

Asia Pacific Justice for All Webinar Series

26 September, 14 & 28 October

Background

The Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST); [Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies](#); the [Open Government Partnership](#) and the [Legal Empowerment Network](#) organized a series of virtual meetings on September 26, October 14 and October 28, 2020 to enable justice actors from across the Asia-Pacific region to share experiences, solutions and challenges on legal empowerment.

The session topics included: *Adaptation and Collaboration, Grassroots Work in the Pandemic* (September 26); *People-Centered Justice and Best Practices* (October 14) and *Partnerships and Resources* (October 28). Over 10,000 participants representing government, the judiciary, civil society and the private sector across the Asia-Pacific region attended or observed the virtual gatherings.

This document draws on the discussions and recommendations made in the series and is intended to assist in collective advocacy and engagement to further realize the ambition behind SDG 16.

Key Findings

The virtual series highlighted significant challenges faced by legal empowerment practitioners in delivering justice to their communities on a daily basis. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities based on caste, religion, gender, disability, nationality and language and created new and unique obstacles and challenges. Participants also noted challenges in accessing healthcare during the pandemic and in preventive measures in informal settlements in megacities. Migrants were also recognized as highly vulnerable due to inadequate healthcare, worse economic conditions, and overcrowded living conditions, which put them at greater risk for infection. The loss of livelihoods and income was also emphasized.

Many justice institutions have closed partly or fully throughout the region as a consequence of the pandemic. Likewise, many lawyers, paralegals and other front-line justice workers are unable to reach the communities they serve. The digital divide has further constrained access to both providing and seeking information and assistance. Participants also noted the challenges resulting from the restrictions placed on organizing, association, and expression, as well as threats to personal liberties through arrest and illegal surveillance. The lack of access to technology also makes it difficult for grassroots actors to participate in virtual meetings.

Alongside these pitfalls, new **opportunities** for innovation and recalibration towards people-centered justice have arisen. A people-centered approach to justice starts with an understanding of people's justice needs and follows with new solutions designed to solve them. People-centered legal and justice services are available across the justice chain and provided in a range of formats, program and services types. It is delivered by a system that is open and inclusive, and works in collaboration with other sectors such as health, education, housing and employment. When people seek help to resolve their needs, they should find help, regardless of where they turn for assistance.

Recommendations

The virtual meetings highlighted key recommendations to advance the collective work of legal practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region:

Recommendations to Elevate Good Practices in People-Centered Justice Delivery

- **Governments** should strengthen the use of data-informed approaches to understand the justice needs of people, including justice needs surveys.
- **Governments, judiciaries and civil society** should ensure gender equity and meaningfully address gender discrimination in justice service delivery given the myriad challenges faced by women justice seekers and providers. Ensuring access to justice for disabled persons and other vulnerable groups should be prioritized, taking care to account for the specific circumstances of the vulnerable group.
- **Governments and civil society** should strengthen their partnerships and collaboration through multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership.

Recommendations to Address Emerging Challenges from the COVID-19 Pandemic

- **Governments** should prioritize people-centered justice as an integral component of response and recovery strategies in relation to COVID-19.
- **Governments** should harness the power of a diverse justice system. They should consider establishing a cross-sectoral pandemic task force under the Ministry of Justice, with representation and input from civil society, to assess justice system needs and prioritize responses.
- **Representatives of the legal profession, the private sector (in particular technology companies), paralegals and others who provide justice services in communities** should convene regularly to provide input and coordinate effective responses to the crisis by justice actors.
- **Justice professionals in government and civil society** should work with other sectors to ensure that new public health restrictions and policies in areas such as housing, employment, and migration help prevent injustice rather than imposing an unnecessary burden on the justice sector.
- **Governments** should ensure that frontline justice workers continue to receive their salaries, working to find supplemental funding from international donors and philanthropy where needed.
- **Governments** should proactively incorporate transparency into decision-making related to the pandemic and operations of the justice system during the pandemic, with a more open justice system being the basis of building trust between citizens and government in the long term.



Recommendations on Sustainability and Financing for Justice for All

- **Civil society organizations and community based legal empowerment organizations** should use domestic and global processes such as the [Open Government Partnership](#) and the [UN Sustainable Development Goals Partnerships Platform](#) to advocate and leverage funding from the government.
- **Governments** should rapidly redirect the funding of services towards online delivery, such as public information campaigns, helplines, and online mediation of disputes.
- **Governments** should scale up investment in meaningful justice and rights awareness to ensure that people adequately understand their rights and the remedies available to them.
- **Donors** should protect justice systems when indebted countries seek an international bailout and maintain justice's share of overseas development assistance.
- **Representatives of the legal profession, including the private bar** should organize to provide pro bono legal services and lend their voice in advocacy efforts to legal empowerment networks.
- **Private sector should be mobilized to support justice for all** — which impacts their stakeholders such as consumers, employees, and the communities they serve — through financial and/or in-kind support.

Background

For additional resources, please visit:

- Justice in a Pandemic: [Justice for All and the Public Health Emergency](#)
- Justice in a Pandemic: [Justice for All and the Economic Crisis](#)
- [Grassroots Justice in a Pandemic](#): Ensuring a Just Response and Recovery, Justice for All and Pathfinders
- Solutions Snapshot: [Domestic Violence in Pandemic](#), Pathfinders
- Solutions Snapshot: [Court Innovations in a Pandemic](#), Pathfinders
- Solutions Snapshot: [Legal Empowerment in a Pandemic](#), Pathfinders
- To learn how the Open Government Partnership works to expand responsiveness, accountability and inclusion in all systems of justice, visit our [OGP Justice page](#).
- To learn more about commitments on justice and how to make a commitment on justice see our Pathfinders [Commitments Fact Sheet](#).

