pronouncements have helped establish that access to legal assistance is an integral component of constitutional justice, even in the absence of explicit statutory language in earlier periods.

The primary legislative framework governing legal aid is the **Legal Aid Services Act, 2000**, which was enacted to institutionalize state responsibility in providing legal assistance to financially insolvent and disadvantaged litigants. The Act marked a significant shift from voluntary or NGO-based legal assistance to a structured state-led mechanism. It defines eligible persons broadly to include individuals who are destitute, insolvent, helpless, or otherwise unable to afford legal representation. The Act established the National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO) as the central coordinating body responsible for implementing legal aid programs across Bangladesh.

The institutional design under the Act is decentralized, aiming to ensure accessibility at different levels of the judiciary and administration. Legal aid committees have been established at the Supreme Court level, district level (Zilla Legal Aid Committee), and Upazila level (Sub-district Committee). This multi-tier structure is intended to reduce bureaucratic barriers and make legal aid services more responsive to local needs. However, in practice, coordination among these committees often remains weak due to administrative inefficiencies and resource constraints.

To operationalize the Act, the government introduced the **Legal Aid Services Rules, 2015**, which provide detailed procedural guidelines regarding eligibility, application, and disbursement of legal aid services. Under these Rules, individuals whose annual income does not exceed Tk. 1,50,000 in cases before the Supreme Court and Tk. 1,00,000 in other courts are generally eligible for legal aid. While these financial thresholds provide administrative clarity, they have been criticized for being rigid and exclusionary, as they may not adequately reflect actual economic hardship, especially in urban contexts where the cost of living is significantly higher.

The **Legal Aid Services Organization Regulations, 2011** further strengthened the institutional framework by defining the operational roles of committees and legal aid officers. These Regulations emphasize the importance of coordination between government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), recognizing that civil society plays a crucial role in bridging the justice gap. Organizations such as Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) have been instrumental in supplementing state efforts by providing legal representation, mediation services, and public legal awareness campaigns.

From a critical perspective, while the legal framework appears comprehensive, its effectiveness is undermined by structural and operational limitations. First, awareness of legal aid services remains low among rural and marginalized populations. Second, procedural delays in processing applications often discourage potential beneficiaries. Third, funding constraints limit the capacity of legal aid committees to function effectively. These issues highlight a significant gap between normative legal guarantees and practical accessibility.

The judiciary has repeatedly emphasized the importance of access to justice as a fundamental right. In *Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) v. Bangladesh* (2010), the High Court Division reinforced the principle that legal aid is essential to ensure fair trial rights, particularly in criminal cases involving vulnerable defendants. Similarly, international human rights instruments such as Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) underscore the right to legal assistance in criminal proceedings, reinforcing Bangladesh's obligation under international law to ensure effective legal aid mechanisms.

Another important dimension of legal aid in Bangladesh is its intersection with alternative dispute resolution (ADR). The **Legal Advice and Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules, 2015** encourage the use of mediation and settlement mechanisms to reduce case backlog and provide quicker access to justice. While ADR has been successful in certain civil disputes, its effectiveness in criminal or rights-based litigation remains limited. Moreover, concerns have been raised about the voluntary nature of mediation sometimes leading to unequal bargaining power between parties.

Empirical studies, including field-based research in districts such as Rajshahi, reveal that despite institutional frameworks, many accused persons remain unaware of their entitlement to legal aid. Interviews with judges,

lawyers, and prosecutors indicate that while legal aid exists in principle, its practical application is often inconsistent. Advocates frequently report delays in appointment of legal aid lawyers, while prosecutors highlight administrative bottlenecks in verifying eligibility. These findings suggest that legal aid in Bangladesh is still transitioning from a formal legal right to a fully operational system.

Another critical issue is the reliance on income-based eligibility criteria. While financial thresholds are intended to ensure fairness, they fail to capture multidimensional poverty, including social exclusion, gender discrimination, and rural disadvantage. As a result, many individuals who are effectively unable to afford legal representation fall outside the formal legal aid net. This creates a structural inequality within the justice system.

Comparatively, legal aid systems in jurisdictions such as India and the United Kingdom demonstrate more flexible eligibility frameworks, incorporating broader vulnerability criteria beyond income. Bangladesh may benefit from adopting a more inclusive approach that considers social and contextual factors alongside financial status.

In conclusion, the legal aid framework in Bangladesh represents a significant constitutional and legislative achievement aimed at ensuring access to justice for disadvantaged populations. The Constitution provides the normative foundation, while the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000, the 2015 Rules, and the 2011 Regulations establish the institutional and procedural framework. However, despite this comprehensive structure, implementation challenges such as limited awareness, administrative inefficiencies, and restrictive eligibility criteria continue to hinder effective access to justice. Strengthening coordination among institutions, expanding eligibility criteria, increasing public awareness, and enhancing funding mechanisms are essential steps toward transforming legal aid from a formal entitlement into a meaningful and accessible right for all citizens.

7. Activities of NGOs in Rajshahi District

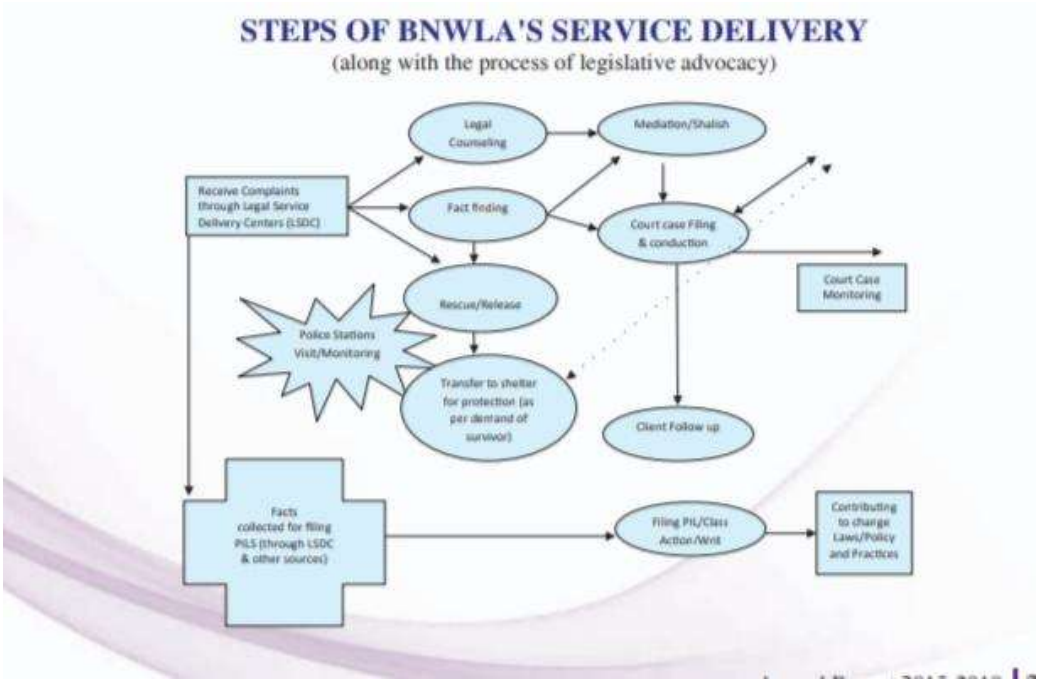
Human rights being essential for all-round development of the personality of individuals in society be necessarily protected and be made available to all the individuals. There are many organizations who work to save the rights of people. Among them, BLAST, ASK, BNWLA provides access to legal aid across the spectrum from the frontlines of the formal Justice system of the highest court. Again, the NGOS providing awareness among the people, so the people can be able to access to Justice. And these NGOs, including BLAST are trying their best to create awareness among the people of Rajshahi district by their activities. In this chapter, the researcher tries to find out the activities and awareness programme of BLAST and other NGOs in Rajshahi district.

7.1 Activities of BNWLA

BNWLA is an Association which main aim is to promote the Status of the female lawyers countrywide, so that they could work with male lawyers equally. Now it's trying to provide equal opportunities and rights for every woman. In Rajshahi, it's trying to create awareness among people so that they will be able to access justice, especially in case of poor people. BNWLA through its legal aid services makes a great platform for children and women for access to Justice.

Activities of BNWLA:

- Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR): BNWLA, firstly emphasizes to dissolve in an amicable way. During 2015-2018, 13204 complaints have been resolved through mediation. Both of the parties are generally satisfied getting harmonious solution through mediation.
- Public Interest Litigation (PIL): BNWLA has field several PIL before high court division, Such PILs have resulted in judicial orders for government actions to comply with statutory rights.
- Steps of BNWLA's service delivery:



Picture collected from Annual Report BNWLA [2015-2018]

7.2 Activities of Aid o Salish Kendra (ASK)

ASK is a national legal aid and human rights Organization, provides legal aid and social support to disempowered woman, working children and the workers. And it's working rapidly to provide legal aid service in Rajshahi district.

Activities of ASK in Rajshahi district:

- Promoting Community Activism: ASK has trained and facilitated the formation of voluntary groups to monitor human rights.
- Legal and Social support: An outreach programme has extended about legal clinics in 7 districts including Rajshahi in partnership with 7 local NGOs.
- Accountability of public institutions
- Advocacy for law and policy reform.
  By these activities ASK is trying to ensure the rights of vulnerable people in Rajshahi district.

7.3 Activities of BLAST

BLAST's legal aid activities focus on,

- Legal Aid: Blast's core activities focus on legal aid (advice, reforms, mediation etc.) for the poor and vulnerable people.
- Public Interest Litigation (PIL): Alongside individual legal aid, BLAST undertakes strategic litigation, or public interest litigation as a key part of its advocacy for law and policy reforms to ensure effective legal protection of rights.

- Advocacy and Networking: BLAST organizes a number of meetings, workshops, seminar, on a range of issues to not only facilitate changes in Bangladesh laws, but also increase discourse around issues of Justice in Bangladesh.
- Capacity Building: BLAST aims to improve access to justice by building the capacity of legal services providers and other actions in the Justice sector.
- Research: Its research activities is complementary to its legal aid, PIL and advocacy activities.

7.4 Awareness Programme of BLAST

BLAST, through its different projects conducted awareness programmes across the country including Rajshahi district to educate women, men and young people about their legal rights and remedies and other issues such as sexual and gender violence, domestic violence, children marriage, labor and family rights and to empower them to seek help from appropriate authority. It also provides leaf-lets to raise awareness among people.



- Legal aid camps for urban poor: It Has organized legal aid camps for urban people, which are visited by local People, such as teachers as well as woman social workers and ward commissioners.
- Prisoner awareness programmes: Under the IRSOP project, paralegals have conducted a large number of legal aid clinic sessions in Rajshahi district.
- Shokhi awareness programmes: BLAST also built and strengthened community awareness in urban slums of Rajshahi. It creates awareness through
    - ❖ Drama
    - ❖ Cultural videos
    - ❖ Courtyard meetings
    - ❖ Rickshaw rallies

- Tea stall campaigns
- Couple fairs
- meetings



Picture collected about Shokhi awareness program from annual report BLAST, 2022

7.5 Successful Activities of BLAST and BNWLA in Rajshahi Unit

BLAST provides awareness raising training among the women and also students of law. Rajshahi legal aid clinic of BLAST was established in 1994. The activities of Rajshahi legal aid clinic are shown below the table:

SL	Description	Number/quantity
1	Case Filed	4750
2	Under Trial	942
3	Financial Transaction in Cases	84,11,836 and 5 katas land
4	Cases referred to supreme court	138
5	Received Applications	8890
6	Solution Through Salish	2127
7	Solved Cases	3808
8	Financial Transaction through Salish	77,66,912 Taka

Table1: Successful activities of BLAST In Rajshahi Unit [1999-2024]

- BLAST provides legal aid service under community legal services (CLS) programme in Rajshahi unit. The statistics of the services is given below the table :

SL	Description	female	Male	Total
1	Complain Received	759	37	796
2	Legal Advice	110	88	198
3	Cases	367	14	381
4	Solved Cases	40	2	42
5	Under Trial	326	13	339
6	Financial Transaction in Cases			6,07,000 taka
7	Solved Through Salish	218	06	224
8	Financial Transaction through Salish			36,32,000 taka and more than 2 katas land

Table 2: Activities of BLAST, Rajshahi unit (January, 2021 to, June 2023)

- ❖ The NGO BNWLA believes to ensure justice, the statistics of There is given below by this chart:

SL	Description	Number
1	Cognizable offence	6676
2	Resolved In Mediation	484
3	Criminal Cases	329
4	Civil Cases	285

Table 3: Activities of BNWLA Rajshahi Unit (2021-2023)

8. Interviews on Legal Aid Services of Some Officers of NGOs in Rajshahi District

The researcher has taken interview of four concerned persons in Rajshahi.

They are**:**

- **Ms. Samina Begum, coordinator (in Charge) of BLAST Office, Rajshahi unit**

  She said that BLAST seeks to reach out vulnerable section of Society, raising their awareness and understanding of available rights, remedies etc. She also said that, mostly family disputes comes before it. And mostly female litigants come to solve their dispute. And, 80% of cases are successful by BLAST's mediation process every year.

- **Mr. Atatur Rahman, Mediation officer, BLAST Rajshahi unit**
  He told the researcher that, one mediator needs to follow the following methods:
  - Introductory remarks,
  - Statement of the problems by both parties,
  - Collect other information,

- Bargaining,
- Reaching an Agreement.

He also said that mediation process is getting famous among the litigants to resolve their disputes without going to courts.

- **Shirina Yasmin, Program officer, at NGO Sachetan,Rajshahi :**

She said that, Sachetan doesn't give legal aid. It gives awareness about legal rights, to the people, who wants it.

- **Zannatul Ferdous, project coordinator, at BNWLA, Rajshahi unit**:

All the services provided by BNWLA on pro-bono basis with a nominal honorarium. BNWLA gives support to the survivors of domestic violence etc. It provides many services. Such as:

- Providing information,
- Fact finding,
- Research and advocacy,
- Legal advice,
- Rescue and shelter.

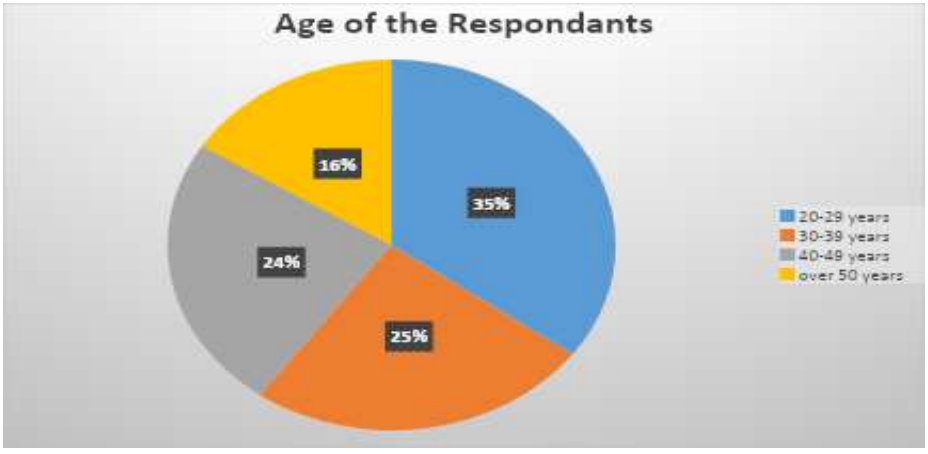
8.1 Interviews of Some People who have taken Legal Aid through NGOs:

- **Respondent 1:** A housewife, Amena beua, she had some problems with her husband. She came to BLAST office Rajshahi unit and her problem has been solved by mediation process of BLAST.
- **Respondent 2:** Rima khatun, who is 28 years old, is a survivor of domestic violence, she told that, the NGO BNWLA gave her enough support and legal advice. And with their services, now she is recovering and trying to cop-up with the situation.
- **Respondent 3:** Tanvir Islam, a poor farmer, who was not able to establish his right, in his land, BLAST has provided him legal aid and panel lawyer in his case. And now he has peaceful possession in his land.

9. Collection of Data

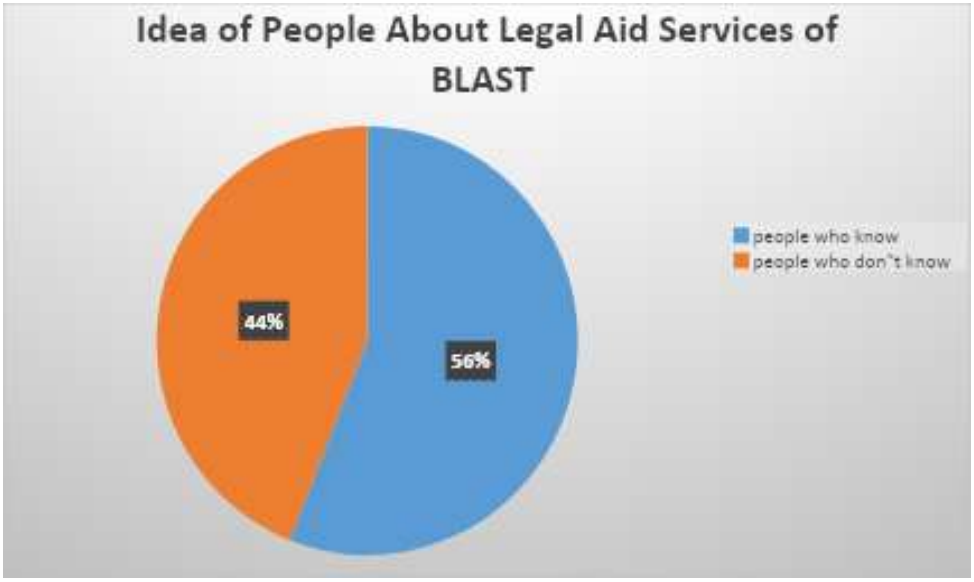
The research has been conducted among 200 random people in Rajshahi area. Most of them are the litigants who have come for getting or took legal aid from the NGOs in Rajshahi. The data is also based on the number of cases filed in the office of BLAST's Rajshahi unit and about their success on mediation.

- This pie chart shows the age of the respondents who came to BLAST's office of Rajshahi unit for legal aid services:



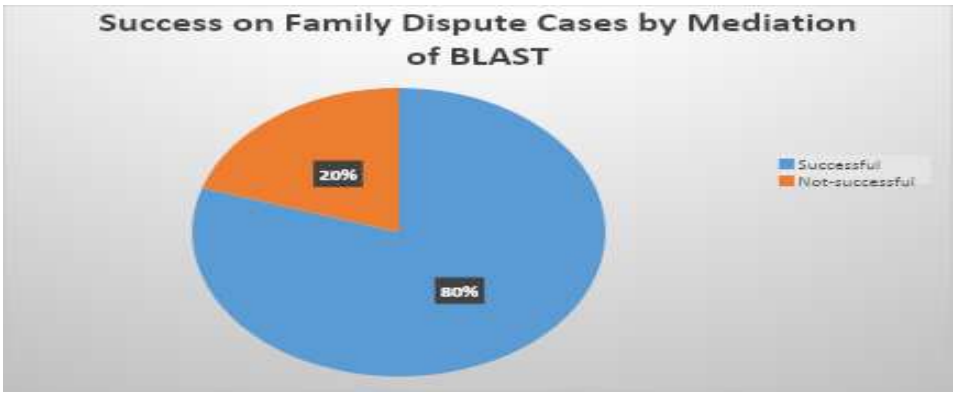
This chart shows that 16% of the respondents are over 50 years, 24% of the respondents are between 40-49 years, 25% of the respondents are between 30-39 years and finally 35% of them are between 20-29 years.

- The researcher has taken interview among people in Rajshahi to find how many people know about legal aid services giving by BLAST, especially from those who came to court for solution of disputes. The following chart shows the percentages of people who knows about legal aid services of BLAST :



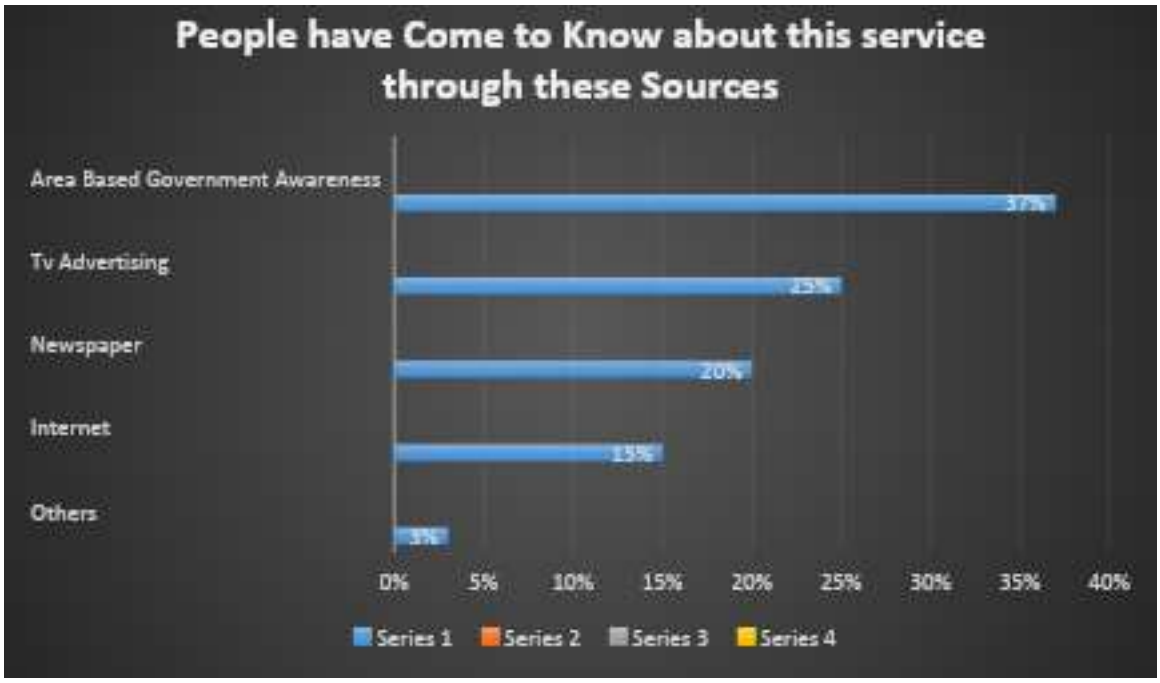
So, from this chart it can be said that, 56% of people in Rajshahi have idea about BLAST legal aid services and 44% of them have no knowledge about it.

- The pie chart indicates about the percentage of successful Family dispute cases, from the mediation process of BLAST:



This pie chart shows that about 80% of family dispute cases are successful by BLAST's mediation process and 20% of them are not successful.

- This chart shows the sources by which people have come to know about the legal aid service :



From this graph it can be said that, about 37% of people have come to know about this service by area based government awareness programme, 25% of them know about this service through TV advertising, 20% of them know it through newspaper, 15% of them know it through internet and 3% of them know it through other sources.

10. Case Study

- **Case study-One (2012) (Restitution of Conjugal Rights Through Mediation):**

Ajita marries a businessman from Rajshahi in 1995 under Muslim law, which means their marriage was arranged without state registration. In 2007, her husband Jamil became so aggressive and sent her a divorce notice. She tried to negotiate but failed. He didn't provide his family with regular maintenance. Ajita went to BLAST's office in Rajshahi. By BLAST's letter Jamil came for mediation. Jamil agreed to pay maintenance. In 2012, both came to Rajshahi office and stated to plan to continue married life. Now they are living happy life.

- **Case study-Two (2014) (Family reunion through intervention):**

Among five brothers and sisters kiva is eldest. Her mother sent her to a family as maid in another district. One year later she got lost. And she was given to an Orphanage in Rajshahi, which searched for her family, but failed. Bit later the Orphanage visited the BLAST office in Rajshahi unit seeking help to find kiva's family. After a lot of search mission, finally the mother, sister of kiva came to BLAST's Rajshahi office. And she reunited with her family. BLAST also provided her 3000 taka foe conveyance.

- **Case Study-Three (2004) (Land Dispute Litigation):**

A farmer in Rajshahi who was very poor and unable to establish his rights, title, interest and possession of land. He came to visit BLAST and seeking legal assistance. With the help of BLAST, he has now peaceful possession of land.

11.Analysis of the Researcher

By the collection of data, the researcher has found some important points.

The research has been done by taking interviews, collecting of data about the successful activities by NGOs in Rajshahi. The researcher also took interviews from a lot of general people.

From the Data, the researcher has analyzed that, about 56% of people in Rajshahi area, who have the knowledge about legal aid services by BLAST. And 44% of them don't have any clear idea. So, it can be said by the researcher that, the legal aid services are known to many People in Rajshahi.

Again, according to collected data, number of cases solved by BLAST is increasing day by day. In the year, between January, 2021 to June, 2022, the total financial transaction of BLAST's Salish process is 36, 32,000 taka, which is a big amount. And during this time, total 759 number of complaints received through BLAST. In case of female litigants, total 40 number of cases are solved. So, it can be said that, BLAST is providing their best service to solve the disputes.

Again, the process of BNWLA is incredible. During the year 2019, they resolved 484 disputes through mediation. During that year, total 329 criminal cases were filed. So, it can be said that people are becoming aware by the services given by the NGOS.

Again, from the data, Researcher has found that, around 80% of cases of family disputes came to a successful ending, by the mediation process of BLAST around these years.

From the collection of data, the researcher has found that, about 37% of people have come to know about this service by area based government awareness programme, 25% of them know about this service through TV advertising, 20% of them know it through newspaper, 15% of them know it through internet and 3% of them know it through other sources So, it is very remarkable that, people have become aware of this legal aid services by NGOs in different ways.

11.1 Findings of the Study

The finding of the study is known more and more about the legal aid services provided by the NGOS in Rajshahi. And about their activities, awareness programmes. The researcher has also found that there are various laws to provide legal aid to the poor, needy and backward section of the society. But sometimes government legal aid offices aren't enough to provide legal aid services. So the role of NGOs is very important. Because they are providing legal aid by their negotiation, conciliation, mediation and other processes. Again, there are many awareness Program provided by NGOs, to make people aware about their rights.

11.2 Observation

The researcher has observed that most of the litigants are insolvent and they belong to middle class families. It is also observed that, mostly family disputes are chosen for mediation. And 90% of them are successful. Some of those are not successful because of non-cooperation of any party. It is also observed that the government should set a watchdog for providing legal aid. Campaign should be arranged against human rights violation and putting pressure on state actors for swift remedy of victims. It is also observed by the researcher that internet, TV advertising, area based government awareness providing a special role for raising awareness and knowledge among people. The newspaper is also publishing a special supplement on legal aid programmes.

11.3 Remarks

After a huge analysis the researcher has found that there are some ways in order to improve the services provided by BLAST and other NGOs.

They are as follows:

- **Strict Steps by The Government**:

The government should set a watchdog for providing legal aid service. The government must ensure a positive environment. So, the NGOs will feel more secure to provide legal aid.

- **Fees of Panel Lawyers Should be Enhanced:**

The fees paid to panel lawyers for presentation of legal aid to beneficiaries should be revised to enhance.

- **Respond to Urgent Appeal**:

The NGOs should respond to urgent appeals sent by the Victims or other organizations.

- **Duties of Research Unit of NGOs**:

The research unit of NGOs should preserve the archives of the fact-finding reports and maintain communication with international and regional activities.

- **Provide Training**:
  Training should be provided to the lawyers, civil society members and other people concerned with the legal aid activities.
- **Arranging Campaign Against Human Rights Violation:**

Campaign should be arranged against human rights violations and putting pressure on state actors for swift remedy to victims.

- **Documentation Team**:

All the NGOs should have a documentation team who will collect data on human rights abuses published in major national dailies.

- **NGOs Fact Finding Activities**:

NGOs fact finding activities cover instances of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment and abuse of some specific laws leading to human rights violations, applications of unnecessary force, by law enforcement agencies.

- **The Compulsory Program for TV Channels**:

The government should make it compulsory for TV channels to telecast special program featuring legal aid services. Apart from this, the newspapers also should publish special supplement on legal aid Programs.

12. Conclusion

Access to justice is universally recognized as one of the most essential components of the rule of law and a cornerstone of constitutional democracy. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh firmly establishes equality before law and the right to protection of law as fundamental rights, thereby affirming that justice cannot be denied on the basis of economic or social status. In this context, legal aid emerges as a crucial mechanism for ensuring that constitutional promises are transformed into practical realities, particularly for marginalized, vulnerable, and economically disadvantaged sections of society.

The government of Bangladesh has taken significant steps toward institutionalizing legal aid through legislative and policy frameworks, particularly the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000, which created a structured system for providing state-sponsored legal assistance. This initiative represents an important shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based legal framework, where access to justice is increasingly viewed as a state obligation rather than an act of benevolence. Subsequent instruments, including the Legal Aid Services Organization Regulations, 2011 and the Legal Aid Services Rules, 2015, have further strengthened the institutional structure by establishing committees at different administrative levels and defining eligibility criteria for beneficiaries.

However, despite the existence of a relatively comprehensive legal framework, practical implementation remains a significant challenge. As scholars have noted, legal aid systems in developing countries often suffer from structural weaknesses, including inadequate funding, limited awareness among beneficiaries, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. In Bangladesh, these challenges are particularly evident in rural and semi-urban

areas where access to legal information and institutional support is limited. As a result, a substantial portion of the population remains unable to effectively exercise their right to legal representation.

In this regard, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a transformative role in bridging the gap between formal legal structures and grassroots realities. Organizations such as Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) have significantly contributed to enhancing access to justice through legal representation, mediation, public interest litigation, and legal awareness programs. These organizations function not only as service providers but also as advocacy institutions that seek to influence legal norms, policies, and institutional practices.

Empirical studies on legal aid in Bangladesh indicate that NGO involvement has improved awareness of rights among marginalized groups, particularly women, workers, and children. According to Mahmudul Hoque, legal aid NGOs play a dual role: first, providing direct legal services to disadvantaged groups, and second, acting as pressure groups to ensure accountability within the justice system. This dual function is particularly important in contexts where state institutions alone may not have sufficient capacity or outreach to address widespread legal needs.

In the context of Rajshahi district, the role of NGOs such as BLAST has been particularly significant. Field-level activities, including legal aid clinics, dispute resolution initiatives, and awareness campaigns, have contributed to improving access to justice at the local level. The findings of this research suggest that while state mechanisms exist in principle, NGOs remain more accessible and responsive to the immediate needs of vulnerable populations. This observation is consistent with international literature, which highlights that hybrid legal aid systems involving both state and civil society actors tend to be more effective in ensuring justice delivery in developing countries.

At the same time, it is important to critically assess the limitations of NGO-led legal aid initiatives. While NGOs have expanded access, their reach is often dependent on donor funding and project-based interventions, which may not always ensure long-term sustainability. Furthermore, coordination between government legal aid bodies and NGOs is sometimes weak, leading to duplication of efforts or gaps in service delivery. Strengthening institutional collaboration between NLASO and NGOs is therefore essential for creating a more integrated legal aid system.

Another important dimension of legal aid in Bangladesh is awareness. Research consistently shows that lack of legal awareness is one of the primary barriers to access to justice. Many individuals entitled to legal aid remain unaware of their rights or the procedures for obtaining assistance. In this regard, awareness-raising initiatives by NGOs, particularly BLAST, play a critical role in empowering citizens and enabling them to seek legal remedies. Legal literacy programs, community outreach, and paralegal training have proven effective in increasing access to justice at the grassroots level.

From a broader human rights perspective, access to legal aid is also recognized under international law. Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) emphasizes the right to legal assistance in criminal proceedings, particularly where the interests of justice require it. Bangladesh, as a party to international human rights instruments, is therefore obligated to ensure effective legal aid mechanisms consistent with global standards.

In conclusion, while Bangladesh has developed a relatively strong legal and institutional framework for legal aid, significant gaps remain between law and practice. The Constitution provides a strong normative foundation, and legislative instruments such as the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 have institutionalized the system. However, effective realization of access to justice continues to depend heavily on the combined efforts of the government, judiciary, and civil society organizations.

NGOs have emerged as indispensable actors in this field, complementing state efforts and ensuring that legal aid reaches the most vulnerable sections of society. Their role in advocacy, awareness-building, and direct legal support has created a meaningful impact, particularly in districts such as Rajshahi. Nevertheless, long-term improvement requires stronger coordination between stakeholders, increased governmental funding, expansion of eligibility criteria, and enhanced legal awareness among citizens.

Ultimately, the success of legal aid in Bangladesh should not be measured merely by the existence of laws and institutions, but by the extent to which justice becomes genuinely accessible to all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status. Strengthening legal aid is therefore not only a legal necessity but also a moral and constitutional imperative for ensuring justice, equality, and human dignity.

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