



## Legal Aid and Women's Access to Justice in Bangladesh: A Drizzling in the Desert

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### Abstract

*Legal aid—a means to promote access to justice—still remains a far cry for the citizens of Bangladesh, especially for women. While an insufficient legal aid funding from the government and other Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) keep many of the poor justice seekers out of this aid scheme, women still remain as the most deprived section compared to their male counterpart. Based on unpublished data on legal aid collected from court and NGO registries of Bangladesh, this paper demonstrated the scarcity of legal aid funding, especially in family cases. It also explained how a scarcity of legal aid may compel women to accept more dismissal and ex parte decrees that affect the quality of justice they get from family courts. Study result implies that channelling government legal aid fund through NGOs may improve the efficiency of distribution in this sector.*

**Keywords:** Access to justice, legal aid, legal representation, mediation, NGO.

### Introduction

Justice is defined as the state of affairs when a 'person has been given what he is due or owed, and therefore has been given what he deserves or can legitimately claim'<sup>1</sup>. Scholars, however, have identified various factors which present as 'barriers' to access to justice and restrain people to attain their legitimate claim. Hutchinson argues that barriers cause a difference between availability and access to justice<sup>2</sup>. When discussing barriers to access to justice, Scholars have identified broadly two different types of barriers: 'subjective barriers' and 'objective barriers'<sup>3</sup>. Subjective barriers relate to intellectual and physiological barriers including 'age, physical or intellectual deficiency the attitude of state functionaries such as the police, lawyer and judges'<sup>3</sup>. The 'objective barrier' relates to 'purely physical barriers' including geographic dispersion of courts, availability of claims officers and lawyers, 'cost of obtaining legal redress', 'delay in legal proceedings' and 'structural complexity of the legal system'<sup>3</sup>. As observed in literature, due to their more vulnerable condition in the society compared to men, the high-cost and long disposal time of litigation compound to make it harder for women to access the formal justice system<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, due to delays in courts and high-costs of litigation women have difficulty accessing the benefits of many protective laws guided by the personal laws or other secular laws to enhance women rights in the society. In fact, mere presence of legal rights will not ensure justice to women if there is not an effective mechanism to make those legal rights *accessible* to them<sup>5</sup>.

Legal aid can help to resolve disproportionate access to justice based on economic and social power<sup>6</sup>. Availability of adequate legal aid may help to relieve a part of the cost burden from the

shoulders of poor women by enabling them to get free services from lawyers and subsidies to cover other court charges<sup>7</sup>. It enables many disadvantaged women in society to access justice who would otherwise be denied access to court. It also increases the respect of general people towards law and judiciary<sup>8</sup>. The practice of government legal aid programs dates back to 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe when Henry VII waived court fees for poor litigants, and empowered courts to provide 'legal representation' by appointing lawyers for these poor clients<sup>9</sup>. In 1960, the United States of America experienced a new concept of legal aid funding which included not only provision of legal advice and legal representation in the court but also provision of legal information and education to make people more informed about their rights. Similar concepts were later introduced in Australia, Canada and other parts of Europe<sup>10</sup>. Whatever form legal aid takes, the main problem remains in its scarcity and limited accessibility to the poor. As observed by Khair<sup>11</sup>.

"The poor and the marginalised are not aware of the existence of legal aid programmes and even where they are aware of it; they are not likely to be persuaded to avail of it for a number of reasons."

**Objective:** Analysing unpublished data collected from different court registries and registries of different legal aid provider Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). this paper discussed how the scarcity of legal aid restrain women from making claim on their matrimonial rights, that they could make otherwise in presence of sufficient legal aid and legal representation to carry on their proceedings in formal courts. Besides legal representation in court, legal advice and information, and different types of legal cost sharing may also be treated as legal aid that can enhance fair outcomes through different in-court

and out-of-court processes<sup>8</sup>. Different NGOs in Bangladesh, including Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA), and *Ain-o-Shalish Kendra* (ASK) provide legal education and counselling to enhance peoples' general understanding of the law<sup>5</sup>. However, while discussing legal aid availability from the government and NGOs, and comparing their relative efficiency, this paper focused only on the legal representation of parties in the court. Since, unlike NGOs, the government does not provide any kind of legal aid except legal representation. Therefore, a direct comparison between the availability and efficiency of legal aid provided by the government and other NGOs was possible only through legal representation.

**Structure of the paper:** To analyse the unmet demand of legal aid for women in Bangladesh this paper started with a brief history of government and NGO funded legal aid in Bangladesh, described the methodology used to conduct empirical study and then analysed empirical data to demonstrate the scarcity of legal aid and its impact on women's access to justice through family courts. Finally, the paper concluded with some policy recommendations to improve the access to and quality of legal aid services in Bangladesh.

**History of legal aid in Bangladesh; Government Funded Legal Aid:** The obligation of governments to provide legal aid was asserted in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR). According to Section 14(3) (d) of ICCPR, it is obligatory for each government to provide legal aid to people who want to bring their issue to a court but are not able to do so because of their financial constraints<sup>12</sup>. The obligation of a state to provide legal aid and other legal services to the poor and disadvantaged sections of a society is also stated in s. 2 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the role of Lawyers<sup>13</sup>.

More importantly, since its enactment in 1972, the Constitution of Bangladesh has recognised equal access to law by all of its citizens, yet until 1994, the government had not provided any funding for legal aid to ensure equal rights to justice for the poor and less advantaged groups of society<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, provision of legal aid is stipulated in the *Code of Civil Procedure (CPC) 1908* and the *Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1898* which are still in practice in Bangladesh<sup>15, 16, 17</sup>. Nevertheless, it was not until 1994 that the first public fund to provide legal aid was constituted under a resolution by the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs to allocate legal aid to 48 districts<sup>17</sup>. However, the fund had remained almost unutilised since 1997 until the formation of the National Legal Aid Committee (NLAC) for providing legal aid and counsel to financially insolvent or helpless seekers of justice<sup>17</sup>.

Later in 2000, The *Legal Aid Services Act 2000* (Act VI of 2000) established a formal legal framework, for providing legal aid in Bangladesh<sup>17</sup>. Under this Act, the National Legal Aid Organisation (NLAO) was formed to administer and manage

provision of legal aid to different districts in Bangladesh. To support NLAO, 61 District Legal Aid Committees (DLAC)s were established for 'providing legal advice, paying lawyer's fees and cost of litigation including any other assistance to the justice seekers who are incapable of seeking justice due to financial insolvency, destitution, helplessness and for various socio-economic conditions'<sup>18</sup>. One year later in 2001, NLAO adopted the Legal Aid Principles to enumerate the eligibility criteria for applying legal aid under the government legal aid scheme. Legal Aid Giving Rules were also introduced in 2001. They describe the rules and procedures for the submission of legal aid applications, for the nomination of lawyers and for the determination of fees receivables by the lawyers<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the government's legal aid scheme in Bangladesh started its full-fledged journey only after 2001.

**NGO Funded Legal Aid:** The NGO's movement that started in Bangladesh just after its independence in 1971 to rehabilitate the war torn people has now attained worldwide recognition. For example, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) was established as a small local NGO in 1972 to aid and rehabilitate the war torn people but is now one of the largest NGOs of the world, having 110 million beneficiaries<sup>19</sup>. Although *Grameen* Bank, BRAC, etc., are the world famous NGOs in Bangladesh, these and many other NGOs around the globe are famous especially for their micro-credit and different other social mobilization program, such as primary education, health care, etc<sup>20, 21</sup>. A different set of NGOs initiated another silent revolution, and considered by the local people as their trusted friends in promoting access to both in-court and out-of-court justice, especially to women, includes *Madaripur* Legal Aid Association (MLAA), *Bachte Sekha*, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), *Ain-o-Shalish Kendra* (ASK), and many others<sup>22</sup>.

MLAA established in 1978 is considered as the pioneer of NGO-based out-of-court justice through mediation. To provide mediation service, MLAA forms mediation committees with the Chairman and Members of respective Union *Parishads* (Councils) along with other local elites including primary school teachers, *madrassa* (religious school) teacher, and influential local leaders. One representative from MLAA also attends mediation sessions as a watch dog. Since its establishment, MLAA has not only resolved local disputes through mediation but also trained local leaders and elites to change their knowledge and attitude towards the use of law while making mediation at local levels<sup>11, 23</sup>. Like MLAA, *Bachte Sekha*, another NGO established in 1982 and works in *Jessore* and *Khulna* districts of Bangladesh, practices a different mode of mediation that gives maximum emphasis on strengthening women's voice during mediation. To ensure this, *Bachte Sekha* forms eleven member village mediation committees including seven women<sup>5</sup>.

Another human rights NGO, ASK, is not only providing the service of mediation but also, through its 'Gender and Social

Justice Project', is sensitizing the local government bodies and law enforcement officials to the violation of women rights. It also strengthens the ties among local people, including journalists and lawyers, to monitor human rights enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, ASK is working towards changing societal knowledge so that women may benefit more from the implementation of law over time. Similar to ASK, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) also works to improve legal awareness and establish rule of law for the protection of women and children in Bangladesh. Though BNWLA was established in 1979 with an objective to promote female lawyers, gradually it extended its operation to help all destitute women in the society through its prevention, protection and rehabilitation activities. From its 6 divisional offices, 32 out-reach clinics and 42 partner organizations all over the country it provides services to women who are victims of domestic violence, acid attack, human trafficking and other forms of social abuses<sup>24</sup>. Besides legal aid services to contest cases through litigation, it also provides mediation services to resolve disputes out-of-court<sup>25</sup>.

Though started a little late in 1993, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) started its operation in 1993 and now has a network covering all 19 greater districts of Bangladesh. BLAST is running legal awareness programs and public interest litigation to establish rights in various sectors including labour law, family law and state abuse of prisoners<sup>23</sup>. One of the popular services of BLAST is to provide a legal aid and advocacy service to its clients if their mediation effort to resolve a dispute fails. 'BLAST utilizes a people-oriented model for mediation which also adheres to the jurisprudence principles of the country'<sup>23</sup>. While MLAA limits its legal aid services mostly to legal advice, different legal aid NGOs in Bangladesh including BLAST provides legal representation to its clients at courts. As discussed in the next section, along with court registries, registries of three major human right NGOs of Bangladesh namely, BLAST, ASK, and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) were consulted for legal aid data used in this paper.

This section demonstrated that different NGOs are providing various types of legal aid including legal representation, legal awareness generation, sensitization of local administration towards rule of law, and participation in public interest litigation. However, as discussed earlier, this paper compared legal aid from the Government and NGOs only on the basis of legal representation. Therefore, the next section discussed about the methodology used for collecting and analysing legal aid data to fulfil this objective.

## Research Methodology

Existing literature in Bangladesh indicated the issue of scarcity of government legal aid without providing sufficient details, especially how such scarcity may affect women justice seekers in family courts. Therefore, data on legal aid to resolve family

cases were collected from both the government and selected NGOs registries in Bangladesh. As mentioned earlier, women are more affected by the scarcity of legal aid, due to their more vulnerable position in the society. Moreover, as women in rural areas sometimes remain more suppressed and vulnerable in comparison to their urban and suburban counterparts, legal aid data was collected for urban, suburban and rural areas to better understand the differential needs and impacts of legal aid on urban, suburban and rural women.

To represent urban, rural and suburban areas, three districts of Bangladesh: *Dhaka*, *Mymensingh* and *Narayanganj* were chosen for this research. These districts were chosen in such a way that the difference between rural, sub-urban and urban women could easily be understood from the sample. For example, in aggregate, 77.33 per cent of all women in Bangladesh live in rural areas<sup>26</sup>. But in *Dhaka*, *Mymensingh* and *Narayanganj* districts 9.35, 44.62 and 85.58 per cent women lived in rural areas respectively<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, these three districts were chosen as sample districts for this study. After making such selection, data was collected from the Government and NGO registries of respective districts in 2007.

**Data from Court Registries:** For each individual district, government legal aid is provided from the office of the District Legal Aid Committee where the District Judge is the *ex officio* Chairman of this Committee. This office disburses legal aid funds to prospective recipients based on their application. For the purpose of this study, detailed data on government legal aid were collected from respective district legal aid offices of *Dhaka*, *Mymensingh* and *Narayanganj* districts. Data collected on government legal aid included the total amount of legal aid allocated to and the total amount of legal aid disbursed by respective legal aid committees, and the number and nature of accepted cases for legal aid. Aggregate data on legal aid for the entire country were also collected from the Director, National Legal Aid Committee, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Bangladesh. Moreover, unpublished data on legal aid disbursement and utilisation by Government of Bangladesh's Legal Aid Committees all over the country were collected from the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Bangladesh. Besides legal aid data, additional data was collected on the total number of cases filed and total number of cases disposed through contested decree, ex-party or dismissal made during the same period were collected from respective family court registries. As explained in sub-section C, these additional data were later compared with legal aid data to determine the availability and impact of legal aid on nature of disposals in family courts.

**Data From NGO Registries:** Data on legal aid disbursement through NGOs were collected from BLAST, BNWLA and ASK, which are the other three major NGOs providing legal aid to their clients. Inclusion of data on legal aid disbursement by three major NGOs in Bangladesh helped to provide a comprehensive nation-wide picture of the legal aid

disbursement by the respective NGOs. These data also enabled a better comparison of the share of contribution made by government and other NGOs in this field. Like government legal aid data, NGOs' data on legal aid were collected on the total amount of legal aid allocation, disbursement, number of accepted cases for legal aid and their nature. Aggregate data on legal aid for all branches of BLAST, ASK and BNWLA operating all over Bangladesh were collected from their respective head offices located in Dhaka. However, more detailed data on legal aid (such as the number of applications for legal aid, the number of cases granted legal aid, the number of cases on which NGOs got a favourable decree in court etc.) were collected from respective NGO branches in each district. These data were then compared with the additional set of data on case filing and disposal mentioned in the earlier section.

**Analysis of Data:** Collected legal aid data was analysed to understand the availability of legal aid from government and NGOs. Availability of legal aid was determined by comparing the total number of cases that received legal aid with the total number of case filed for disposal during the same period. Separate calculations have been made for civil and criminal cases to get figures on the pattern of distribution of legal aid in Bangladesh. As discussed later in detail, such pattern revealed the slender allocation of legal aid to family cases. Similar patterns were calculated for government provided and NGO provided legal aid. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the percentage availability of legal aid was compared with the percentage of different nature of disposals such as contested decree, ex-party decree and dismissals to understand how availability of legal aid may affect the nature of disposals in family court. Natures of disposal were later used as proxies to explain how availability of legal aid may affect the quality of justice that women can get from family courts.

## Results and Discussion

**Legal Aid from Government:** Despite all the developments mentioned in the introduction, the quality of the government's legal aid program still remains unsatisfactory. Though it could improve access to justice by boosting the financial capacity of poor clients and by making them capable of running their own cases, scarce legal aid funding and inefficient management of available funds has failed to resolve the problem of disproportionate access to formal courts<sup>27</sup>.

For instance, as demonstrated in table 1, government provided legal aid covered only an insignificant number of total family cases filed in *Dhaka, Narayanganj* and *Mymensingh* districts. Unpublished data on legal aid collected from respective court registries suggests that among the total family cases filed, only 2.6, 0.8 and 1.3 per cent of cases received government legal aid in those three districts respectively.

Insufficient provision of government legal aid affects family court clients even more because, as is evident from table 2, in all three districts, almost all government-provided legal aid is allocated to criminal cases. Therefore, women who always remain a party to family cases get only a slender share of government provided legal aid to establish their matrimonial rights.

Another drawback in government legal aid services relates to insufficient payment made to panel lawyers who then provide 'free of cost' legal services to clients. Although NLAO does not use a monitoring mechanism or performance index to measure the quality of legal services gained through legal aid, data indicate that, because of insufficient payment, lawyers are not diligent when dealing with cases which receive government legal aid. As explained in the final report of the LJCBP mentioned earlier:

**Table -1**  
**Total filing of family cases and their receipt of government legal aid (2006)**

	Dhaka		Narayanganj		Mymensingh		Three districts together	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Total family cases filed	2632	100.0	354	100.0	701	100.0	3687	100.0
Family cases that received government legal aid	68	2.6	3	0.8	9	1.3	80	2.2

**Source:** unpublished data from district legal aid committees in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Mymensingh

**Table-2**  
**Percentage of government legal aid channelled to family cases (2006)**

	Dhaka	Narayanganj	Mymensingh
Percentage of government legal aid to family cases	5.3	0.8	11.0
Percentage of government legal aid to other civil cases	0.4	0.8	8.5
Percentage of government legal aid to criminal cases	94.3	98.4	80.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Source:** unpublished data from district legal aid committees in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Mymensingh

“[I]t has been expressed by many respondents that often the lawyer is found to be absent on the date of hearing...Many of the prisoners stated that they never met the lawyers assigned to them even when legal aid had been provided for about a year<sup>17</sup>.”

Therefore, even if few of the poor female clients may be able to access legal aid, they may not expect to get good outcome through contested decrees due to the negligence of their lawyers.

**Legal Aid from NGOs:** As mentioned earlier, a number of NGOs in Bangladesh provide legal aid to its poor clients<sup>28</sup>. Research data reveal that legal aid granted by various leading NGOs in Bangladesh is not high enough to satisfy the demands. For example, according to the data collected for this study, in 2006, BLAST, BNWLA and ASK granted legal aid to 337, 106 and 85 family cases respectively or a total of 528 family cases in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Mymensingh districts. A comparison of this Figure with the total 3687 new family cases filed in the three districts in 2006 indicates that leading NGOs provide legal aid to 14.3 per cent cases only.

A study of LJCPB on legal aid recipients from government and non-government sources concluded that aid recipients from these two sources do not overlap by any considerable degree<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, by combining the percentage of cases that receive legal aid from government and NGOs, it can be reasonably

concluded that only 18.9 or less than one-fifth of total family cases received legal aid in Bangladesh. This indicates that, even if all legal aid to family cases is received by women, more than 80 per cent of total female family court clients do not have access to either government or NGO provided legal aid and may be ‘denied equality in the opportunity to see[k] justice as envisaged in our Constitution’<sup>29</sup>. Under this circumstance, legal aid fails to relieve women from the excessive cost of proceedings in the family court, and cannot ensure their constitutional right for the equal access to justice. This figure indicates the absolute level of scarcity of legal aid in Bangladesh where around 60% women live below the poverty line. Because of this scarcity, legal aid funding from government and NGOs might fail to attain any significant positive impact on the access to quality justice that women may seek from family courts.

Nevertheless, NGO lawyers remain much sincere in contesting their legal aid cases through family courts and have a very good success rate in comparison to family cases funded by government legal aid. NGO legal aid also increases the abidance to NGO mediation agreements made outside the court. Sometimes merely the knowledge that a party (usually women) may file law suit with NGO legal aid is sufficient to make other parties (usually men) voluntarily comply with a mediation agreement<sup>22, 23</sup>. Therefore, provision of legal aid is often described as the ‘teeth’ of mediation efforts<sup>2</sup>.

**Table-3**  
**Family cases receiving legal aid from NGOs (2006)**

	Dhaka		Narayanganj		Mymensingh		Total for three districts	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Total cases filed in family courts	2632	100.0	354	100.0	701	100.0	3687	100.0
Cases filed by BLAST	203	7.7	20	5.6	114	16.3	337	9.1
Cases filed by BNWLA	82	3.1	2	0.6	22	3.1	106	2.9
Cases filed by ASK	85	3.2	-	0.0	-	0.0	85	2.3
Three NGOs together	370	14.0	22	6.2	136	19.4	528	14.3

Source: Unpublished data from legal cell of BLUST, BNWLA and ASK. Indicates no operation in that area

**Table-4**  
**Availability of legal aid and different natures of disposal**

	Dhaka	Narayanganj	Mymensingh
<b>Nature of disposal</b>			
<i>Ex parte</i>	35.0	39.0	22.0
Dismissal	32.0	42.0	47.0
<b>Sub-total of <i>ex parte</i> and dismissal</b>	67.0	81.0	69.0
Resolved through litigation or in-court mediation	33.0	19.0	31.0
Total disposal	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Nature of legal aid</b>			
Cases covered under govt. legal aid	2.6	0.8	1.3
Cases covered under NGO legal aid	14.1	6.2	19.4
Total cases received legal aid	16.7	7.0	20.7

Source: Court and NGO registries of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Mymensingh district

**Impact of Legal Aid on the Quality of Settlement:** Scarce legal aid not only restrict women to seek justice from courts, but also affects the quality of justice for women who may be able to initiate their cases but not able to continue them without legal aid. Therefore, the availability of legal aid could affect the quality of resolution as well. For instance, the number of family cases resolved *ex parte* in the three sample districts declined as the availability of legal aid increased. As demonstrated in table 4, among the three districts, family cases in *Narayanganj* district received least amount of legal aid from NGOs and also from government sources. This could be one reason why the percentage of *ex parte* cases is higher in *Narayanganj* than in *Dhaka* and *Mymensingh* districts.

As shown in table 4, the higher the rates of legal aid from government and NGOs, the lower the number of cases which are settled through *ex parte* and dismissal. Though the issue cannot be fully addressed by the data collected under current study, one proposition for the negative relationship between the availability of legal aid and lower rate of *ex parte* decrees could be that husbands take litigation more seriously and not let them go *ex parte* when they perceive that, by means of legal aid, their wives have gained better capacity to contest through litigation. Though apparently it seems that women get quick disposal of their cases through *ex parte* decrees, in reality, for most of these *ex parte* decrees women have to contest appeal made by their husbands in higher court. As many women are not able to continue with a long and costly process of appeal in higher courts, most of them drop out and ultimately deprived from getting formal court justice. One earlier study demonstrated that for only 5% of total contested cases in family courts women can get realization before appeal<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, a comparison of the percentage of cases covered under government and NGO legal aid in *Narayanganj* and *Dhaka* districts with their corresponding figures of dismissal indicates that lower availability of legal aid leads to a higher rate of dismissal of family cases. Since more than 90 per cent of family cases are filed by women, a higher dismissal rate with insufficient legal aid indicates that women are not able to continue their cases without legal aid<sup>5</sup>. An even higher dismissal rate in *Mymensingh* may be rationalized by the fact that, besides scarce legal aid, women from conservative rural societies may have to face greater obstacles to continue their family cases through litigation. However, further research is required to explore this issue.

## Conclusion

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 litigation. Though legal aid funding from NGOs is still too scarce to cover

all women who need legal aid, the three biggest NGOs providing legal aid in Bangladesh covered more than 6 times the total clients covered under government legal aid. The cost of resolving out-of-court mediation is also much lower than the cost required to contest cases through litigation or in-court mediation<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, sometimes it is indiscriminately suggested that, given a scarce availability of legal aid, mediation is a better low cost alternative to provide quicker access to justice to women.

However, while indicating a concern for access to justice through low-cost, quick resolution of disputes and quick realisation of post-separation entitlements, one should not forget about the quality of justice received by these women. Getting quicker and cheaper access to justice through mediation may not always ensure that women are getting fair justice. Women may get speedy access – but because of gendered power disparity and family violence, there remains a concern that access may not ensure fair outcomes to women in mediation. Presence of widespread violence in the society may also restrain women's capacity to negotiate effectively with their husbands during mediation<sup>5,30</sup>. As discussed earlier, availability of legal aid to women also increases the abidance of mediated agreements made outside courts. Therefore, to ensure a proper balance between increased supply of legal aid and use of other low-cost alternate means to justice like mediation requires further consideration from scholars and policy makers working in this field.

Nevertheless, one final recommendation that can enhance women's access to justice under the ongoing scarcity of legal aid is to channel unused government legal aid fund through NGOs. A greater collaboration between government and NGOs may ensure a better utilization of scarce legal aid fund and improve women's wellbeing under limited government budget.

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