Role of NGOs in Advancing SDG 16B in Bangladesh

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Organisational Overview

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
• Non-governmental specialist legal services organization established in 1993
• Make the legal system accessible to poor and marginalized so every individual has access to justice and their human rights are respected and protected.

Dak Diye Jai (DDJ)
• NGO established in 1982 with a view to ensure sustainable development of the community by fighting against poverty, illiteracy and social injustice.

National Development Programme (NDP)
• NGO established in 1992 to contribute towards achieving National Development Goals by ensuring equality, good governance and freedom from exploitation.
Strategic Collaboration of NGOs and GOs

- NGO and GO Partnership:
  Working with government with a view to:
  - Increasing demand for justice in the community
  - Providing services – identifying and addressing discrimination
  - Increasing responsiveness of the justice system

- Collaboration among NGOs:
  Important to have both:
  - Community Based Organisations (CBOs) (eg DDJ and NDP) and
  - Specialist Legal Services Organisations (LSOs) (eg BLAST)
  Both have distinct yet complementary functions to tackle discrimination: prevention + intervention

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Who We Work For and Work With

**Marginalised and excluded communities:**
- Women facing violence or discrimination
- Children facing violence
- Workers
- Individuals facing discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion, caste, and disability
- Low income groups
  - rural poor
  - urban poor.

**Collaboration with Executive and Judiciary**
We have strong working relations with different government bodies and ministries:
- Activating village courts project – Local Govt Ministry
- Multisectoral Programme on Violence Against Women - MOWCA
- District Legal Aid Committees – NLASO/ Law Ministry
- Regular engagement with
  - Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
  - Law Commission
  - District Court and Supreme Court

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How NGOs Help Further SDG16(B)

1. Creating understanding and awareness of rights – Prevention of discrimination through:
   - awareness building programmes and courtyard meetings.
   - capacity building workshops (e.g. to develop women leadership)
   - dissemination of knowledge and materials on rights and justice.
   - **DDJ**: arranged public hearing to increase accountability on issues of early marriage, birth and marriage registration.

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2. Facilitating access to information and remedies (both inside and outside the court).

DDJ and NDP:
- monitoring incidents of discrimination at community level – prevention
- direct intervention to stop discriminatory practices (e.g. forced child marriages, domestic violence and VAWG etc.)
- referral to legal aid organisations in VAW cases
  - 305 cases referred by NDP in 2017

- education: DDJ provides free education at primary level in over 96 schools to approx. 9,000 disadvantaged children.

BLAST:
- legal aid in courts from village courts to Supreme Court - over 80,000 cases.
- Information + Advice + Mediation – legal aid clinics and camps.

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3. Increasing the responsiveness of the legal system.

- Identifying discriminatory laws and practices
- Proposing changes through advocacy and PILs

- **Drafting of Elimination of Discrimination Act**: BLAST participated in a series of expert consultation meetings with the Law Commission and Ministry of Law with a view to finalise and review the draft EDA.

- **Landmark PILs**: which have enabled the Supreme Court to lay down guidelines:
  - Women’s Rights (fatwa violence and two finger test)
  - Disability Rights (challenging disability discrimination in employment)
  - Housing Rights: (challenging forced eviction of slum dwellers - seeking rehabilitation).
  - Child Rights: (ending corporal punishment)

- **GO-NGO collaboratin - Chowki Courts**: BLAST and Faridupur DLAC activated a Chowki Court Legal Aid committee in Bhanga, Faridpur - first such grassroots legal aid provision by the government in the country.

- **Outreach Innovations**: introduction of mobile legal clinics, paralegals, telephone hotlines and mobile phone application - major interventions in terms of outreach.

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Challenges

- Lack of implementation of anti-discriminatory laws (disability provisions e.g. ramp in buildings).
- Economic vulnerability of marginalised communities which hinders access to justice (e.g. high costs of pursuing cases in court).
- Discriminatory social attitudes strongly held by communities (e.g. child marriages).
Vision for the Future

• Increase use of technology and innovation to combat discrimination.
• Activate dormant laws which deal with marginalised communities (e.g. Domestic Violence Act 2010, Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013).
• Incorporate anti-discrimination lessons in school curriculums (esp. in rural areas).
• Further build functional partnerships between GOs and NGOs.
• Use data from NGOs to identify reach of justice services and who is excluded to make sure no one is left behind.