

“In the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, world governments made a historic commitment to achieve ‘access to justice for all.’ This book is a must-read for anyone who, like me, believes in the urgency and vitality of that goal, and anyone who wants to understand how we go about achieving it. If ‘access to justice’ is an abstraction to you, it won’t be once you read the stories in these pages of paralegals and clients seeking justice. Those stories are unforgettable. They hold lessons for all of us.”

– **Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and  
former High Commissioner for Human Rights**

“This book brings law to life in a thoroughly original way. It charts, with great empirical care, analytical acuity and historical sensitivity, the obstacles that lie in the path of making justice accessible to marginalized groups. It then addresses the question: to what extent can paralegals mitigate these obstacles? Through wonderful case studies of the incredibly innovative paralegal movement, it throws light on the toughest questions of our time: how can law become a site for an inclusionary imagination. Anyone interested in the future of law and justice will have to reckon with this book.”

– **Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Vice-Chancellor, Ashoka University**

“This is a powerful guide to understanding one of the most promising emerging fields in the world today. Community paralegals are heroes on a daily basis. Each individual story is inspiring, and the global potential of this profession to change countless lives is thrilling.”

– **Ricken Patel, Founder and CEO, Avaaz**

“Methodologically rigorous and deeply humane, this groundbreaking and hopeful book transports the reader to the frontlines of global community paralegal efforts to squeeze justice out of the most unlikely places. We bear witness to their successes as they champion the rights of individuals and communities against abuses of power by state actors, private corporations and dysfunctional justice systems. And through clear-eyed analysis of the challenges that community paralegals face, the book makes a convincing argument that only with sustainable financial resources, political will, and dedication to the cultivation of strong cadres of well-trained and supported grassroots advocates, can justice be a lived and long-lasting reality in the lives of the global masses.”

– **Chi Adanna Mgbako, Director of the Leitner International Human Rights  
Clinic, Fordham University School of Law**

“For many people in the United States and worldwide, the law is a ruse for oppression. Frontline legal advocates can help people turn law into the guarantor of equality it is supposed to be. This book shows us how.”

– **Bryan Stevenson, Founder of Equal Justice Initiative and Macarthur Fellow**

“This book consists of detailed and impressive studies of a worldwide program that might well constitute a revolution in the making: relying on ordinary citizens to use the power and majesty of the law to protect their rights.”

– **Owen Fiss, Sterling Professor, Yale Law School**

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“This compelling volume not only demonstrates the significance of “barefoot lawyering” in nations struggling for democracy. It contains important insights for the world wide effort to preserve and extend fundamental freedoms in the twenty-first century.”

– Bruce Ackerman, Sterling Professor of Law and Political Science, Yale University

“*Community Paralegals and the Pursuit of Justice* is a work of prodigious scholarship that represents a significant contribution to the development, human rights, and rule of law fields. Vivek Maru, Varun Gauri and contributing authors have evaluated paralegal organizations in six countries with scrupulous care and have drawn well-supported lessons for improving and expanding the model globally. *Community Paralegals and the Pursuit of Justice* provides welcome evidence that investment in paralegal organizations can not only pay significant dividends for the poor, but can improve the accessibility, capacity, and accountability of justice systems themselves.”

– Gary Haugen, Founder and CEO, International Justice Mission

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## COMMUNITY PARALEGALS AND THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

The United Nations estimates that 4 billion people worldwide live outside the protection of the law. These people can be driven from their land, intimidated by violence, and excluded from society. This book is about community paralegals – sometimes called barefoot lawyers – who demystify law and empower people to advocate for themselves. These paralegals date back to 1950s South Africa and are active today in many countries, but their role has largely been ignored by researchers. *Community Paralegals and the Pursuit of Justice* is the first book on the subject. Focusing on paralegal movements in six countries, Vivek Maru, Varun Gauri, and their coauthors have collected rich, vivid stories of paralegals helping people to take on injustice, from domestic violence to unlawful mining to denial of wages. From these stories emerges evidence of what works and how. The insights in this book will be of immense value in the global fight for universal justice. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781316671801>

Vivek Maru is the founder and chief executive officer of Namati, an organization dedicated to supporting legal empowerment around the world.

Varun Gauri is a senior economist in the Development Economics Vice Presidency of the World Bank.

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# Community Paralegals and the Pursuit of Justice

Edited by  
**VIVEK MARU**  
**VARUN GAURI**



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**Vivek Maru** started Namati in 2011 to grow the movement for legal empowerment around the world. Namati and its partners have built cadres of grassroots legal advocates – also known as “community paralegals” – in eight countries. The advocates have worked with more than 65,000 people to protect community lands, enforce environmental law, and secure basic rights to health care and citizenship. Namati convenes the Global Legal Empowerment Network, made up of more than 1,500 groups from 130 countries who are learning from one another and collaborating on common challenges. Vivek was named a Social Entrepreneur of the Year by the World Economic Forum, a “legal rebel” by the American Bar Association, and an Ashoka Fellow. He, Namati, and the Global Legal Empowerment Network received the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship in 2016.

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