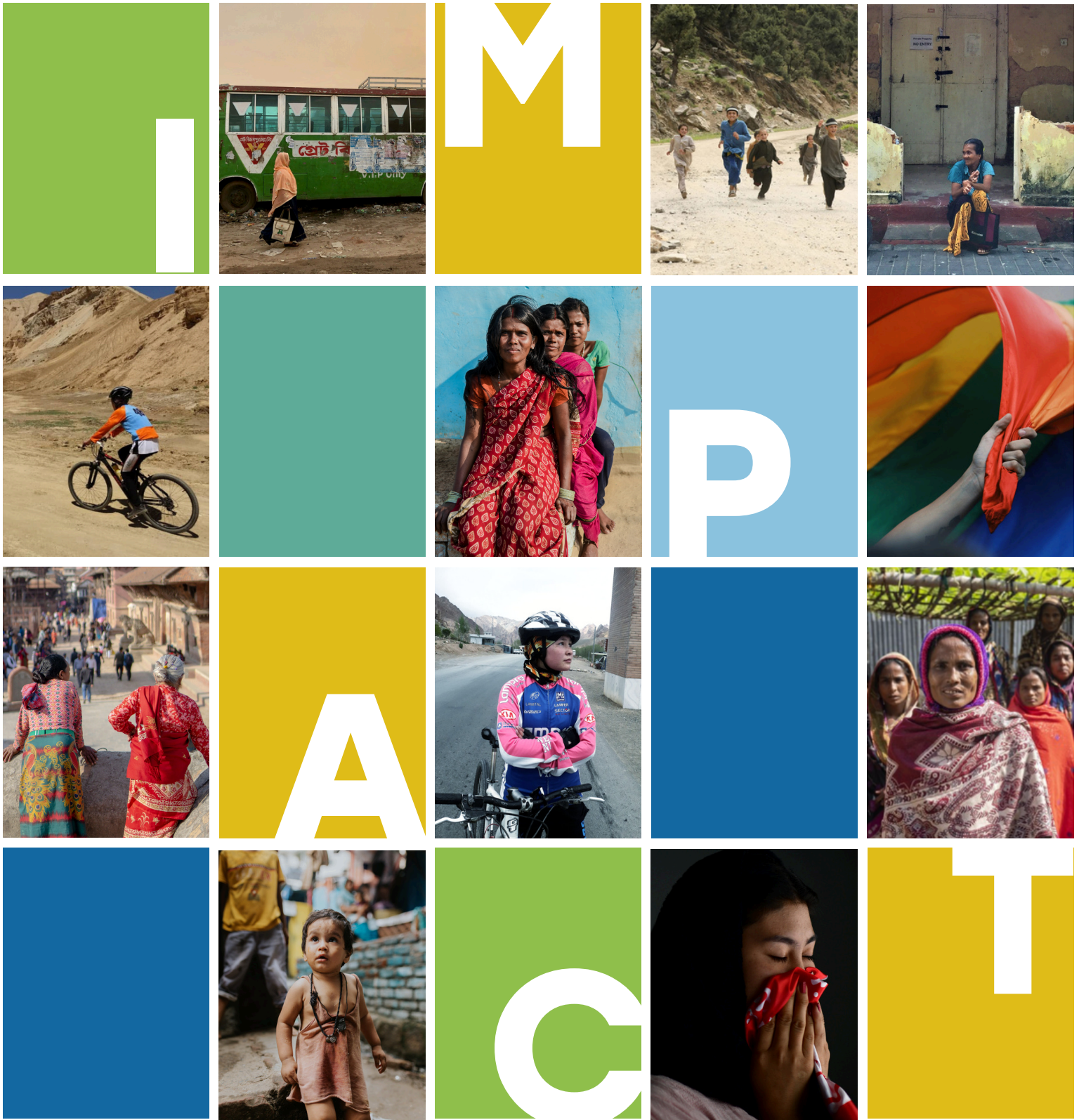




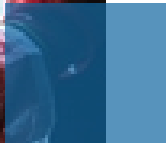
iProbono

GLOBAL IMPACT
REPORT 2024

in pursuit of a
just society



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A message from our CEO

For many of us, justice is an abstract idea. For others, it's a feeling, or an image we carry in our minds, or a particular achievement. For me, justice is not a moment but a movement - one that begins with the acknowledgement of injustice, and the desire to change things alongside like-minded collaborators.

At iProbono, we have long held to the ideal that we stand with people across South Asia and the diaspora in their pursuit of justice. What does this mean in practice? This impact report sets out the answer to this question. In the pages that follow you will find stories from our work in different regions and across thematic areas. Each section sets forth the cornerstones of our work: from justice through legal support and reclaiming the law, to shifting systems and strengthening civil society. Why do these matter as much today as they did 16 years ago, when we began our journey? I believe it's because as the path to justice becomes increasingly fraught, the work of social justice organisations becomes all the more critical. But not only must we continue to work for the vulnerable communities that are our stakeholders, we must reflect on how we do this work and the imprint we create.

In a year of painful conflict and instability, I have once again seen communities and individuals cleaving to the idea of justice, and taking action to achieve it. Even as structural inequities deepen and fundamental rights face renewed contestation, iProbono continues to evolve—guided by our conviction that a just society is not mere abstraction, but the outcome of strategic interventions, grassroots empowerment, systemic reform, and sustained effort.

At the heart of this work is Accelerate, our social justice lab. Accelerate deepens our commitment to community-led change by supporting ventures and leaders confronting entrenched inequities. This year, it nurtured projects like the Queer Archives of the Bengal Delta, safeguarding queer memory and resistance, and continued to stand with Afghan women as they rebuilt their lives after fleeing persecution in their own country. By pairing legal expertise with strategic networks and sustained support, Accelerate strengthens communities to lead the change they most need.

The people whose stories we are highlighting this year include women garment and domestic workers in Bangladesh, members of the queer community in Sri Lanka, and indigenous community members living in remote parts of Nepal, all resolved to fight for, or better understand, their rights. Each of them stand out for modelling community leadership and resilience in the face of complicated court processes, systemic biases, and social taboos, among many other factors. They stand out for sparking deep change.

I hope you find them as inspiring as I do.

Thank you for your continued partnership and solidarity.



Mariam Faruqi
CEO, iProbono



Program Highlights

Justice through Legal Support

Although free legal aid is constitutionally promised across several countries in South Asia, it is often out of reach for vulnerable populations. Institutional processes to access this support are opaque and discourage people from pursuing legal action. Even in cases where state aid is utilised, it is found to be lacking in standards and care. Alternative modes of justice delivery can bridge this deficit by centring people's legal needs, lived experiences, and emotions.

iProbono's legal support extends beyond action in the courtroom to encompass legal advice, psychosocial care, and moral support, creating conditions for community-centred pro bono support that builds agency and confidence. This year, we were approached by a diverse group of individuals, including members of Sri Lanka's queer community and working women from Bangladesh to support them in their journeys towards justice.



Standing Up for Queer Rights

Sri Lanka

Deshan

The internet can be a powerful space for connection and solidarity for vulnerable communities lacking avenues for free expression. Increasingly though, it is manipulated and wielded in ways that cause significant emotional, psychological, and financial distress. Online interactions, at times seemingly benign, can rapidly deteriorate into episodes of offline intimidation and violence. In 2024, we began hearing from members of the queer community who were being blackmailed and threatened after encounters on online dating apps. Deshan was one such person. After meeting Malith on the Grindr app, he decided to meet him in person. At Malith's home, Deshan was assaulted by two men claiming to be Malith's brothers. They took photos of Deshan and Malith, threatening to leak them to Deshan's wife. They also forced Deshan to reveal the PIN numbers of his ATM cards and used these to steal more than LKR 200,000 (approx. USD 700). We took legal action to ensure that the perpetrators were arrested, and succeeded in recovering a part of the sum stolen. In a country that is yet to legalise same-sex relations, favourable court outcomes like these serve as powerful reminders that the right to justice exists for everyone, and not just a privileged few.

Nayoma and Shamali

Earlier this year, Nayoma and Shamali, two transgender women, stepped into an unlocked changing room at a shopping centre in Colombo, reasonably assuming it to be unoccupied. When they discovered another woman was inside, Nayoma and Shamali immediately apologised. By this time, the customer had begun to make derogatory remarks about their gender transition. She then physically assaulted them. Nayoma lodged a complaint at a nearby police station soon after the incident.

Meanwhile the perpetrator filed her own complaint, which the police chose to investigate instead of the initial complaint filed by Nayoma. When the case reached the Magistrate's Court, iProbono submitted multiple applications highlighting the police's failure to investigate Nayoma's complaint first, as was required by law. Mediation was advised, and although Nayoma and Shamali showed up on each occasion to arrive at an early resolution of the case, the perpetrator did not. When the case finally reached trial, we once again highlighted the police's failure to act in line with due process and argued that the case be discharged. Our application was heard, and Nayoma and Shamali were at last released. Their case illustrates how deep-seated police bias can have a tremendous impact on the legal process. The court's decision to discharge Nayoma and Shamali sets an important precedent, not only emphasising the transgender community's right to full protection under the law but also sending a clear message that police impunity is unacceptable.

Before approaching iProbono, we were referred to another lawyer who dragged our case on for a year. My daily life was badly affected because I was always thinking about this case. I was depressed and having suicidal thoughts. Shevindri (Manuel, iProbono's Program Manager) provided us with a lot of confidence. She was a big mental release for me, and she also finished the case quickly. As a transgender woman, it was a huge support to me, and a major financial help. iProbono's support to the queer community is a huge service."

Nayoma, litigant

Mobilising Working Women

in Bangladesh

Women in garment factories and domestic work form the backbone of Bangladesh's economy. But they often face abuse and exploitation by both their employers and close family members. While the motivation to take legal action is strong, the cost is often prohibitive. Recognising this pressing need, iProbono and Karmojibi Nari created the Legal Aid Clinic project.

We held 14 such legal clinics at women's 'cafes' across working class localities in Dhaka, creating a safe and supportive environment for those seeking legal redress. Our legal counsel enabled women to claim unpaid wages and take action on domestic abuse. For many, the decision to advocate for themselves came at great personal risk as it openly challenged dominant patriarchal norms. But they remained steadfast in their pursuit of justice. "The people in my village discouraged me from going to court, but today I was able to learn what remedies I can avail", said Razia, who attended a clinic. Several women also returned after an initial consultation to pursue formal litigation. Like Lila, a victim of financial fraud, who is currently pursuing legal action against the accused.

100+ women
used these clinics in 2024



The Legal Aid Clinics at our women's cafes started because the women we work with told us clearly what they needed: free and accessible legal assistance for the problems they face at home and at work. It shows what is possible when we build something based on what women actually ask for."

**Sunzida Sultana, Additional
Executive Director,
Karmojibi Nari**

Humaira Ahmmed Misha

Misha's life was upended in 2024 when her husband became addicted to drugs, engaged in extramarital affairs, and abandoned all responsibilities towards their family. Overwhelmed and distressed, Misha attempted suicide. Her husband's addiction created financial debt and, as a result, Misha faced constant harassment from lenders. Her husband and in-laws also falsely accused her of infidelity with one of the creditors and publicly assaulted her in the street, leaving her traumatised. Misha decided to divorce her husband and waive her right to dower. Determined to leave her abusive marriage and reclaim her agency, she visited one of our legal aid clinics. iProbono advised her on the documentation she needed to assert her legal right to custody and maintenance. Empowered by the legal support she received, Misha was finally able to dissolve her marriage and retain custody of her children.



How did your decision to pursue legal action change you?

When my ex-husband finally threw me out of my house, I realised what a big mistake I had made by allowing injustice to continue for so long. Even though I was only 20 years old, I was in so much trouble. I still can't get out of it, because people around me continue to label me as a divorcee. They are very angry with me because I stood up to him. My father didn't offer me shelter after my divorce. In fact, he spread rumours about my character. But I don't care. I'm somewhat educated, I've rented my own place, and I have a job now. My dignity comes first."

Humaira Ahmmed Misha



iProbono and Karmojibi Nari lead a legal education session in Dhaka, empowering working women to navigate the legal system with confidence.

Reclaiming the Law

When rights are at risk, preventive action is critical. Legal awareness bridges this gap between vulnerability and justice. To illustrate what the law can tangibly do to change a life, iProbono worked with allies, partners, and community members to develop various practical resources that translate legal knowledge into actionable guidance. Through training and dissemination workshops, we created a strong foundation of these resource ownership among both practitioners and community members, galvanising their interest in activating the law to advance basic rights and freedoms.

Empowering Young Women for Life after Trauma

in Sri Lanka

Survivors of childhood abuse living under institutional care are expected to re-integrate into society when they turn 18. Often they lack resources and support to manage this critical transition. iProbono was invited by the Emerge Lanka Foundation, which provides comprehensive support to survivors transitioning out of state care, to empower these young women with knowledge of their legal entitlements - for example, how to access free legal support, or lodge a complaint with the police. Our training was also used to deliver a toolkit, 'Navigating Legal Rights and Protections in Sri Lanka', which brings together important legal insights and guidance. These resources have enabled survivors to build their new lives with a renewed sense of agency and resilience.



The legal toolkit meets survivors exactly where they are. This knowledge doesn't just shield them from re-victimisation, it empowers them to break cycles of abuse and become advocates for others."

Kaavya Pathirana,
Communications Lead, Emerge
Lanka Foundation



When I joined my new place of work, my employer took a photo of me without asking me. I didn't know where it would be posted and anything could've happened with that photo. I remembered what I learned from the toolkit about consent and asked him to take down the photo. When he finally did, I felt relieved - and proud that I was able to speak up for myself."

**Asanka, resident, Emerge Centre
for Reintegration**

Healing
from trauma
is a journey.
This toolkit is
your guide.



Our social media campaign created a conversation on the rights and requirements of survivors.

Harnessing Design Thinking to Strengthen Abortion Access

in Nepal

Nepal's Constitution guarantees every woman the right to safe motherhood and reproductive health. This includes autonomy over one's decision to have children as well as the right to terminate the pregnancy. But laws outlined under the National Penal Code (2017) and the Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act (2018) currently allow abortion under specific circumstances only, leaving women unprotected and vulnerable to prosecution and imprisonment for up to five years. Fear of these legal repercussions often push women, especially those who are poorer and more marginalised, towards unsafe and illegal abortions that can cause longer-term health issues or even death.

To close these gaps between abortion laws and constitutional rights, iProbono co-created a legal education intervention under its Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) program. Together with colleagues from the University of Warwick, City Law School, University of London, Law and Policy Forum for Social Justice (LAPSOJ), and the Nepali artist Kripa Joshi, we developed a first-of-its-kind toolkit that simplifies legal information about abortion laws using visual communication tools and design thinking. A practical 'how to' manual and video explainer were also created as accompanying resources to guide various stakeholders - lawyers, civil society activists, doctors, and nurses - on how to integrate the toolkit into their everyday professional practice.

This legal design project is part of a wider campaign aimed at fully decriminalising abortion in Nepal and invigorates a Public Interest Litigation initiated by iProbono in 2021. Although our petition is still pending before the Supreme Court, the toolkit sparked new conversations foregrounding the need for urgent and significant changes to the law.

In September, iProbono launched this toolkit in Kathmandu at a gathering of lawyers, activists, former members of the judiciary, journalists, and doctors. Kalyan Shrestha, former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Nepal, noted:

“The toolkit we have developed can serve as an invaluable resource for service providers, such as doctors, nurses, and health workers, as well as for the general public. It is my hope that this toolkit will be fully utilized and that its reach will continue to expand.”

The launch was accompanied by workshops involving innovative simulations to demonstrate how lawyers, activists, and medical professionals can use the toolkit to support women and girls claiming their reproductive health rights.

Reproductive rights are rights that concern women's rights, and reproductive rights are part of the human rights of women. That's why whether a woman gives birth, how many children she has, and whether she wants a child or not are all matters that fall under a woman's human rights.”

Toolkit champion and community leader Sushila Gole, National Indigenous Women Forum



(From L-R) Prem Chandra Rai (Executive Director, LAPSO), Mariam Faruqi (CEO, iProbono), Dr Mara Malagodi (Warwick Law School), Hon'ble Kalyan Shrestha (Former Chief Justice, the Supreme Court of Nepal) and Hon'ble Justice Hari Phuyal (Justice, Supreme Court of Nepal) launched the toolkit.

The Legal Design Toolkit that we created under our joint [#DesignTheLawNepal](#) project harnesses the power of visual communication methods informed by comparative legal analysis to enhance sexual and reproductive health rights. We share iProbono's vision that these rights require an innovative and inclusive approach, and we continue to work with Nepali stakeholders in their fight to break down the intersectional barriers to fulfilling these rights.”

Dr Mara Malagodi, University of Warwick, Dr Sabrina Germain, and Professor Emily Allbon, City Law School, University of London

250+ DOWNLOADS IN 2024



‘In Pursuit of a Just Society: A Visual Journey’, an exhibition showcasing the reproductive justice movement and iProbono's impact in Nepal.

Resourcing the Queer Community to Tackle Gender-Based Violence

in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's colonial-era laws criminalising same-sex relations, together with the shame and stigma surrounding the queer community, discourage survivors of online violence from seeking legal redress. At times, survivors are even unable to recognise this violence as a violation of their legal rights. Shongshoptok, a grassroots organisation dedicated to supporting queer lives from vulnerable, low-income, and indigenous backgrounds, reported more than 500 cases of dating blackmail from 2020 to 2024.



iProbono collaborated with Shongshoptok to develop a community toolkit that provides guidance to prevent, respond to, and address these crimes. To ensure that it was meaningfully shaped by the community's lived experiences and needs, consultations were conducted with more than 100 queer activists and individuals across the country. Key components of the toolkit were used to inform the training curriculum for five learning sessions delivered to roughly 75 members of the queer community. By the end of these sessions, we observed greater fluency with best practices in digital safety among participants.

Shifting Systems

Shaping institutions entrusted to deliver justice is critical to bring about lasting change. We partnered with stakeholders to assess critical gaps in the child protection system and identify practical solutions. We mobilised to end corporal punishment, exposed institutional deficits and lapses within state bodies, and set new standards and benchmarks for what an accountable and responsive child protection system can look like.

Campaigning to End Corporal Punishment

in Sri Lanka

Corporal punishment harms children both physically and psychologically, deeply affecting their overall well-being. iProbono met with the President of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickramasinghe, as part of a wider delegation of civil society activists and legal experts calling for a Penal Code amendment to outlaw corporal punishment. On the eve of the International Day to End Corporal Punishment, the Cabinet passed an amendment to this effect. iProbono marked the occasion by co-convening a multi-stakeholder roundtable with the Child Protection Alliance, hosted by the Canadian High Commissioner. Child rights advocates, government ministers, and legal professionals cautiously welcomed the Amendment Bill, discussing its likely future implications and identifying supporting institutional, legal, and socio-cultural measures needed to translate the Bill into reality. Sahil, a young participant at the gathering, took the floor to remind everyone that the fight isn't over until all children are safe.

Driving Institutional Transparency and Effectiveness

in Sri Lanka

Accurate and timely data on child abuse conviction is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the child protection system. Last year, Dr Tushara Wikramanayaka, Founder of the NGO Stop Child Cruelty Trust, formally approached the NCPA - the government's lead advisory body on child protection - to request conviction data spanning 2010 to 2021, along with the NCPA's most recent annual reports. Her request was denied. iProbono worked in collaboration with our network lawyer to support Dr Wikramanayaka in her efforts to mobilise the RTI Commission to secure and make this data publicly available. The petition submitted to the Commission was successful, and crucially noted that the NCPA was obligated to maintain accurate data on case progress including details of all legal proceedings. It also mandated the NCPA to make their annual reports fully and publicly accessible.



(From L-R) Kugarajah Kalaatharshani (Program Officer, NCPA), Dimuthu Galapathi (Assistant Director Planning and Monitoring, NCPA), Rohana Ranasinghe (Director of Research & Development, NCPA), Shevindri Manuel (Program Manager, iProbono), Aritha Wickramasinghe (Equality Law Director, iProbono) and Ashvina Sinnetamby (former Program Officer, iProbono).



Child victims are so vulnerable and they should be protected by the law. But in Sri Lanka, it is a very sad situation - many child victims only see justice much later, when they're already adults. As a pro bono lawyer, what we can do is appear free of charge when these children need us."

Erandhi Abyenayake,
Attorney-at-Law and panel lawyer, who worked with iProbono to advocate for data transparency within the NCPA

iProbono collaborated with the Stop Child Cruelty Trust to conduct a thorough review and analysis of the data our petition made accessible. In our report, 'Children First: A Deep Dive into the National Child Protection Authority's Role in Child Protection', we uncovered a number of gaps, concerns, and patterns.

Key Findings

1000 child abuse complaints go missing between reporting and documentation

2/3rds of available psychosocial resources are currently untapped

<1 percent of cases use video evidence units designed to protect children from courtroom trauma.



Our report, available in English, Sinhala, and Tamil, was launched on Human Rights Day.

Our report also offers concrete recommendations to amplify the agency's overall impact, from expanding the coverage of video evidence units to developing a central database that tracks case progress and updates, among several others.

Seven million children in Sri Lanka would benefit from these measures being implemented, and they could minimise a backlog of over 40,000 unresolved child abuse cases



Strengthening Civil Society

The challenges faced by civil society actors in South Asia have led to a greater need for sharing expertise, counsel, creativity, resources, and risk. Mobilising our expertise and regional network of over 200 lawyers, we provided culturally-aligned technical and advisory support to enhance the efficacy and adaptive capacities of our partner organisations. We also amplified global civil society's efforts to open civic space by advocating to governments in and through multilateral institutions like the United Nations. Through our analysis and written submissions, we ensured visibility and urgent attention to concerning regional trends, paving the way for action and domestic reform.

Driving processes to strengthen freedom, rights, and democracy

in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka

Our work amplified the impact of civil society in multiple ways, from supporting the formal registration of NGOs to strengthening disability justice in Bangladesh to providing legal and drafting support to a community network advancing transgender rights in Sri Lanka.

In our submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, we highlighted asymmetries in state-civil society relations in Bangladesh and provided recommendations. These included reviving dialogue between government, civil society, and the media, amending and eliminating laws curtailing freedom of expression and association, and improving civil society's access to funding. Our contribution was referenced in the final report presented at the 57th session of the Human Rights Council in September 2024, and reinforced the need to uphold key democratic values and principles.

We also made a formal submission to the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), highlighting criminalisation, censorship, and increasing surveillance of queer communities in both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. These concerns, echoed in the UN's report, 'Freedom of Expression & Assembly: Protecting LGBTQ+ Rights', propelled the global conversation to urgently address these issues.



iProbono's report to the Independent Expert on SOGI.

After the collapse of the central government in Bangladesh in August, the interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus requested the UN Human Rights Office to launch a fact-finding mission investigating the former regime's crackdown on student-led protests. iProbono was invited to provide expert input and testimony. We highlighted how discrimination against already marginalised groups - in particular, the queer community and indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hills Tracts - intensified and took on more violent forms during the period of political upheaval following the fall of the government.

Accelerate

Through Accelerate, our social justice lab, iProbono provides community-led ventures and promising leaders with holistic support that transcends traditional funding models. It responds to community needs that are deeply felt and articulated, and implements interventions that are propelled by a deliberate and careful process of thinking and acting together. It emboldens justice organisations, grassroots leaders, and activist-scholars to serve their communities by strengthening their access to knowledge, advice, networks, legal counsel, and other forms of strategic support.

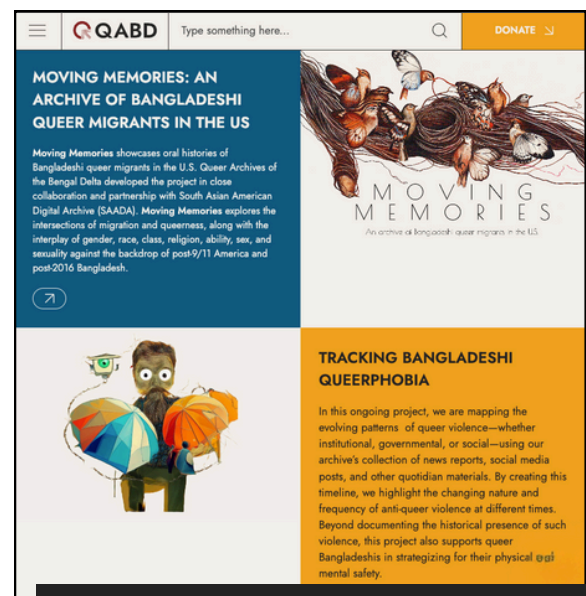
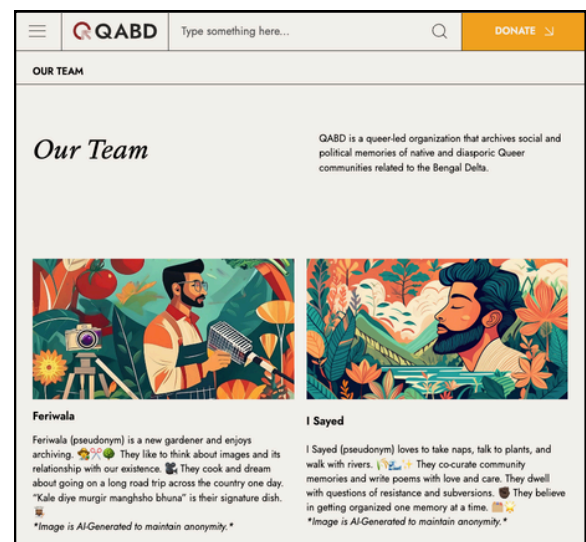
Queer Archives of the Bengal Delta: Stewarding Queer Memories

We continued to support the Queer Archives of the Bengal Delta (QABD), a community-led archive of queer experiences from Bangladesh and its diaspora, co-founded by Efadul Huq and Rasel Ahmed. As a living archive, QABD resists erasure through the preservation of memory. In October 2024, its website was officially launched at a gathering of the Bangladeshi queer community and their allies. Attendees participated in a guided exploration of QABD's digital archives, which included a discussion on the nuanced principles and protocols in place to encourage ownership, confidentiality and ethical memory preservation. Today it holds space for 250+ items drawn from queer lived experiences in Bangladesh and beyond, including diaries, letters, personal items, newspaper clippings, and photographs. The archive has also served as a strong foundation for queer organising in a number of different ways.



Through its support for QABD, iProbono has demonstrated a deep commitment to preserving and amplifying queer stories from Bangladesh and its diaspora with dignity, legal insight, and care. Their collaboration has strengthened our ability to document and protect the lived experiences of our communities.”

Efadul Huq and Rasel Ahmed,
Co-founders, QABD



The Queer Archives of Bengal Delta website showcasing its critical work.

Supporting Afghan Women at Risk

In August 2021, the Taliban took over Afghanistan and women cyclists and human rights defenders became immediate targets. Forced to flee, they spent months in hiding - cut off from family, stripped of their identities, and left without support - yet determined to rebuild their lives elsewhere. iProbono evacuated over 100 Afghans including women cyclists who had under a previous regime fought for their right to ride a bike. We provided comprehensive care that included urgent legal aid, mental health support and counselling, and safe pathways to resettlement, empowering them to find community, home, and purpose in their new environments.

Mahnaz Mohammadi is one such cyclist. Before the Taliban takeover, Mahnaz was a student and cyclist for the Salsal Shahmama cycling group. She was also an active participant of human rights programs and workshops. Recently, Mahnaz was granted political asylum in Germany after a complicated and emotionally rigorous legal process during which iProbono provided counsel, advice, and solidarity.



Mahnaz Mohammadi on her bike after being evacuated to Europe.
Photo by Mobeen Ansari for iProbono.

I feel like I am flying in the sky! I really appreciate all your support - you took my hand and told me to stay strong."

Mahnaz Mohammadi

Arifa Mirzaie is another cyclist who, with iProbono's support, resettled in Italy to forge a new path.

One day, I was told I had to marry a Taliban member. That was the moment I knew I had to run. I escaped, leaving behind my family, my home, and everything I knew. Italy became my second chance. I started from zero - no bike, no language, no safety net. But people helped me. A woman gave me a bike. I trained hard. I went to school. And now, I study engineering at a university in Rome."



Arifa Mirzaie cycling in Afghanistan before the Taliban's takeover.
Photo courtesy Arifa Mirzaie.

Community

Building a community of lawyers, government actors, judges, and other stakeholders committed to upholding and asserting human rights is how we lay the groundwork for accountable justice systems. Our convenings are designed to bring unusual constellations of actors together to create spaces for dialogue, unexplored perspectives, and joined-up thinking across different parts of the justice system. By strengthening relationships among and between these disparate parts and players, we centre a pluralistic approach towards improving accountability in the justice system.

350+

stakeholders gained new insights and skills that empowered them to push the boundaries of their practice in the justice system

Collective learning to amplify access to justice

in Sri Lanka

iProbono launched the Human Rights Defenders Collective, a group of 40 lawyers, activists, and police officers committed to responding to human rights violations against marginalised communities. This collective grew out of a shared enthusiasm and ambition to defend and assert human rights on behalf of vulnerable communities after its members participated in iProbono's access to justice legal education trainings, first in 2021, and then in 2023. Through peer-to-peer learning, mutual solidarity, and experience-sharing, the collective emboldens members to take on sensitive cases which might otherwise have fallen through the cracks.

It has already provided vital legal support to over 30 people, setting several significant legal precedents, particularly for Sri Lanka's queer community.

This year, iProbono provided technical expertise and training to the collective on the appropriate application of the recently introduced Online Safety Act to ensure that its open-ended clauses are interpreted in ways that advance, rather than imperil, the rights of women, children, and members of the queer community.

We also delivered a targeted training on queer rights to mediator officers from Sri Lanka's Ministry of Justice and the Mediation Boards Commission. Their role is to provide voluntary, semi-formal dispute resolution, and our training highlighted how intersectional discrimination faced by the queer community impedes their access to rights. It also explored access to justice strategies and policies to create safe, and inclusive environments for queer individuals in educational institutions, workplaces, healthcare settings, and broader community spaces.

Deepening trust between communities and legal practitioners

in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, we recognised a critical need for sensitised legal support to grassroots and marginalised communities facing abuse or exploitation. In response, we offered sensitisation trainings, delivered through a mix of case studies, legal analyses, and practical exercises. These trainings enabled legal practitioners to learn best practices in providing holistic legal care to marginalised groups, especially to gender-diverse populations. By creating reflective spaces for practitioners to engage directly with members of affected communities, we deepened trust and laid the foundation for skilful client care.

“As lawyers, we are always ready to provide legal services to any client who seeks our support. When it comes to working with members of the LGBT+ community, one of the key challenges we face is our own limited understanding of areas such as gender diversity. At the same time, many LGBT+ individuals may feel hesitant to fully trust us or share all the necessary information. iProbono’s trainings skillfully bridge this gap.”

Nomita Rani Biswas, iProbono panel lawyer, Bangladesh



(From L-R) Nazia Zebin (Executive Director, Oboyo), Juttaadul Jabed, (Program Manager, iProbono) at a discussion on building gender diverse communities, hosted by the German Embassy in Dhaka.

Alliance-building for reproductive justice

in Nepal

In a key step to improve abortion care in Nepal, iProbono brought together a curated group of lawyers, medical professionals, civil society activists, grassroots leaders, and representatives from inter-governmental organisations with experience or interest in advancing the complete decriminalisation of abortion in Nepal. The purpose of this gathering, held in Kathmandu, was to create space for open and constructive dialogue among different stakeholders working across distinct but interconnected areas of the reproductive rights ecosystem to gain a more holistic view of the challenges facing the movement to decriminalise abortion. While participants were initially clustered by profession, they came together through conversations that surfaced shared priorities, policy coherence, and interlocking strategies to improve abortion care and access.

“The consultation was incredibly rich. As a lawyer, it clarified many aspects of sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially from the perspective of medical professionals, which will be invaluable for legal advocacy and litigation.”

Dechen Lama, Lawyer and Founder, Satya Rakshya Law Firm

8.2million

women in Nepal could benefit if these measures are implemented

Fellowship

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Fellowship

Now in its third iteration, iProbono's Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Fellowship continues to support early-career lawyers with bold ideas to create meaningful change in Nepal. Fellows develop strategic litigation or advocacy projects in an area of their choice over 18 months. The fellowship equips them with the skills, tools, networks, and resources to grow as impactful litigators and changemakers in their communities, laying a foundation for lasting social justice.

Our 2024 ESCR Fellows are Pushpa Neupane and Barsha Sah. With support from our ESCR Adviser, Raju Chapagai, they are developing strategic litigation rooted in environmental law, equity and state accountability. In Nepal's Chure region, unchecked extraction of natural resources has caused severe groundwater depletion, triggering a drinking water crisis. While wealthier households can use deep water extraction systems, poor families relying on shallow hand pumps face increasing water scarcity. The strategic litigation will seek judicial intervention to address government inaction and uphold both constitutional and international guarantees of safe drinking water for all.

The fellowship has helped me grow confident in managing responsibilities. I've also learned how to structure legal information in a way that is accessible to grassroots communities."

Pushpa Neupane
ESCR Fellow

I have seen, both in my own community and across Nepal, how women struggle in every aspect of life. These realities have inspired me to commit to social justice."

Barsha Sah
ESCR Fellow



(From L-R) Lawyers Dechen Hyolmo Lama and Anurag Subedi with ESCR Fellow Barsha Sah during a group activity at the launch of our Legal Design Toolkit.



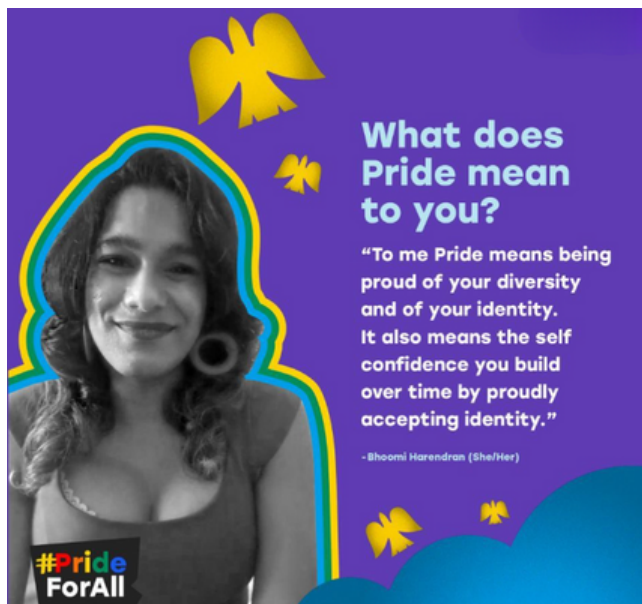
(From L-R) - Shreya Sanjel (Judicial Officer at the Supreme Court of Nepal), Taran Khan (Communications Lead iProbono), Mariam Faruqi (CEO iProbono), Hon'ble Justice Mrs Sapana Pradha Malla, Pushpa Neupane (ESCR Fellow), Barsha Sah (ESCR Fellow), Lottie Backstrom (Program Officer iProbono), Shraddha Prasai and Matina Shakya (Judicial Officers at the Supreme Court of Nepal).

Storytelling

Stories seed change. We collaborated directly with those at the margins, illuminating their voices in our campaigns and disrupting the stigma and shame surrounding them. We also ignited new narratives that questioned growing misinformation and intolerance towards minorities.

750,000+ views

across various platforms built an online community inspired to connect, care, and champion the rights of marginalised people



iProbono's Pride campaign highlighting access to justice for the LGBT+ community.

#PrideForAll

As part of our #PrideForAll social media campaign, we asked human rights defenders, activists, legal practitioners, and civil society representatives from the region to share what Pride means to them and reflect on their journeys as members of the queer community.

I see Pride as a sense of belonging to the global queer community, inspiring even the most excluded to celebrate their intersectional identities. It motivates us to fight for the rights of grassroots queer people in areas where they are not seen, heard, or felt."

Ifaar Hasan, Shongshoptok, Bangladesh

To me Pride means being proud of your diversity and of your identity. It also means the self confidence you build over time by proudly accepting identity. So during this month, think about how you will celebrate your whole life being proud of yourself."

Bhoomi Harendran, Founder and Executive Director, National Transgender Network, Sri Lanka

We amplified stories of everyday queer experience with commentary about the ground-level implications and impacts of policy on queer rights and freedoms. This included cautioning against an uncritical endorsement of Sri Lanka's new Online Safety Act and highlighting how restrictive laws, state surveillance, and social hostility have created significant barriers for queer civil society organisations in Bangladesh.

Stigma

After a successful run in 2022 and 2023, we launched the third season of our talkshow, Stigma, which amplifies the stories of marginalised people in Sri Lanka and creates a safe space to connect with a wider audience. This year, we heard from a survivor of an abusive marriage, a woman navigating patriarchy in politics, and a transgender man's experiences with the healthcare system in their journey towards self-actualisation, among several others.

My career in politics has not been easy or a smooth journey. Talking about women's rights, having better day-care facilities, improving the maternity clinics: these are not seen as pressing issues. We need more women in governance. But we often see women's issues being talked by women. We need men to also speak about women's issues. Because these are not women's issues, these are societal issues."

**Lihini Fernando, lawyer,
businesswoman and politician**

I went to a psychiatrist and he recommended a counsellor under him, so I was happy that finally someone can explain this to my parents. But unfortunately the counsellor mixed intersex and transgender, and then the counsellor suggested that I should go to conversion therapy. If the healthcare system does not know what a trans body is, then no matter what we do, they won't see us. We need to be visible, we need to talk about this."

**Thilina Anoma, Mental Health
Counsellor, National Transgender
Network**

In the lively virtual commentary and discussions sparked by these episodes, audiences expressed empathy and understanding, and even shared their own experiences with discrimination and abuse. Over the years, Stigma has helped to shape the internet as a safe space for solidarity, mutual care, and freedom of expression for some of Sri Lanka's most marginalised voices.



Acknowledgements

Thanks to our community for their generous support in enabling us to advance access to justice for all.

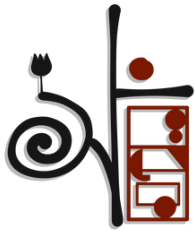
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