

# Annual Report

July 2002 to June 2003

**Nagorik Uddyog**



ACCESS TO JUSTICE  
GOVERNANCE AND  
HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION



## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Preface  | 2  |
| Introduction to Nagorik Uddyog                                 | 3  |
| Improving Women's Access to Justice                            | 4  |
| Human Rights Learning Programme                                | 12 |
| Participatory Action Research                                  | 13 |
| Publications and Information Dissemination                     | 14 |
| Networking, Partnership and Advocacy                           | 16 |
| Concluding Remarks   | 19 |
| Audited Financial Statement                                    | 20 |
| Executive Committee Members                                    | 21 |
| Organisation's Human Resources                                 | 21 |
| ANNEX - A  | 22 |
| Declaration of Grassroots Women's Leadership Conference -2003  |    |
| ANNEX - B  | 24 |
| NU's Approach to Improve Access to Justice at Grassroots Level |    |



## Preface

Nagorik Uddyog (The Citizens Initiative) started its activities in 1995. Over the years we have gained valuable experience and have strengthened the capacity of the organisation.. Now we are confident to move forward to achieve the mission of our organisation.

This annual report contains the activities of our organisation within the period of July 2002 to June 2003. However the report analysed the impact of our main programme 'Improving Women's Access to Justice' on the basis of our three year implementation of the programme. We hope this analysis will provide a deep sense of impact the project has made. We, the implementation team of Nagorik Uddyog, are grateful to the Board of Directors, the people for whom we work and to our supporters (One World Action, Ireland Aid and DFID). We hope to have their continued support in the future.

We are happy to publish this year's annual report for wider circulation and to celebrate our achievements.

Zakir Hossain  
Coordinator  
Nagorik Uddyog



# Introduction to Nagorik Uddyog

## Background

Nagorik Uddyog, founded in 1995, is an NGO that promotes human rights and good governance. Since 1996 its work has included workshops, action research, training and awareness programs, resolving disputes through mediation and interaction with other organisations, individuals and government bodies. From statistics and experience, NU believes in the necessity of more affordable and approachable systems of justice, than the formal court and judicial systems. NU has contemplated on the current lack of awareness among poor people about their rights. Through increasing administrative participation and building strong representative structures at the grassroots level, poor people can gain access to justice and other services; irrespective of gender or social class.

Nagorik Uddyog (The Citizen's Initiative) - the name itself epitomises the essence of the activities of the organisation. Bringing laws within the reaches of the poor and disadvantaged remain the key to a successful democracy. Nagorik Uddyog seeks to create an enabling condition for the people to set up institutions or learn to adapt to existing institutional procedures and pave the avenues towards justice for themselves using the laws of the country.

## Goals

Nagorik Uddyog's fundamental goal is to carry out activities in order to promote human rights and good governance, with a particular focus on strengthening the local governance. It is also committed to democratising the conventional system of mediation and establishing justice irrespective of gender and social status. NU assists in empowering women at the

grassroots level through educating them on political and women's human rights.

## Objectives

The specific objectives of the organisation are:

- ◆ Establishing social and gender justice irrespective of gender and social status through mediation and legal aid support;
- ◆ Adopting educational programmes with a view to raising consciousness on human rights and women's human rights at the grassroots level;
- ◆ Supporting the struggle of women at the grassroots level in order to ensure their effective participation on a larger scale in the development process;
- ◆ Conducting training programmes on human rights for NGO workers, activists, and community members;
- ◆ Establishing a network of national and international organisations in the field of human rights; and
- ◆ Conducting research on various aspects of the society, economy, human rights situations, and the polity of Bangladesh.

**Executive Committee:** The EC comprises of nine members - three females and six males.

**Staff Members:** A total of 45 staff members, of which 23 females and 22 are males

## Status

Registered under Joint Stock Companies Act No. (Act XVIII) in 1995  
NGO Bureau No. 1240, February, 23, 1998



## Improving Women's Access to Justice

The project aims to uphold human rights, especially to promote women's rights and improve their access to gender-sensitive mediation procedures at the grassroots level. This will be achieved by:

- a) promoting a more equitable dispute resolution system that protects women's human rights
- b) raising women's awareness of their human and legal rights
- c) creating 'watchdog' capacity at the local level by establishing sustainable institutions to advocate for women's rights
- d) developing women's leadership capacities
- e) providing legal aid and support, where disputes are not settled in the Shalish

### Participatory Workshops

24 one-day workshops on "Law and the Shalish Process" were organised at the Union level with members of existing Shalish Committees and elected members of the Union Council (the lowest level of local government). The workshops encourage participatory discussions on various issues of relevance to the community including marriage, polygamy, unregistered marriage, divorce, dowry, alimony, Fatwa, inheritance laws and domestic violence. Discussion is based on people's experience of and participation in Shalish processes to date – their use and understanding of both customary law and State law, and methods for settling disputes in the past. These workshops help to expose ways in which practice to date during traditional mediation sessions, may actually be contravening existing laws.

### Women's Leadership Training and Women's Group Discussions

309 training sessions and women's group meetings were held in the project areas

benefiting approximately 10,000 women. These events have helped to maintain motivation, raise awareness of women's rights and increase participation in community activities. Training for women leaders covers women's rights, constitutional provisions protecting women's rights, the causes of discrimination against women, women's reproductive rights, discussions on CEDAW, family law, and the Children's Act against oppression. NU's approach is centred on building women's capacity for leadership within the community and there is evidence that women are participating more actively at this level since the project began. Women leaders have themselves developed a grassroots women's leadership network, which has been responsible for organising three conferences in the communities over the project period, and a declaration (see annex) for presentation to local government. This highlights issues and challenges facing women in rural areas (including early marriage, violence against women, participation in the decision making process with local level government and self development).

### Monitoring Meetings

The purpose of the meetings is to oversee progress within the Shalish and monitor the human rights situation, as well as to maintain motivation and contribute to efforts to building a more just and peaceful society. A total of 83 monitoring meetings were held and 648 people attended four consecutive meetings, of which 40% were women. All members of the Shalish Committees at both Union and village level meet at least once every quarter. Members share experiences and interesting aspects of recent Shalishes; discussion of relevant laws enables members to update each others knowledge. These meetings also aim to build human rights activism at the community level, through the members to their friends and contacts.



## Training on Laws and Shalish

It was felt that there was a lack of knowledge on which legal issues, patriarchal attitudes, and attitudes which are largely responsible for settling disputes unlawfully, influencing decisions, and insensitiveness to women and poor people. To improve the legal knowledge and to create the desired sensitivity, three-day training was planned and organised in three of our working areas.

## Legal Aid

Nine cases were referred to the court after failure to settle them by the Shalish process; five of these cases so far have been settled in court.

## Staff training and Quarterly Experience Sharing Meetings

Two 4-day training programmes were organised on "Human Rights, Land laws

and Shalishes" for Nagorik Uddyog's own staff members. In addition to the in-house training programmes, NU has built the capacity of their staff through participation in training programmes, conferences, workshops, etc. Examples of training opportunities from which NU staff have benefited include:

- One month of training for Human Rights Educators organised by the South Asian Learning Institute of Human Rights Education in India and the People's Movement for Human Rights Education in the USA (two senior level members of staff attended)
- Two weeks' training on participatory action research methods from Research Initiatives in Bangladesh (one member of staff attended).
- Training of Trainers on rights-based development issues (two staff members attended).



**Table 1:** Summary of Beneficiaries for the period of July 2002 – June 2003

| Activities   | No. of Events | Direct beneficiaries |              |               |
|--|---------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------|
|  |               | Women                | Men          | Total         |
| Union level workshops                                      | 24            | 584                  | 754          | 1,338         |
| Monitoring meetings with Legal Aid Committees              | 83            | 812                  | 1,533        | 2,345         |
| Women's group awareness meeting                            | 309           | 10,000               | -            | 10,000        |
| Training for women leaders                                 | 10            | 348                  | -            | 348           |
| Training on Laws and the Shalish, for Legal Aid Committees | 3             | 38                   | 48           | 86            |
| Advocacy Meeting   | 2             | 36                   | 60           | 96            |
| Training for NU staff                                      | 2             | 38                   | 37           | 75            |
| HR awareness Training                                      | 1             | 13                   | 15           | 28            |
| HR Day observance 2002                                     | 3 areas       | 110                  | 280          | 390           |
| International Women's day observance 2003                  | 3 areas       | 518                  | 68           | 586           |
| Grassroots Women's Leadership Conference                   | 3             | 709                  | 52           | 761           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>443</b>    | <b>13,206</b>        | <b>2,847</b> | <b>16,053</b> |





## Shalishes Conducted

Shalish committees conduct the Shalish process and therefore have considerable influence over the outcome. The election of members to the committee, the ways in which decisions are taken within the committee and the extent to which existing laws are applied, are crucial factors in creating more equitable dispute resolution. NU focuses on forming new Shalish committees at the village and the union levels, which must include representatives of the poor and, in particular, poor women.

NU provides training to the elected committee members on the legal rights of citizens and current laws on custody, guardianship, divorce, marriage, maintenance, and other family law issues, and the technical aspects of land and labour laws. These account for most local level disputes across the country. During a dispute, accurate guidance from committee members on legal aspects of each case, and the consequences of failing to comply with the law, has a significant influence on the outcome.

The following table shows the number of Shalishes conducted during the last year. It is important to mention that NU has received 2,194 applications in last three years, out of them 1,747 disputes were

settled. NU has documented case studies of settled Shalishes and plans to publish them with an analytical commentary.

## Challenges and Difficulties Experienced

The project set out to improve women's rights in some of the poorest areas of Bangladesh where awareness of human rights and knowledge of relevant laws is deeply lacking. NU found it necessary to work on developing very basic concepts of rights and laws in people's minds in the preparatory stages of the programme. This required strong motivating and leadership skills from NU staff in the field. Social and gender issues have presented many obstacles, and for staff fresh from training it, has been difficult to accept sometimes that many women cannot automatically renounce the abuse they have faced or disclose personal family problems to strangers. Women in rural areas of Bangladesh are often not allowed out of the home unless they are in the presence of a male relative. The strong focus on training and direct field experience in this programme have ensured that NU staff develop the capacity to deal with human rights abuses in a sensitive but assertive manner.



**Table 2: Summary of Dispute Resolution through Mediation During July 2002 - June 2003**

| Issues                  | Application received | Mediation completed | Application dropped | Referred to Court | Currently Pending |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Family violence/matters | 252                  | 185                 | 18                  | 3                 | 46                |
| Maintenance             | 187                  | 147                 | 19                  | 2                 | 19                |
| Polygamy                | 81                   | 68                  | 11                  | -                 | 2                 |
| Dowry                   | 104                  | 90                  | 8                   | 2                 | 4                 |
| Land related            | 85                   | 71                  | 6                   | -                 | 8                 |
| Others*                 | 187                  | 148                 | 12                  | 2                 | 25                |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>896</b>           | <b>709</b>          | <b>74</b>           | <b>9</b>          | <b>104</b>        |

\* Conflicts over loan repayment, minor issues and arguments that turn violent, breaking of informal contracts, etc.





## IMPACT

*The following analysis illustrates the impact of the project against original objectives and indicators, over the last three years:*

### Objective: 1

Organise workshops to sensitise local elected representatives, community leaders and NGO representatives to the use of existing laws as a basis for alternative dispute resolution.

#### Indicators:

- Participation of local leaders and elected representatives
- Settling of disputes according to national law (realising the role and limitations of Shalish)
- Changed behaviour and use of open meetings to lobby on human rights issues

**Main activity:** workshops at union level with elected representatives and community leaders to discuss issues pertaining to family law, women's rights, human rights and legal issues in general.

#### Impact:

#### ■ *Enhanced awareness and participation of local leaders and elected representatives:*

Local leaders and elected representatives have participated actively in these workshops and rates of attendance have been good. Workshop discussions allowed members to make connections between the formal legal system and their own experiences of participation in Shalish processes, and to question ways in which customary and state law have been used traditionally. These discussions have raised awareness of the need to transform traditional mediation sessions to ensure that they conform to the law.

#### ■ *More equitable dispute resolution - settling of disputes according to national law*

- members have been encouraged to consider the legitimacy, limitations and strengths of the Shalish procedure and their roles as members
- decisions are now based more on the legal system and much less on individual discretion
- there is a stronger focus on listening to the different parties involved and seeking other opinions or witnesses
- local opinion is that the Shalishes held in the NU project areas are now better organised and this facilitates a more just process and outcome in dispute resolution
- Shalish systems that work alongside the legal system are more participatory and democratic and, as a result, have gained the respect and trust of local communities
- Shalish committees are now aware that serious crime such as murder or rape must be referred through the formal court system

### Objective: 2

Raise awareness amongst women of their legal rights pertaining to family law and women's rights in general.

#### Indicators:

- Filing and recording of cases
- Collective action
- Women's leadership and direct participation in mediation and settling disputes

**Main activity:** women's group discussions conducted in the communities. The aim of these meetings is to create awareness amongst women of legal and human rights at grassroots level. Elected women



representatives have received leadership training with a focus on effective leadership skills, as well as existing family laws and women's human rights.

## Impact:

### ■ *Proper filing and recording of cases*

- Proceedings are accurately recorded and filed, which is particularly important if disputants wish to take the case to the local courts.

### ■ *Collective Action*

- The four grassroots women leaders' conferences held in Bangladesh during March and April 2003 were very successful and well supported in the NU project areas. (*please see annex, conference declaration in one project area*)
- Women at community level have organised and manage a regular newsletter called *Narir Shopno patha*.

### ■ *Women's leadership and increased participation & awareness*

- Women are increasingly becoming aware of their rights, (including entitlements to various benefits) and how to protect them through the Shalish. Traditional beliefs and customs that contravene national law are exposed during sessions.
- Awareness raising posters and leaflets have been published and distributed widely on women's human rights and violence against women.
- Attendance of women at the awareness raising discussions has increased as the project progresses.
- Women are demonstrating increased confidence and more women are openly expressing their opinions and objections during Shalish sessions.
- Signs of growing leadership skills in some women include repeat attendance at the awareness raising workshops and encouragement of others to attend.

- In a recent discussion during a field visit by the project co-ordinator, women explained that they were keen to learn more about the issues and requested that the training be extended to include new areas.

## Objective: 3

Promote a more equitable and just alternative dispute resolution (especially for family disputes) and reduce litigation

## Indicators:

- Emergence of specific committees and groups

**Main activity:** Shalish committees take responsibility for conducting the Shalish process, for electing who will sit on these committees and for determining how decisions are taken. NU has learned that it is crucial for committee members to have the capacity to guide those involved in a dispute on key aspects of the law and on the legal consequences of failure to comply with them.

## Impact:

### ■ *Emergence of strong, representative Shalish committees*

- The new Shalish committees or Legal Assistance Committees formed at village and union levels with support from NU are more representative, giving a voice to the poorest and more vulnerable sectors of society (e.g. poor women are now amongst the members who make decisions).
- Training for the committees has a strong focus on developing awareness of "family" laws (i.e. laws on custody, guardianship, divorce, marriage, and maintenance), land and labour laws which are relevant to the vast majority of local level disputes.



- NU draws on a network of lawyers who attend the training events and provide advice and support. The participation of professional lawyers gives credibility to the programme in the eyes of the committee and community. In the event that disputes cannot be settled through the Shalish these lawyers support the case through litigation courts.

### Objective: 4

Monitoring mediation (*Shalish*) procedures in the project area to ensure the enforcement of women's rights

#### Indicators:

- Reduction of violence
- Increased status of women in social decision making process
- Collective and concerted action

**Main Activity:** quarterly meetings are held with Legal Assistance Committees to monitor the Shalishes conducted in each quarter. These meetings help to assess the impact and to refresh members knowledge of different aspects of the laws and rights issues.

#### Impact:

##### ■ *Reduction of violence*

Violence during the Shalish is in decline and particularly reduced in the NU project areas. While disagreements at a Shalish are common, training and preparation of committee members helps them to facilitate a peaceful resolution.

##### ■ *Increased status of women in social decision making process*

Women's rights and gender awareness underpin training for staff, field workers, volunteers and committee members involved in the programme.

Attitudes and stereotypes are being challenged as more of the issues discussed at Shalish centre on women and their rights by law.

##### ■ *Collective and concerted action*

NU aims to ensure that women learn *how* to use the law to their benefit in order to achieve access to justice; however, it is also important that attitudes change within the wider community. Indications of a wider human rights activism are becoming increasingly evident within the communities.

### Objective: 5

Extending the provision of legal aid available to its clients the majority of whom are women

#### Indicators:

- Number of people receiving legal aid
- Percentage of disputes resolved

**Main activity:** where it has not been possible to settle disputes through the Shalish, litigation is filed through the courts and legal support provided to the most disadvantaged, especially women. Most of the complaints registered have been settled through Shalish hearings; only 11 cases were referred to the courts (6 of these have since been settled). NU enjoys good linkages with the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) the most prominent legal aid organisation in Bangladesh. BLAST has supported NU in a number of cases and the organisations have recently initiated a joint three year human rights education programme.

#### Impact:

##### ■ *Number of people receiving legal aid*

NU is committed to providing legal support for settling disputes which need to



be referred to the courts; this is otherwise normally a process that excludes poor people. This support has had two key impacts:

- women and other disadvantaged groups have gained from access to legal aid for the first time
- there is increasing acceptance of the Shalish decision and therefore in the number of cases settled within the Shalish. This is partly because NU's reputation for successfully supporting cases for more vulnerable people has acted as a deterrent to those who have taken advantage of the weaknesses in the system to date. NU's record for defending cases is raising awareness of the sometimes stricter penalties within the formal legal system for breaking the law and abusing human rights which is leading to more cases being resolved within the Shalish.

## Objective: 6

Establishing a network between the elected women representatives and women's groups / leaders

### Indicators:

- Meetings established and taking place
- Resolution of disputes
- Specific actions taken
- Attendance of these meetings by elected women representatives
- Greater sense of accountability to electorate

**Main activity:** leadership training programmes were organised to establish grassroots women's leadership. The focus has been on women's rights, constitutional provisions protecting women's rights, causes of discrimination against women, women's reproductive rights, discussions on CEDAW, family law, and the Children's Act against oppression.

### Impact:

#### ■ *Meetings established and taking place*

Women's group meetings have taken place as planned (see Activities). The women leaders have developed on their own initiative, a grassroots women's leadership network, which has been responsible for organising four conferences in the communities.

#### ■ *Attendance of these meetings by elected women representatives*

Women leaders attend meetings and cooperate in the widening of the scope of the network. The issues raised at the meetings address women's rights but also other important issues e.g. child marriage, birth registry and child labour. The declarations to local government are being organised and presented over a five-year period.

#### ■ *Resolution of disputes*

The vast majority of disputes brought to the Shalish have been resolved.

#### ■ *Specific actions taken*

- Four conferences organised by the grassroots women's network
- The newsletter, *Narir Shapna pata* (all articles are written by women leaders). The publication is currently the only one of its kind in Bangladesh and has become very popular with women in the community.

## Objective: 7

Further training for Nagorik Uddyog field workers and para-legal workers to reach a wider target group and increase awareness amongst women of their rights and legal procedures

### Indicators:

- Improved skills in legal affairs
- Efficient management of the project



- Better record keeping
- Community acceptance of the project

**Main activity:** training, workshops, group discussions for NU field workers and staff have all focussed on common legal issues of relevance to communities in rural Bangladesh, enabling them to actively promote the programme through awareness building campaigns and to support individuals with advice.

#### Impact:

##### ■ Improved skills in legal affairs

Training has provided staff with knowledge of laws, the legal system and the constitution and placed great emphasis on family law and land rights which are key issues in rural Bangladesh. Experience, particularly the interaction with the community at group discussions and workshops, has reinforced their understanding and sharpened their skills.

##### ■ Community acceptance of the project

The capacity of staff and field workers to respond to challenges has given them a reputation in the communities as 'mini-lawyers'. Their support to the poorest and most vulnerable enables many members of the community to gain access to justice for the first time. Training on the legal system has enhanced the skills of staff and

enabled them to defend the poor, confront misleading messages and clarify where the law has been misinterpreted.

#### Objective: 8

Publication of quarterly newsletter

#### Indicators:

- Publication and distribution of the newsletter

#### Activity and Impact

##### ■ Publication and distribution of the newsletter

*Nagorik Uddyog Barta* (NUB), The newsletters have been popular with beneficiaries and other grassroots human rights agencies.

*Narir Sapna Pata* ("Women's Dream Pages", an initiative of the women leaders which has been very popular.

*Unmochon* ("Unveil"), a quarterly newsletter published through the Access to Justice and information Network- this network initiated by Nagorik Uddyog. It deals with status of access to justice, the right to information and their relation to development.





## Human Rights Learning Programme: Toward Developing Human Rights City

On November 2001, a City Steering Committee was formed in Dinajpur, consisting of 27 members, who are all citizens of Dinajpur. Of the 27 members, 9 are women. The City Steering Committee is already active in developing a human rights sensitive city.

The steering committee decided to organize a series of Human Rights Awareness training workshops. The challenge was to select appropriate participants. Participants were selected by pasting notices in public places in the city and advertising in the local newspaper. Information was given that a three - day long residential training will be organised on Human Rights, and interested persons were requested to apply. The notice mentioned the objectives of the training were to create human rights volunteers.

We were seeking applications from those who were interested in the field of human rights in their own capacity. Surprisingly, 200 applications were received and the final selections of 140 participants was through face to face interviews by the steering committee.

### Human Rights Training Workshop

After the selection, *Nagorik Uddyog* facilitated the six human rights training programmes in collaboration with Community Development Association-Dinajpur. A total of 130 people were trained on human rights issues. The table below shows the category of participants who received training.



**Table 3:** Participants in the Training Workshop

| Occupation of Participants | Number of Participants |           | Total      |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------|
|                            | Female                 | Male      |            |
| Journalist                 | -                      | 9         | 9          |
| Social worker              | 15                     | 25        | 40         |
| NGO staff                  | 10                     | 22        | 32         |
| Cultural activist          | 3                      | 5         | 8          |
| Small trader               | -                      | 2         | 2          |
| Lawyer                     | -                      | 4         | 4          |
| Student                    | 8                      | 22        | 30         |
| House Wife                 | 2                      | -         | 2          |
| Teacher                    | -                      | 1         | 1          |
| Researcher                 | -                      | 1         | 1          |
| Sports Organizer           |                        | 1         | 1          |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>38</b>              | <b>92</b> | <b>130</b> |



## Action Taken by Human Rights Volunteers

The trained human rights volunteers have already undertaken number of initiatives, such as, observing Universal Human Rights Day, Women's Day, Environment day and Violence against Women Day. This Violence against Women Day, a national day in Bangladesh, was declared by the community in order to commemorate the death of Yasmin, (a young women who was raped by police and killed) and also to ensure that no

woman has to undergo such violence again. In general on these Days, programmes include discussions, meetings, rallies and publishing posters and leaflets. Volunteers even have ward level committees. The committee has also identified a number of issues, such as cleaning the city, improving the environment and the human rights situation. A memorandum has been submitted to the Municipal Chairman to take action on the issues. These volunteers act as human rights 'Watch Dog' in the areas.

## Participatory Action Research

### Participatory Action Research for Establishing Self-esteem and Rights of Widows, Deserted and Divorced Women

Widows, deserted and divorced women of Bangladesh live a highly vulnerable life not only because of their gender but also because of the socio-cultural customs and flaws in the legal system specially related to the inheritance of property. These women are deprived of their rights to income, inherited property, and proper living space. They remain almost in social isolation in the male dominated society and trapped in a dependency relationship throughout their lives. The research seeks to understand and analyse the socio-economic and human rights situations of these vulnerable groups. It seeks to identify awareness raising and other intervention needs to ensure inheritance rights, facilitate dispute resolution, receiving public services and aids, and enhance the dignity and status of women in society. The action part of the research also includes an element of providing training to these

vulnerable groups to raise their level of awareness, build confidence, changing the attitude and mindset towards increased self-respect and self-esteem. The Community will be involved for ensuring the property rights of women and for initiating discourse related to the socio-economic improvement of women. The research is expected to lead to the development of an Operation Module to be used by concerned local NGOs. At least 10 NGO's will be provided with the module and necessary training to undertake similar activities for improving the condition of vulnerable women.

### Research Location:

| UPAZILA     | UNION         |
|-------------|---------------|
| Kalihathi   | ● Shahdebpur  |
| Shwarupkati | ● Shutiyakati |
| Patiya      | ● Jiri        |
| Badarganj   | ● Damodpur    |





## Publications and Information Dissemination

Publications and information sharing provide NU with the opportunity to replicate the experience of the programme in other parts of Bangladesh. NU produces two main newsletters, both of which are produced with as much ownership of project participants as possible:

*Nagorik Uddyog Barta (NUB)* is a quarterly newsletter published by NU and disseminated widely. Each newsletter follows a theme and aims to provide a balance of topical articles and information as a resource for Shalish Committees and Women Leaders in particular. Issues covered include the history of the women's rights movement in Bangladesh, summaries of relevant conventions, data on political representation of women in local and national government, and Nagorik Uddyog's programme activities from the previous quarter. The newsletters have been popular with beneficiaries and other grassroots human rights agencies.

### Contents of the quarterly newsletters published during the project period

#### Issue 7: July - September 2002

**Theme:** Women and Property Rights

##### Main articles:

- Gender Justice and Muslim Inheritance Law
- Land Management in Bangladesh and Women's Interest
- Inclusion of Women's Land Rights in the Women's Development Agenda and Women's Empowerment
- Inheritance Law and Women in the Bangladeshi Context
- Case Studies
- Nagorik Uddyog's quarterly activities

#### Issue 8: October-December 2002

**Theme:** Women's Education in Bangladesh - Realities and Prospects

##### Main articles:

- Women Education and Begum Rokeya's philosophies
- Women's Education as a tool for development
- Uphill battle to achieve gender balance in education
- Constitutional and legal legitimacy of special facilities offered by the government
- Education and Bangladeshi women: A Historical view
- Nagorik Uddyog's quarterly activities

#### Issue 9-10: January-June 2003

(This issue could not be published by due date due to lack of time for special themes, so two issues were combined)

**Theme:** Feminism and Women's Progress

##### Main articles:

- Bridging concepts and practice of feminism
- Feminism and Development in Bangladesh
- Environment and feminism
- Feminism, Women's development and related other issues in Bangladeshi context
- Feminism and marginalisation of women
- Discrimination against women in employment and challenging working environment: A critical view
- Nagorik Uddyog's quarterly activities





### *Narir Sapna Pata* ("Women's Dream Pages")

Encouraged by the success of the quarterly newsletter, NU began publishing a newsletter aimed (and produced) primarily by women leaders. It features articles, poetry, case studies and local updates from women leaders in different areas covered by the programme, with the aim of sharing experiences and promoting networking and solidarity. The newsletter has provoked a very good response. Other national level human rights NGOs have commented that this initiative seems to be totally new in the Bangladeshi context.

*Unmochon* ("Unveil"), a quarterly newsletter published through the *Access to Justice and Information Network (AJIN)* – is an NU inspired initiative. It covers issues like the status of the justice system, briefs on legislation currently being proposed, and the right to information and their relation to development.

### Published Book

Nagorik Uddyog published a book entitled "Women's Struggle for Establishing Rights on Land and Natural Resources" by Altaf Pervez. The book deals a wide range of issues, such as political and social perspectives of women



land rights, laws and women rights, women and indigenous minorities, women's struggle for khas and wetlands, land reforms and women's struggle, etc. The author also analysed the peasants and landless organisations documents to understand their outlook on these issues. Action Aid Bangladesh supported us to publish this book.

### Resource and Documentation Centre

The resource and documentation centre of Nagorik Uddyog consists of a reference library and research unit. The centre catalogues books and newspaper clippings on relevant topics. The centre expands every year. The centre can be used by interested readers and researchers.



## Networking, Partnership and Advocacy

### National Networks

NU has played a pioneering role in the establishment of the *Access to Justice and Information Network (AJIN)*, which currently has 19 members. It provides like-minded NGOs with the opportunity to share ideas and experiences and to find common ways of promoting human rights and good governance through diverse approaches in different regions of Bangladesh. The member organisations are:

1. Ananya Samaj Kallyan Shangostha, Pabna
2. Association for Social Development and Distressed Welfare (ASDDW), Dakop, Khulna
3. Association of Voluntary Action for Society (AVAS), Barisal
4. Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF), Dhaka
5. Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangstha, Dhaka
6. Bil Cholon Development Project (BCDP), Chapinawabgonj
7. Center for Rural Child Development (CRCD), Chittagong
8. Chinishpur Dipshika Mohila Samity (CDMS), Narsingdhi
9. Development Support Services (DSS), Swarupkati, Pirojpur
10. Grassroots, Bhanga, Faridpur
11. Human Rights Development Centre (HRDC), Savar
12. Mukti Nari-O-Shishu Unnayan Sangstha, Kushtia
13. Nagorik Uddyog, Dhaka
14. Pabna Protishruti, Pabna
15. Palli Karma Sahayak Sangstha, Natore
16. Patronizing Rural Initiative as Team Effort (PRITE), Chittagong

17. Pirojpur Gono Unnayan Samity (PGUS), Pirojpur
18. Udayangkur Seva Shangstha, Nilphamari
19. Women Development Organisation (WDO), Netrokona

### Regional and International Networks

Nagorik Uddyog has established effective working relations with regional and international organisations. The organisations are as follows:

- People Decades for Human Rights Movement (PDHRE), New York, USA
- South Asian Learning Institute for Human rights Education (SALIHRE), Mumbai, India
- South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR)
- Communities Against Violence Network (CAVNET), based in Washington, D.C. USA
- VSO- Bangladesh
- Asian Social Forum



## Partnership Program with BLAST

In 2003, Nagorik Uddyog became the partner of Bangladesh Legal Aid Services and Trust (BLAST) under the project entitled "Gender, Knowledge, Networking and Human Rights Intervention in Bangladesh". As network partner of BLAST the following activities will be conducted through this project:

- Human Rights Education programme will be organised on a monthly basis with the students of secondary and higher secondary level.
- Community meetings on human rights issues will be organised on a quarterly basis. Participants will include community leaders, elected representatives of local bodies and members of the law enforcing agencies
- Focus group meetings will be organised every two months which will involve NGO beneficiaries and social activists
- Settling disputes through mediation. Legal aid will be provided through the BLAST network

## Roundtable Discussion

We have observed from our experiences that the work of establishing social justice at the local level for both men and women does not crystallize through a few sessions and meetings. We need to discuss with other organisations and individuals who are working on this issue and take a collective initiative. Furthermore, we need to organise extensive meetings, seminars, and conferences to realise the extensity of the problem. Through these meetings and seminars there will be a renewed sensitivity at all levels of society regarding injustice, violence against women, and lack of access to justice at the local level. In future, the need for policy and legal changes would also become clear through these exercises. Realising the objectives a

roundtable discussion was organised by Nagorik Uddyog on August 03, 2002 at the YWCA Auditorium in Dhaka. The purpose of the discussion was to:

- Explore the issues of access to justice and accountability of justice systems and institutions for the poorest from a gender perspective.
- Share information on useful approaches, initiatives and strategies from local and national NGOs, donors, and relevant government bodies.
- Assist in strengthening networking among those interested in democratic justice in Bangladesh.

Through the roundtable discussions the following important issues came up which require our immediate attention:

- In order to establish justice at the local level, we need to establish an independent, separate, and strong local government.
- The elected representatives at the UP should be provided with legal training.
- The common people should be made aware of law and human rights violation in such a way that they can put up a resistance when there is such a violation of human rights.
- *Shalish* is very effective in terms of dispute resolution at the local level. However, people have to be aware of which cases are fit for *Shalish* and which aren't. In addition, the system of *Shalish* should be made to become more democratic and lawful.





- In order to expedite the process, there should be a network of NGOs and other legal aid organisations working toward establishing justice at the local level.
- There should be a mentality of cooperation among the NGOs and the UP.
- There has to be a network among the people and organisations working at the field level, and national leaders be connected with local initiatives.
- Instead of thinking of the *Shalish* system as a permanent solution that by-passes the government and governmental machinery, we should try to make the government and its judiciary system more people oriented, accountable, and responsible.
- This initiative is only a beginning in terms of establishing justice at the local level. We need to bring "The establishment of Justice at the Local Level" and at a wider level, into our discussions and thoughts. We need to give it a form of a movement. For this, we have to organise a national conference. Any other organisation could take that initiative, or we could jointly take that initiative.

The discussion was moderated by renowned women rights activist Ms. Khushi Kabir. A wide ranging participants were attended in the roundtable discussions includes, ASK, BLAST, BRAC, CDA, Nari Pokkho, Madaripur Legal Aid Association, ACD, RIB, DFID and many other organisations.



## Discussions on Domestic Workers and Their Rights:

It is common in our country to work as a domestic servant for food shelter and for some payment. Unfortunately, violence against domestic servants is widespread in our society. It is especially prevalent in middle class families living in the city. An open discussion session was organised by Nagorik Uddyog in collaboration with National Domestic Women's Labour union on November 4, 2003. The discussion session was attended by trade union organisations and human rights organisations. The following issues were discussed:

- Domestic workers should be recognised as labourers
- Legal recognition of their work
- Register the number of labourers working in this sector
- Issuing appointment letter
- Employers detail along with the workers particulars should be registered at the police station
- Determine working hours, allocate enough time for recreation and create opportunity for primary education
- Free legal services for victims and create shelter homes for victims
- Human rights NGO's should get involved to work on this issue
- Organise more awareness programmes



## Concluding Remarks

Nagorik Uddyog's journey has not been illustrious, but its growth has been steady. Its staff have been dedicated and committed to its vision, and they realise the importance of such interventions at the grassroots level. The assessment of NU's programmatic interventions from outsiders clearly shows the truth of this fact. Without a sanguine convergence of NU's programmes and people's needs, this would not have been possible.

NU believes that all of its programmes are replicable elsewhere in rural Bangladesh. This is the primary reason why NU has initiated and mobilised the Access to Justice

and Information Network (AJIN) of like minded organisations. More importantly, NU is determined to achieve its vision of promoting human rights and good governance with a particular focus on strengthening local governance. The belief that guides the NU team is that a truly democratic nation is not simply a dream, but an achievable reality.

NU would like to publish annual reports on a regular basis in the coming years, along with other important publications. Transparency and accountability lies at the ethical core of this organisation, and these publications would testify to that fact.



# Audited Financial Statement

**S.K. BARUA & CO**  
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

**Nagorik Uddyog**  
Consolidated Receipts & Payments Account  
For the year ended 30th June, 2003

| Receipts  |   | Amount              |
|---|---|---------------------|
| Opening Balance                                 |   | 666,304.10          |
| Donor   | Project Name  |                     |
| One World Action                                | Improving Women's Access to Equality and Justice,   | 28,98,777.63        |
| Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB)           | Participatory Action Research on Establishing the Rights and Self-Esteem of Widowed, Abandoned and Divorced Women | 2,71,530.00         |
| Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) | Gender, Knowledge, Networking and Human Rights Intervention in Bangladesh   | 44,750.00           |
| Action Aid Bangladesh                           | Published Book Titled "Women's Land Rights and their Struggles in Bangladesh"                                     | 70,050.00           |
| Grand Receipt                                   |   | 3,285,107.63        |
|   | <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>3,951,411.73</b> |

| Payments                               | Amount              |
|--|---------------------|
| Pay & Salary (Local                    | 1,743,087.00        |
| Honorarium                             | 30,000.00           |
| Primary & Follow-up Survey             | 26,000.00           |
| Training                               | 198,082.00          |
| Seminar/ Workshop/ Conference          | 364,032.00          |
| Office Accommodation (Rent)            | 236,832.00          |
| Office Equipment                       | 175,390.00          |
| Vehicles (Bicycle)                     | 27,000.00           |
| Travelling Allowance & Daily Allowance | 154,857.00          |
| Postage, Fax, Telephone                | 48,264.00           |
| Stationary, Photocopy & Printing       | 106,779.00          |
| Utilities                              | 51,982.00           |
| Others                                 | 259,983.00          |
| Advance                                | 33,276.00           |
| Audit fee & Bank Charges               | 12,257.24           |
| Closing Balance                        | 483,590.49          |
| <b>Total Tk.</b>                       | <b>3,951,411.73</b> |

Dated: Dhaka  
25th August, 2003

Suhrid Kumar Barua, FCA.  
S.K. BARUA & CO  
Chartered Accountants.





## Executive Committee Members

Dr. Khan Sarwar Murshid

|                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Dr. Hameeda Hossain   | Mr. Fazlul Huq           |
| Dr. Anisuzzaman       | Dr. Farjana Islam        |
| Ms. Khushi Kabir      | Dr. Mirza M Hassan       |
| Dr. Meghna Guhathurta | Mr. Shah-I -Mobin Jinnah |

Chief Executive Officer

Zakir Hossain

## Organisational Human Resources

| Sl Name                           | Designation             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Dhaka Office</b>               |                         |
| 1. Zakir Hossain                  | Coordinator             |
| 2. A. T. M. Sayeed-Uz- Zaman      | Program Officer         |
| 3. Monirul Haque                  | Accounts Officer        |
| 4. Mausumi Sharmin                | Research Officer        |
| 5. Rokibul Hasan Rana             | Monitoring Officer      |
| 6. Shashwatee Biplob              | Asst. Programme Officer |
| 7. Syeda Ashrafiz Zaharia Prodhan | Asst. Programme Officer |
| 8. Md. Adil Hasan Chowdhury       | Research Officer        |
| 9. Sharmin Rahman                 | Research Assistant      |
| 10. Mizanur Rahaman               | Data Manager            |
| 11. Babul Misa                    | Office Assistant        |
| 12. Amina Bagum                   | Office Assistant        |
| <b>Kalihati Office</b>            |                         |
| 13. Fazila Akter Lily             | Program Organizer       |
| 14. Md. Serajul Islam             | Community Mobilizer     |
| 15. Nurzahan Akhter               | Community Mobilizer     |
| 16. Nasima Akter                  | Community Mobilizer     |
| 17. Shahnaj Akter                 | Community Mobilizer     |
| 18. Ruma Akter                    | Community Mobilizer     |
| 19. Sayeed Ahmed Sikder           | Asst. Coordinator       |
| 20. Assaduzzaman                  | Office Assistant        |
| 21. Mohammad Shirazul Islam       | Shalish Worker          |
| 22. Nurunnaher Akter              | Research Assistant      |

| Sl Name                  | Designation         |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Badarganj Office</b>  |                     |
| 23. Md. Mahmudur Rahman  | Program Organizer   |
| 24. Aminul Haque         | Community Mobilizer |
| 25. Abed Ali             | Community Mobilizer |
| 26. Most. Mohsina Khatun | Community Mobilizer |
| 27. Mst. Afroza Khatun   | Community Mobilizer |
| 28. Most. Tanjila Khatun | Community Mobilizer |
| 29. Bablu Kha Kha        | Community Mobilizer |
| 30. Md. Abul Kalam Azad  | Community Mobilizer |

### Banaripara Office

|                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 31. Md. Safiqul Islam | Program Organizer   |
| 32. S.M. Quamruzzaman | Community Mobilizer |
| 33. Mrs. Monira Bagum | Community Mobilizer |
| 34. Mrs. Shamsunnaher | Community Mobilizer |
| 35. Ms. Jarna Khanam  | Community Mobilizer |
| 36. Rekha             | Community Mobilizer |
| 37. Shamima Nasrin    | Community Mobilizer |

### Swarupkati -PNGO/DSS

|                           |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 38. Md. Kamrul Hasan Litu | Program Organizer   |
| 39. Mosammad Sahida       | Community Mobilizer |
| 40. Nilufa Yasmin         | Community Mobilizer |
| 41. Md. Syful Islam Khan  | Community Mobilizer |
| 42. Md. Mohasin Reza      | Community Mobilizer |
| 43. Shahanaz Parvin       | Community Mobilizer |
| 44. Kanai Lal Mali        | Community Mobilizer |
| 45. Suraia Akter          | Research Assistant  |



## ANNEX - A

### The First Grassroots Women Leaders' Conference 2003

#### Background

Today the 8th March 2003, we the women of Badargonj have gathered here at the Upazila Parishad conference room. We have come to share a variety of life experiences aiming to change our socio-economic situation and protest against the injustice we have suffered from. We have united here to bring an end to all violence against women. Actually, violence towards women is a deterrent to women's human life.

Since 1996, Nagorik Uddyog has been assisting in establishing rights, justice and empowerment for women in various parts of the country. To strengthen this effort further, the grassroots women leaders have created a network of their own and they are publishing a newsletter called *Narir Shwapno-Patha* (Women's Dreams-Page). Through its work, the conferences have been instigated. Besides Badargonj, these conferences have been organised in other Nagorik Uddyog work areas of Kalihati and Sharupkhati. We believe this is a historical event. because this is the first time in Bangladesh, a grassroots women leaders' conference has been held.

In this declaration, major emphasis have been given to child- marriage, marriage-registration, violence towards women, birth registration and strengthening the union parishad female members' activities. In addition, women's participation in Shalish and other social programs, rural women's problems, equal position in the eyes of law, abolishment of discrimination against women in marriage and in family lives. The

grassroots women's right to participate in social and political activities in their own areas and work at all levels of the government bodies, has been asserted.

To monitor if the programme is running as stated in the declaration, an 18 member committee has been formed for each area of work. This committee will take necessary steps to assess progress at least once a month.

#### The Declarations

**Declaration 1:** *Child-marriage is Hindrance to a Child's Development in Life, let us all be Vehement to abolish it*

Child-marriage brings an end to a lovely childhood. It diminishes their rights and opportunities to education, health, security and development. For child-marriage usually female children are affected physically and mentally. Mainly poverty causes the inclination towards child-marriage. The minimum legal age of marriage in the country is 21 for the males and 18 for the females. For the lack of birth registration certificate, in the Badargonj area many marriages are carried out with ages falsely raised. Although child-marriage is legally punishable, due to lack of evidence, prosecution can not be undertaken. Only a law would not suffice to stop child-marriage - a social movement is necessary. For the sake of our children's better future, let us all stand against child-marriage from our individual positions.



***Declaration 2: The Legal Evidence of Marriage is a Marriage Certificate, so Marriages must be Registered***

Marriage registration is to have all the information regarding a marriage recorded at the government registrar. This registration is the documented legal proof of a marriage. In case of polygamy, divorce, dowry, alimony collection, guardianship of children and inheritance of husband's property, this marriage certificate is a saviour for women. Upon marriage, it must be registered. For this, almost at every union a kazi (marriage registrar) is appointed. To leave a marriage unregistered is punishable by law, in spite of it 50% of marriages in the country remain unregistered. To have marriages registered *kazis*, *imams* along with union parishad personnel and conscious citizens from all levels, have to take up initiatives. Special attention is necessary to see that marriages are not left unregistered. Let us make all aware of this issue.

***Declaration 3: Stop Violence against Women***

Like other parts of this country, in Swarupkathi everyday women are victimized by divorce, polygamy, dowry, child-marriage, smuggling-chains, rape and gang-rape, coerced into prostitution as well as regular physical and mental abuse. Meager redressing and prevention of violence towards women has given birth to an imperilling insecurity in society. Development projects are being hindered. The National Constitution assures equal rights for men and women, but the tenet of this equality is not being harnessed for women in reality. Hence, eluding public exposure women are being abused in many ways. Abuse of a woman is a major obstacle to the progress of a civilized society. So, the abuse of women has to be obviated for good. We must grow the consciousness in all, about

preventing abuse of women by changing the attitude of seeing them as inferior to men. Let us conjure a movement against abuse of women.

***Declaration 4: Registration of Birth is a Child's Birth-Right, let us Commence their Lives properly by having their Births Registered***

By law every birth must be registered within eight days. The identity, age, when and where the child was born, who the parents are and all such information regarding a new born child have to be recorded at the government registrar. The organisations that assigned to have the births registered should be active. A birth certificate is the assurance of citizenship and nationality for a child. Without it the determination of age for appropriate medicine, prevention of child-marriage, elimination of child-labour, smuggling of women and children, retrieving of smuggled children, solution to prostitution problems and rape victim's age-for all such issues this certificate is essential. According to the Government regulations, every child's birth registration is compulsory. So, let us commence the children's lives properly by having their births registered.

***Declaration 5: Participation of Women in the Shalish and Other Social Activities have to be Assured***

Without the participation of women, a competent local Government or good governance cannot be established. But participation of women at the local ruling constituents is very little. For this, on one hand they are left out of the development projects, on the other hand they miss out on the benefits offered. Diverse initiatives have to be taken to raise the participation of women in all local administrations. Let participation at Shalish be for women as much as men.



**Declaration 6: *At the Union Council the Newly Elected Female Members' Activities have to be Strengthened Further***

The union parishad at the local government administration of Bangladesh holds 133 years of tradition. But in this union parishad, males are the majority, at all levels. As a result the female members cannot carry out their given duties properly. As at the national parliament, here in the union parishad the female members remain at seats of political ornamentation. They do not get to know their duties or the sphere of activities, and most often are ill-treated by other male members and the Chairman of the parishad.

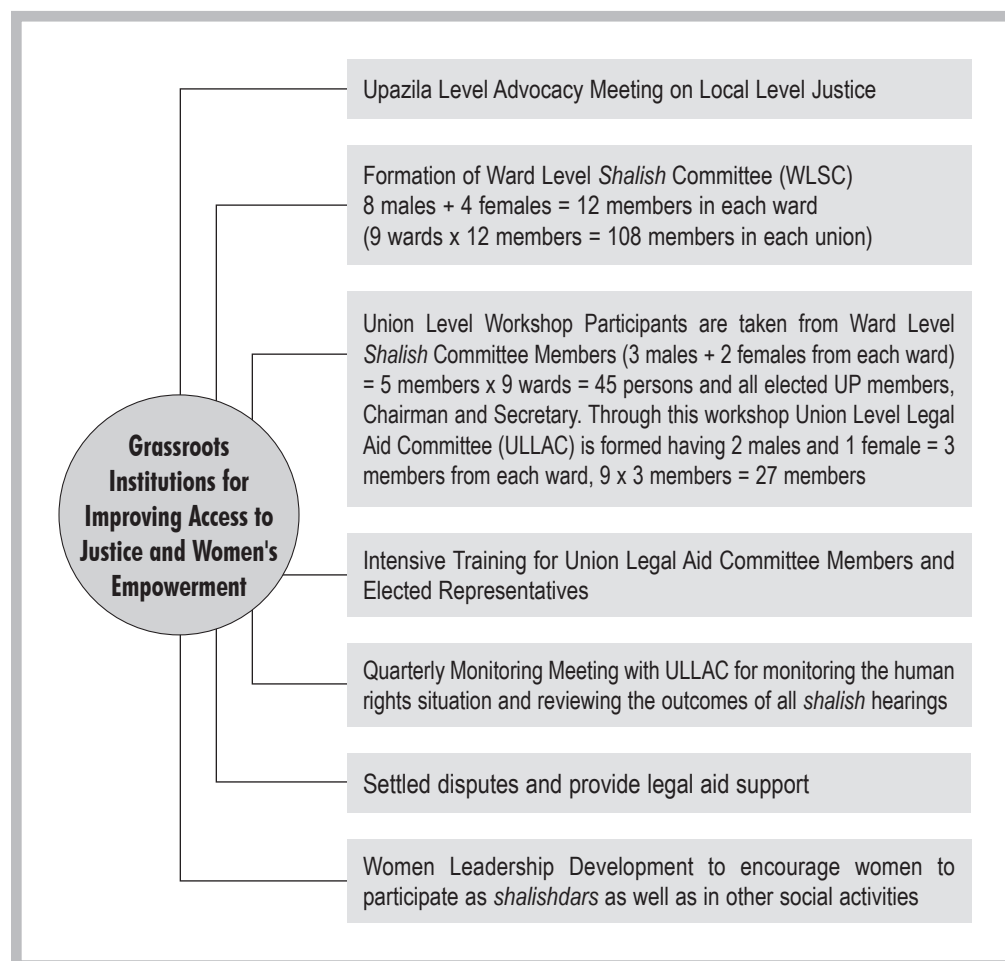
This issue needs resolving immediately. That is why, it is necessary to assign the female members their duties properly, so they can strengthen their activities.

Actually these declarations have brought some success for the grassroots women leaders' conference. So, upon gathering here we sit again soon taken up action-plan for implanting the declarations. We are also assuring the second conference of **Grassroots Women Leaders' Development Network** will be held in March 2004. So is declared, at this great conference.

*Such declarations have been made by Women Leaders at two other Nagorik Uddyog project areas.*

## ANNEX - B

### NU's Approach to Improve Access to Justice



## Our Working Areas

| Districts    | Thanas         | Unions   |  |
|--------------|----------------|--|--|
| Tangail      | Kalihati       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Kokdahara</li> <li>◆ Kalihati</li> <li>◆ Nagbari</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Sahadebpur</li> <li>◆ Balla</li> <li>◆ Elenga</li> </ul>            |
| Rangpur      | Badarganj      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Gopalpur</li> <li>◆ Gopinathpur</li> <li>◆ Ramnathpur</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Damodarpur</li> <li>◆ Lohanipara</li> <li>◆ Mhadupur</li> </ul>     |
| Barisal      | Banaripara     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Banaripara Sadar</li> <li>◆ Eluhar</li> <li>◆ Baishari</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Udoy Kathi</li> <li>◆ Saliabagpur</li> <li>◆ Sayed kathi</li> </ul> |
| Pirojpur     | Swarupkati     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Atgar Kuriana</li> <li>◆ Baldia</li> <li>◆ Jalabari</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Shohagdal</li> <li>◆ Sutiakati</li> <li>◆ Sarangkhati</li> </ul>    |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>4 Thana</b> | <b>24 Union</b>  |  |



*Nagorik Uddyog* (Citizens Initiative) was founded in 1995 as a non-government organisation aiming to carry out activities in order to promote human rights and good governance, with a particular focus on strengthening the local governance. It is also committed to democratising the conventional system of mediation, establishing justice irrespective of gender and social status, and assisting in empowerment of women at grass roots level through educating them on political and women's human rights.

## Nagorik Uddyog

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