Overview
This case study examines the effort by the government of Bangladesh to reduce overcrowding in its prisons. The government, with the support of development partners, instituted a program entitled Promoting Political Human Rights and the Fight against Corruption through Judicial and Prison Reform to reduce the number of pretrial prisoners. Paralegals were trained to provide legal assistance to prisoners and education on prisoners’ rights. Case Coordination Committees were established to improve case management, reduce backlog, and provide a forum for the coordination of efforts by stakeholders in the justice system. The number of pretrial detainees has dropped in some districts since the launch of the pilot program.

Key contextual conditions: Bangladesh’s justice system is overwhelmed, and its prisons are grossly overcrowded. Prisoners lack access to legal assistance, and a huge backlog of cases keeps many detainees in prison awaiting trial. Many detainees, especially the poor, are unaware of their legal rights. Coordination among stakeholders in the justice system was poor. Alternative dispute resolution is not widely used.

Key stakeholders: Government of Bangladesh; Ministry of Home Affairs; Ministry of Local Government; Law Ministry; Prison Directorate; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; UK Department for International Development; Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo; Case Coordination Committees; prisoners and their families in Bangladesh

Lessons Learned
- **Use a multilevel approach.** The program addressed issues at the highest levels of government through coordination among ministries, and at the most local levels, through Case Coordination Committees and Village Courts.
- **Use a multisector approach.** Coordination among justice system stakeholders (courts, police, prisons, state legal aid, the bar, and public prosecutors) led to agreement on policy reform.
- **Program personnel must be able to build relationships** with and maintain the trust of government officials and other stakeholders.
- **Information management systems and audits** can identify areas of need, target beneficiaries, and provide evidence of effective strategies.
Development Challenges

- The criminal justice system in Bangladesh works slowly, causing a huge backlog of unresolved cases.
- Many people accused of crimes await their trials in prison because they do not know their rights or cannot afford to exercise them.
- Encourage the use of alternative dispute resolution to divert cases from the criminal justice system and keep the accused out of prison.

Delivery Challenges

- Address the institutional blockages, such as frequent adjournments and delays, that interfere with the efficiency of the criminal justice system.
- Educate prisoners on their legal rights and provide assistance for the exercise of those rights.
- Foster trust and cooperation among stakeholders in the criminal justice system.