

Peace and Justice through Legal Empowerment: CPJ's Journey in 2019 – 2022

Faustina Pereira¹

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Rationale

As a multi-disciplinary academic institute, which has as its mission to promote global peace and social justice through quality education, research, training and advocacy, the Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ) of BRAC University is uniquely placed to contribute to a basic pillar of justice and peace – the legal empowerment of the poor and the marginalized. Insofar as we understand Legal Empowerment to be empowerment that is achieved through the use of law and legal processes to help poor, marginalized and disadvantaged populations gain access to justice and increased control over their own lives,² CPJ approaches legal empowerment both as a tool and a means to achieving justice and peace.

By its very foundational legacy and mandate, CPJ commands a unique position in Bangladesh in particular, and South Asia in general, and indeed globally, to contribute and take forward the discourse and practice on identifying and promoting sustainable and inclusive solutions on rule of law concerns such as fragility, conflict and violence – at the State, institutional and individual level.

For its forward looking strategy on legal empowerment initiatives, CPJ builds on the knowledge and strength gained from the wider BRAC Family's overall role in the journey from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, CPJ aims to build on an important aspect of the journey – the understanding of the linkage between law and development outcomes. For this the work of the Commission of the Legal Empowerment of the Poor (CLEP – a leading member of which was Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Emeritus Chair, (BRAC) and the Justice Task Force Report, among others, form the seminal basis for CPJ's work on Legal Empowerment.

CPJ's Positioning and Way Forward

Over the next three years (2019 – 2022), CPJ looks to position itself as a voice of relevance as well as a thought-to-practice leader on legal empowerment, nationally as

¹ Dr. Faustina Pereira, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh; Head, Legal Empowerment and Sustainable Development (LESD), Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ), BRAC University.

² Legal Empowerment Working Papers, Stephen Golub, Series Editor, IDLO (2010), at p. 2. Also available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/138100/Golub_Introduction.pdf

well as regionally. Given CPJ's unique positioning simultaneously within an academic and a development practice milieu, having a strong presence within the development framework of the wider BRAC family configuration, it will do all it can to harness the potential of a multi-faceted paradigm of justice and development. For this it will pivot firmly around the 2030 Agenda of the SDGs – which makes it clear that achieving sustainable development through justice and legal empowerment hinges on effective linkages between and across the various goals and targets, both vertically and horizontally. It will in particular focus on SDG 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for inclusive development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. CPJ will embrace a holistic viewpoint, and will seek to align and integrate its capabilities and initiatives with both Government and non-Government (State and non-State) actors. It will further combine and leverage complementary strengths with international and national partners.

Given the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDG agenda, CPJ understands that achieving the end goals of peace and justice through SDG16 is larger than the frame of SDG16 itself. As such CPJ will achieve its mission to promote peace, justice and social cohesion, through an “SDG 16+” pathway. For this it will supplement its three streams of work (academic, research, training) across all the other goals, including SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

The existing operational structure of the larger BRAC entity already allows for cross-programmatic linkages to respond to a common objective. CPJ will take advantage of this structure and effectively use the linkages it has to offer towards achieving the objective of Legal Empowerment. CPJ will build on the knowledge and innovations in the justice and development field to achieve and best practices of legal empowerment in the following three ways:

- a. Create interlinkages of relevance and impact with legal empowerment through CPJ's three streams: Academic, Training, Research
- b. Support and facilitate Convenings aimed at multiplication of voices, resources and platforms on legal empowerment
- c. Identify, support and contribute towards global justice innovations

Since its inception in 2016 CPJ has already positioned itself as an actor of relevance in all of its three streams, whether through successfully developing an ongoing knowledge platform through its edited volumes on social justice and fragility, or undertaking research leading to innovative outcomes such as the Peace Café, or running trainings in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar on cohesion and peace building.

CPJ's Legal Empowerment Stream will harness the gains from all of the above and will gauge traction from them through a rights-based, justice centric approach.

Three Year Plan

As mentioned above, while looking for new and relevant areas for expansion and traction, CPJ will aim to build on its existing streams. It will therefore arrange specific activities under its Legal Empowerment theme in the following manner:

- *Interlinkages of relevance and impact on legal empowerment interventions through CPJ's three streams: Academic, Training, Research*

Paralegal Certificate Course: Three courses a year. Target: to certify approx. 60 paralegals per year, inclusive of internship placements

- *Convenings leading to multiplication of voices, resources and platforms on legal empowerment*

Conference on Legal Empowerment and Paralegalism in South Asia/ Bangladesh

Grassroots Legal Empowerment Network:

Legal Empowerment Course (Asian Version):

- *Identification, support, contribution and linkage to global justice innovations*

Review and Contribute to CPJ's Research and Academic Outputs

Networking and Linkages – through the Legal Empowerment Network (LEN), and Grassroots Justice Prize, among others

A common point linking all of the activities mentioned above, is that CPJ's emphasis will be on (a) the informal rather than formal justice sector, and (b) SDG 16 as the unifier of all the sustainable development goals.

This approach makes particular sense, because the statistics on informal justice needs in Bangladesh are consistent with global findings that community or informal justice resolution forums help to resolve between 80 and 90 percent of disputes for the majority of populations.³ This area of legal empowerment, access to justice and working with governance and service institutions is a vast and complex area that provides ample

³ Ewa Wojkowska, *Doing Justice: How informal justice systems can contribute*. UNDP Oslo Governance Centre. 2006. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAWJUSTINST/Resources/EwaWojkowska.pdf>

operating space for and institution such as CPJ, beyond the traditional legal aid and access to justice actors. This operating space allows for Government as well as Non-Government actors to carry out multifaceted programming, either as a separate programme or as integrated with other interfaces.

These initiatives will be carried out by a small team of legal and development practitioners, under the Legal Empowerment Stream of CPJ, led by Dr. Faustina Pereira, Senior Advisor, CPJ.