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We asked four members of the Legal Empowerment Network working in different regions, serving different clients to share about who is involved in their work and how they pursue remedies

Title Card:

Vesna Shapkoski

LET STATION, Macedonia

Hi everyone. My name is Vesna Shapkoski and I come from Association for legal education and transparency, LET STATION from Macedonia. We work on legal empowerment and access to justice for the marginalized communities with particular focus on Roma community and people living in rural areas.

Title Card:

Khalid Hussain

Council of Minorities, Bangladesh

My name is Khalid Hussain. I work for Council of minorities. We have paralegal programs supported by Namati. We are working in five cities in Bangladesh. Basically, our beneficiaries are Urdu-speaking linguistic minorities those are living in 160 camps all over Bangladesh. We are trying to help the camp community to achieve the civil documentations, like the birth certificate, national ID card, passport, opening the bank account.

Title Card:

Luthna Chimbwete

Southern African Litigation Centre, Malawi

My name is Luntha Chimbwete and I work for the Southern African Litigation Centre in Malawi. I support the promotion of human rights and access to justice. I also support the advancement of the rule of law and democratic governance in Southern Africa.

Title Card:

Macarena Martinic

Fiscalia del Medio Ambiente (FIMA), Chile

My name is Macarena Martinic, I am the coordinator of the Access to Justice area of the NGO FIMA, where we support communities in the defense of their territories, participation in environmental decisions and access to justice.

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Who is involved in the process of legal empowerment in your work?

What roles do the lawyers play?

Who is an equivalent of community paralegals in your region?

How are they recognized/trained?

Title Card:

Vesna Shapkoski

LET STATION, Macedonia

Our team that works on legal empowerment is consisted of lawyers, paralegals, and community health promoters. Lawyers are the main providers of legal aid and they are offering their services directly in our main office and the three mobile offices in the rural communities, but also indirectly through the paralegals who consult and communicate with them each time there is a more complex case to be solved. Then there are the paralegals, which are the main carriers of the community work. They are members of the communities that do not have a law degree and whom we train to recognize and be able to properly address the administrative and legal issues of the people. Finally, we have the community health promoters, which are field activists, engaged in informal education and community organizing related to health rights.

These people are particularly important during the time of pandemic and they're constantly engaged in sharing information, education and protective measures; and immunization; distribution of hygienic products, disinfectants and so on. Again, these are members from the

communities coming from different age and background that we train on realization of health rights, identification of systemic obstacles and community organizing for advocacy.

Title Card:

Khalid Hussain

Council of Minorities, Bangladesh

In this paralegal project, basically paralegals are involved to help the camp community and along with them we have some pro bono youth group and pro bono women group. We don't have any lawyers to help the community people. But sometimes we just get the support from the lawyers like, they advise us and they just make some legal documents, but we are not providing any legal aid support from the lawyers.

Title Card:

Luthna Chimbwete

Southern African Litigation Centre, Malawi

The Southern African Litigation Centre consists of human rights lawyers who support strategic litigation, advocacy, and capacity strengthening in Southern Africa. We also work with community-based organizations and paralegals to support and empower marginalized communities in Southern Africa.

In Malawi, the paralegals based at the Centre for Human Rights, Education, Advice, and Assistance, collect potential cases for strategic litigation and advocacy. These paralegals also act as points of contact between marginalized communities, the Centre for Human Rights in Malawi and Southern African Litigation Centre overall.

Title Card:

Macarena Martinic

Fiscalia del Medio Ambiente (FIMA), Chile

Access to Justice is a team made up of lawyers and scientists. Our role is to collaborate in legal empowerment by making known the tools that environmental institutions provide for the advocacy of citizenship, bringing it closer to the people, and the knowledge of their rights. We

also provide free legal advice and assistance to the communities we work with before judicial instances, if necessary. In our country, the institution of paralegals is not recognised. In practice, it is the leaders of the communities who are our counterparts in the territories and the main channel of communication. It is with them that the work strategies are concretised, with whom the community is organised for specific presentations where proceedings are required, and with whom workshops or other instances of legal empowerment are organised.

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What sorts of institutions have you found most promising for the issues that you focus on most?

What is your most successful pathway to remedies?

Title Card:

Vesna Shapkoski

LET STATION, Macedonia

In our work, we mainly communicate and cooperate with institutions from local level, such as local government, center for social work, local offices of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice. In the legal empowerment work, we're strongly advocating for development and advancement of the former free legal aid system governed by the Ministry of justice and the local offices.

They're the main state carriers of the formal tools for access to justice. However, although Macedonia has a law on free legal aid, a lot of things are yet to be developed and introduced in this formal system.

Title Card:

Khalid Hussain

Council of Minorities, Bangladesh

Within this project, we are engaged with the most promising institutions - city corporation authority, passport authority, and the social welfare authority.

And in this way, we have done so many advocacies to achieve this civil documentations issues and all the issues of the Biharis.

Title Card:

Macarena Martinic

Fiscalia del Medio Ambiente (FIMA), Chile

The support provided by ONG FIMA to the communities depends on their needs. Most of the cases involve extractive projects that will have an impact on the community, which enter an environmental assessment. In these cases, we assist the community in accessing all the administrative instances contemplated by the Environmental Impact Assessment System, including sponsorship in subsequent judicial instances, in environmental courts. In the case of violations of fundamental rights that require immediate action, FIMA files appeals for protection on behalf of those affected in Courts of Appeals of common jurisdiction. In this way, depending on the case or the needs of the community, other mechanisms can be used, such as requests for access to information, legal pronouncements to the Comptroller's Office, complaints to the supervisory body, the Superintendence of the Environment, among others.

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**What have been the biggest challenges you face in pursuing justice
and how do you respond?**

Title Card:

Luthna Chimbwete

Southern African Litigation Centre, Malawi

Lack of cooperation between bodies within the justice system makes it hard for vulnerable groups to access justice. Where it's located in urban areas, expensive lawyers and legal processes steeped in specialist languages also makes it hard for vulnerable and poor groups to claim their rights in courts. For this reason, the Southern African Litigation Centre advocates for legislation to allow paralegals to represent people in the justice system. The Southern African Litigation Centre also has policies and mechanisms in place to secure integrity of all personal information and to prevent unauthorized access of such information.

Title Card:

Vesna Shapkoski

LET STATION, Macedonia

If you are a justice worker or a grassroots justice organization, when it comes to challenges, it is double the trouble. You have to fight your own organizational challenges, at the same time, struggling with challenges your beneficiaries face. And sometimes it is impossible to decide which one of these should be given a priority and be urgent in dealing with. In order to do that, you have to build a strong team that will share responsibilities as well as the successes. For us, especially in times of pandemic, it is crucial that we have different members of the team with different responsibilities regarding coping with challenges. So while some of them deal with the beneficiaries, others are focused on organizational ones.

The challenges of civic space are such that require constant adjustment on our side. We continuously work on improving our services and introducing alternative ways of communication. We introduced telephone and online service called emergency paralegal aid which is a twenty four seven available service via phone and website in order to ease the communication with beneficiaries in the time of pandemic.

Furthermore, since we work with rural communities that are very remote and lack access to legal services, we initiated mobile offices for legal aid that travel in three different locations during the week, providing direct services. The mobile offices are located in municipal spaces in three different villages that are provided for free by the local self-government of the three municipalities. When it comes to financial sustainability, having in mind the restriction of donor support last year we started with an economic activity of our own in order to self-generate a part of our income and make sure that at least the most critical services we provide are secured and obtainable.

Title Card:

Khalid Hussain

Council of Minorities, Bangladesh

The biggest challenge of this project is our categories. As you know, the Biharis are living in 160 camps and all the camps are in the urban base.

So when the camp dwellers are applying for any civil documentations or anything, the authorities say you are a stranded Pakistani, you are living in the camp, you don't have any electricity bill or permanent address. So that is the biggest challenge, but we are trying to do the advocacy and most of the time we have done so many advocacy to achieve, to resolve this issue of the camper. And very recently, last year in October, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, she gave this statement in front of the Netherlands ambassador that the Rohingyas and the stranded Pakistanis are a burden on Bangladeshi economy. So these are the biggest challenges recently we are facing. To resolve these challenges we organized an in-hand meeting and we invited some intellectuals from Bangladesh, like barrister Sara Hussain, Mr. Zakir Hussain, and some UN expert. So they advised us that we need to do more and more advocacy, we need to do more and more dialogue within the local community and civil society.

Title Card:

Macarena Martinic

Fiscalia del Medio Ambiente (FIMA), Chile

The greatest challenges in our work are the inequality of resources when confronting private extractive projects, the inequality of information, lengthy judicial processes that take a long time to resolve, and decisions that are not implemented and require strong pressure from the community.

In relation to the security of the defenders we work with, at FIMA we have focused mainly on providing guidance on how to carry out safe actions in environmental defense, legal assistance in the event of intimidation, and on raising awareness of situations of harassment and danger to environmental defenders.

Finally, we have put strong pressure on the State through campaigns for the ratification of the Escaz' Agreement, the first step that would allow the adoption of an institutional framework for the protection of environmental defenders.