Dear Friends,

We are engaged in a vital struggle, in a brutal time. With authoritarianism and nativism rising, Namati and our many partners around the world are fighting to protect basic rights. We are working with communities who have been vilified and excluded to secure the documents that prove their citizenship. We are working with farmers to recover land that was stolen from them by corporations or by their own governments. We are challenging broken health systems and unlawful pollution. In the last five years we have proven that community paralegals and their clients can take on some of the toughest forms of injustice and win. And we have built the first global network dedicated to legal empowerment – now nearly 1,000 groups from 150 countries.

We are called in this moment to do much more. Our world is profoundly unequal. Authoritarians are responding to this inequality by scapegoating minorities and promising to turn systems upside down. We have an alternative: deepening democracy rather than giving up on it. Transforming institutions rather than abandoning them. Succeeding in this struggle is going to require much more of us, from many more of us. I hope all of you will be a part of it.

With love and respect,
– Vivek Maru, CEO

Implementing partners:

Ruma and her daughter outside their home in one of the camps of the minority Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh.

© LAURA GOODWIN, NAMATI

1,912
LEGAL IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

A team of 33 paralegals supported individuals from historically excluded communities in Kenya and Bangladesh to secure 1,912 legal identity documents.

SECURING CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS IN THE FACE OF DISCRIMINATION
BANGLADESH

Ruma’s daughter was approaching school age, but there was a problem: her daughter didn’t have a birth certificate. Ruma couldn’t enroll her in school without one.

Ruma lives in one of the camps of Bangladesh’s Urdu-speaking community, a minority group whose citizenship was not confirmed until 2008. Residents of these camps often do not understand their citizenship rights or how to get their documents, or they face discrimination when applying.

Fortunately, Ruma learned of Namati’s partner, Council of Minorities, and their community paralegals who could help her through the process. It was intimidating at first, Ruma admits, but she’s glad she did it. “I got the certificate of my daughter and I can admit my daughter in school,” she says happily.

Ruma now plans to help others get their documents and realize their rights to citizenship, too. Read more

PROTECTING COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS
SIERRA LEONE

Fanta Sia Nyanda awoke to shocking news. The local chiefs had sold her family’s land, and that of 70 other families in Nimiyama Chieflord, to a Chinese rubber company. For most of the families, farming this land was their entire livelihood.

Namati paralegals worked with the families to understand their rights – what the chiefs had done was illegal under Sierra Leonean law. When negotiations failed, they took the case to court – and won. In a landmark judgment, the court restored all 1,486 acres to the families and ordered that they be paid a compensation equivalent to US$85,000.

Fanta was overjoyed. “The law has come to our aid,” she said. “We now have confidence that the courts can work for us.” Read more

A team of 8 paralegals assisted more than 90 communities in negotiations with investors.

Fanta was one of over 70 clients whose land was returned after a high court ruling.

© NAMATI
For decades, the Burmese military seized land across Myanmar. In Eastern Shan province, they took Daw Mya’s land to plant teak trees for their private profit. When the government began to address these seizures in 2012, Daw Mya made multiple appeals for her land and was ignored. In 2015, she met a paralegal from Namati’s partner organization, Than Lwin Thitsar. Together, they collected official records and presented their case directly to the military. When negotiations failed, they wrote to every local body involved in land rights issues. Their letters led to an investigation. In 2016, a military-controlled civilian body ruled in Daw Mya’s favor. After nearly 20 years, her land was returned. Daw Mya’s victory sparked investigations into eight more cases nearby – all of which returned land to the rightful owners. Read more

A team of 240 paralegals worked with 46 communities across 6 countries to adopt clear rules for local land governance.

A woman farms her land in the village of Dwar Ther Hte, Myanmar. © Bremen Donovan

Community land is vital to the people of Handaraku, in Tana River county, Kenya. As pastoralists, they have depended on the common pastures and rivers to raise their cattle for generations. But their status as stewards of the land is undocumented. Companies and powerful individuals take advantage of communities like this, grabbing their resources and displacing families.

By working with Namati, the Kenya Land Alliance, and Oxfam, the people of Handaraku learned to use Kenyan law to protect their rights. In 2016, they documented their land governance by-laws and used GPS mapping to record the boundaries of their lands. In the words of Mzee Dido, a community mobilizer and elder: “this mapping and our community by-laws will protect our lands from investors coming to grab lands.” Read more

A team of 75 paralegals working across 4 states in Myanmar helped 5,000+ farmers secure administrative recognition of their land rights, including obtaining the return of seized land in 25 cases.
For years, the improper handling of coal and cement at Ambuja Cement’s jetty polluted the air near the Muldawakarka Port in Gujarat, India. Villagers worried that the dust posed health risks and farmers complained that it damaged their crops and fields.

The community wanted clean air and crops but was unsure what to do. “We knew the Pollution Control Board was responsible but we did not know where to go, which officer to meet and how to complain,” explains village head, Kishore Chagan Sikotaria.

By working with a paralegal from a joint Centre for Policy Research-Namati program, the community learned how to collect and present evidence for their case. The Pollution Control Board ordered Ambuja Cement to comply with existing environmental guidelines. Soon, Kishore says, the air was clearer than it had been in years. Read more
GRASSROOTS INNOVATION

With implementing partners, we develop methods by which community paralegals and clients tackle major justice challenges.

INSIGHTS FROM GRASSROOTS EXPERIENCE

These methods are applied by a growing network of organizations.

GLOBAL LEGAL EMPOWERMENT NETWORK

We foster learning and collaboration across the legal empowerment community.

PARALEGALS WORK WITH COMMUNITIES

Paralegals work with communities to bring positive new laws and policies to life.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

We secure positive, large-scale changes based on data from grassroots experience.

NATIONAL AND GLOBAL COALITIONS ADVOCATE FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES

National and global coalitions advocate for large-scale structural changes based on data from grassroots experience.
GLOBAL LEGAL EMPOWERMENT NETWORK

The Global Legal Empowerment Network, which Namati convenes, is the world’s largest community of grassroots justice practitioners and advocates. In 2016, the network grew to nearly 1,000 groups from 150 countries, an increase of 80%. We learned from each other on our online discussion platform and at in-person events such as the 2nd annual legal empowerment leadership course and learning exchanges in Tanzania and Kenya. From Nigeria to Argentina to the Philippines, members persuaded governments to act on the historic commitment to access to justice in the Sustainable Development Goals. Together, we are building a global movement working to advance justice throughout the world.

80% INCREASE

in the number of organizations in the global network.

“The Namati Learning Exchange Program is such a powerful program... I was able to identify a unique perspective of legal empowerment approaches to bring back to my office and add value to my work.”
— NONDO NOBEL BWAMI, ASYLUM ACCESS, TANZANIA

SYSTEIC CHANGE

12 SYSTEMIC CHANGES

Our paralegals collect data on every case they handle. This creates a powerful map of how laws and systems are working in practice, something often no one else has. In 2016, we used that information to successfully advocate with our clients for 12 systemic changes that affected hundreds of millions of people.

» Mozambique approved a five-year strategy for improving the quality of health services. Namati played a key role in its drafting, successfully advocating for a more active role for village health committees and communities in assessing health services and resolving grievances.

» Namati and partners established a coalition for the protection of citizenship rights in Kenya. The group has made recommendations to the Registration of Persons Bill and submitted a letter with 1,000 signatures to 40 Members of Parliament demanding improved access to citizenship documentation for all and limitations to discretionary processes that lead to discrimination.

» Paralegals and clients compelled the fisheries department of Karnataka state, India to issue an order to bull trawlers to comply with a regulation prohibiting them from fishing up to 12 nautical miles off the coast, in the territorial waters of the state. Strict implementation of this order will improve the livelihoods of 60,000+ traditional fisherfolk.

» Myanmar’s new National Land Use Policy incorporated recommendations made by Namati, including permitting joint land registration, acknowledging customary land rights tenure, and promoting women in land decision-making processes.
Publications
Namati is a learning organization. We publish and share lessons from everything we do. In 2016, we authored or co-authored over 40 publications, including policy briefs, practitioner guides, articles, and op-eds.

» Our team draws on years of multi-country experience in our step-by-step “how to” guide for grassroots advocates working to help communities protect their land.

» Our right to health manual is recognized as an official training guide by the Ministry of Health in Mozambique.

» Namati’s CEO and policy director propose indicators for measuring access to justice in THE GUARDIAN.

» Kanchi Kohli and Manju Menon from Namati-CPR explain why India’s environmental regulations won’t work unless communities have a meaningful role in enforcement in THE HINDU.

» Sonkita Conte of Namati Sierra Leone describes how paralegals can counteract the power imbalances that characterize natural resource exploitation in THIS IS AFRICA.

» Our CEO gives the closing talk at the Oslo Freedom Forum, titled “Rule of Law for All.”

Media Coverage
We are dedicated to raising the global profile of legal empowerment around the world. In 2016, Namati and/or the Global Legal Empowerment Network were featured, quoted or interviewed in the media over 60 times.

» “A New League Of ‘Barefoot Lawyers’ Will Transform Justice In The Next 15 Years” - FORBES.

» “It takes more than a law to ensure equal land rights for women” - REUTERS.

» “Sierra Leone Land Grab Thwarted” - BBC AFRICA.

» “Poor law: The rise of paralegals” - THE ECONOMIST.

Thank you to our supporters

Recognition
Recipient of the 2016 Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship. Finalist for The Wharton School’s Lipman Family Prize.

Namati is a Sanskrit word that means “to shape something into a curve.” Martin Luther King Jr. said: “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” We call ourselves Namati because we’re dedicated to bending that curve.

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NAMATI CONvenes the global legal empowerment network