



LAS
LEGAL AID SOCIETY

RESHAPING SOLUTIONS FOR
ACCESSING JUSTICE IN PAKISTAN

NEWSLETTER

January -March 2024

26th Edition

EDITORIAL SECTION: from the desk of Barrister Haya Emaan Zahid (Chief Executive Officer, LAS)

LEVERAGING A.I. SOLUTIONS IN ACCESSING JUSTICE



Each day our district courts are inundated with the addition of 70,000 new cases, revealing the grim realities of the near 2.4 million cases pending before our Judiciary. These startling figures were brought to light during a speech by Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah during the Asma Jahangir Conference in Lahore in April. Justice Shah not only highlighted the root causes of the mounting case backlog but also presented a comprehensive 6 point road map to improve judicial efficiency. His strategy includes integration of automation and AI technologies for case management and oversight, curbing frequent adjournments, introducing costs for delays, adopting a zero tolerance policy against judicial corruption and incompetence and promoting alternative dispute resolution.

Justice Shah is poised to assume the role of the 30th Chief Justice of Pakistan in October of 2024 with a tenure of a promising 3 years. His predecessors were occupied with endeavours such as the construction of dams for water conservation, clearing urban encroachments, establishment of model courts for select cases etc. In contrast, Justice Shah's approach is characterized by an inward looking minimalism, prioritizing efficiency over grandiose

initiatives. His plan of action is data-driven, premised on the scaling of a model built on the proof of concept of leveraging ADR in Punjab during his tenure as Chief Justice of the province. Justice Shah is notably a techno-optimist and the first known Supreme Court Judge who has been advocating, and rightly so, for the use of AI technologies in our legal system. Since November of 2023 he has chaired the National Judicial Automation Committee and seems to mean business when he says the current state of affairs relating to the data repositories of the courts do not speak to the end users leaving Judges powerless even when they desire to intervene.

His soon to be counterpart in India, the 50th Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud has already embarked on the techno-revolution that is the promise of AI solutions in order to address their mammoth backlog of nearly 47 million cases. The Indian Judiciary has been piloting tools such as SUPACE (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Court's Efficiency) and SUVAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software) with clear examples of success. SUPACE is a language learning model which assists in providing relevant information from massive volumes of data to ease the work load of Judges whereas SUVAS translates documents into 9 vernacular languages. It is currently being used for translating Supreme Court judgments into Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Odiya, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu which will be further expanded to other regional languages. In addition a software called SCI-Interact is being used to make Supreme Court benches paperless.

There is no doubt that AI tools can yield efficiency gains through automating operations such as legal research, document reviews and analysis of contracts thereby cutting down on preparation times however the dangers of biased

outcomes remain in AI Algorithms. There is a need to ensure fairness, transparency and lack of bias through rules and guidelines necessary for its regulation in legal proceedings. The Supreme Court will need to embark on its technological journey with careful navigation and consideration of ethical and legal implications, ensuring that AI serves as a tool for justice and fairness.

Shifting back the Covid-time focus on e-hearings / video conferencing and ensuring submissions can be made on digital platforms is a fundamental first step in mobilizing our sluggish system towards the dawn of this new era of modernization. It would be appropriate for the incoming Chief Justice to keep to his minimalist philosophy, departing from the lure of previous maximalists mindsets (which doomed the legacies of his predecessors in some ways) that seemed to have been distracted between conflicting opportunities and chaos. Justice Shah must guard his attention with all his might and free himself, much like the 19th century economist Henry David Thoreau, from the chaos and excesses that consume judicial attention. A new economics must be adopted in our approach, where we measure delays in terms of the 'cost in life' for that is the price we pay for the clutter that clogs our courts and distracts judicial minds. The cumulative costs of non-crucial things outweighs the small benefits that the clutter of chaos promises. Justice Shah must embrace the backlog issue with a primitive focus and devote all his time to the promised results of the freedom of a system that delivers justice expeditiously and fairly.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS



Karachi



Hyderabad



Dadu



Sukkur

A woman carries a whole world within her; without her contributions, our world would be incomplete. International Women's Day recognizes the progress made towards gender equality and raises awareness about the challenges that women continue to face, it also serves as a reminder of the importance of advocating for women's rights and empowering them to reach their full potential in all aspects of life.



Khairpur



Shaheed Benazirabad

To pay tribute to all women who are devoting their lives to making our world a better place, we celebrated the day across all our regional offices.



Sanghar



Larkana



Head office



SLACC

STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE in Pakistan

PILOT LAUNCH OF THE ANTI-RAPE CRISIS CELL in Islamabad

LAS, in collaboration with the Ministry of Law and Justice (MoLJ) and the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), successfully launched the pilot Anti-Rape Crisis Cell at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) Hospital Islamabad on January 15, 2024. The event was graced by **Ms. Jane Marriot** (British High Commissioner to Pakistan), **Dr. Luay Shabaneh** (UNFPA Country Director), **Mr. Raja Naeem Akbar** (Federal Law Secretary), **Mr. Iftikhar Ali Shallwani** (Federal Health Secretary), Chairperson, **Ms. Ayesha Raza Farooq** (Special Committee on Anti-Rape Trial and Investigation Act, 2021), and several senior government officials and key members of the civil society.



Through this collaborative effort between the federal government and members of civil society, the newly launched Anti-Rape Crisis Cell at PIMS is all set to provide well-rounded medical, legal, and social services to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.



"This new anti-rape crisis facility is a strategic innovation that ensures GBV survivors are provided accelerated response services under one roof, and we are proud to have partnered with Pakistan in advancing such an important innovation in tackling violence."

~ Ms. Jane Marriot at the launch ceremony



Assessment sessions with the DEPUTY INSPECTOR GENERAL



LAS has played a critical role in operationalizing the Special Sexual Offences Investigation Units (SSOUIs) in Karachi. Investigation Officers posted under the SSOUIs are trained on gender, victim-centric handling of cases, and specialized protocols for investigation for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) cases to provide an expedited and focused response.

To ensure the effective operationalization of the SSOUIs, LAS has engaged with the Karachi Police Office to map the challenges and requirements that the SSOUIs

have to cater to victims of SGBV effectively. Assessment sessions were held in the presence of **Mr. Imran Yaqub** (DIG Admin, Karachi Police Office) where LAS members and police officers from these units were present to discuss the problems and their possible solutions firsthand. Key recommendations to address the issues identified were also developed.

As further assessment sessions are to be conducted in the coming months, the efficient operationalization of these units is critical in achieving a higher conviction rate in SGBV cases.

FIELD OFFICERS TRAINING on community engagement



LAS field officers play a critical role in ensuring organizational success, relevance, and sustainability by bridging the gap between project implementers and the communities they serve. Their on-ground knowledge, communication skills, and ability to engage effectively with community members have proven indispensable.

With support from UN Women

Pakistan, LAS conducted community awareness sessions during the reporting quarter on the thematic areas of citizen-police liaison and gender-based violence, targeting a diverse range of groups. For this purpose, field officers were trained on community engagement strategies, community mapping tools, and monitoring tools to effectively capture learnings from the field.



MLO TRAINING SESSIONS

LAS, in collaboration with UN Women Pakistan, aims to improve coordination, sensitivity, and knowledge of key justice system actors in their engagement with victims and survivors of violence against women. These actors involve Medico-legal Officers, Police, Prosecutors, and Judges.

Under this collaboration, LAS conducted two training sessions in February with Medicolegal Officers in Sukkur and Karachi to train them on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Guidelines for Rape Detection Kits in Anti-Rape Crisis Cells. The training sessions were conducted by **Dr. Summaiya Syed Tariq** (Chief Police Surgeon in Karachi). As a result of these sessions, the percentage increase in knowledge of the participants was 46% and 60%, respectively, for Karachi and Sukkur.

These sessions proved to be crucial in understanding the challenges faced by the first responders and identifying the nature of any future interventions for medico-legal examination, investigation, and the trial phase of a case.

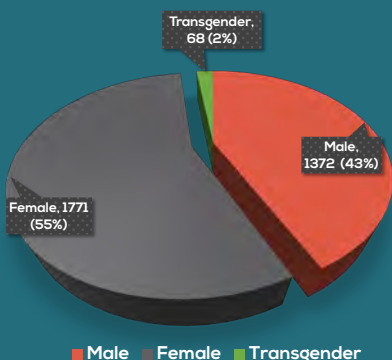


LEGAL AWARENESS CLINICS on ADR

LAS aims to uplift communities in Sindh by promoting legal awareness of ADR. During the reporting quarter, 192 paralegals organized a series of **127 legal clinics** across eight targeted districts in Sindh.

These clinics went beyond simply raising awareness, as our paralegals actively partnered with field teams to ensure the smooth execution of the sessions within their communities. **3,211 people**, including men, women, and transgender individuals, benefitted from this initiative. The clinics equipped participants with knowledge of ADR principles and mechanisms, empowering them to resolve disputes effectively. Additionally, the beneficiaries learned about the proper channels for reporting cases, providing them with the tools to navigate through the legal system.

Participants of Legal Awareness Clinics: Breakdown by Gender



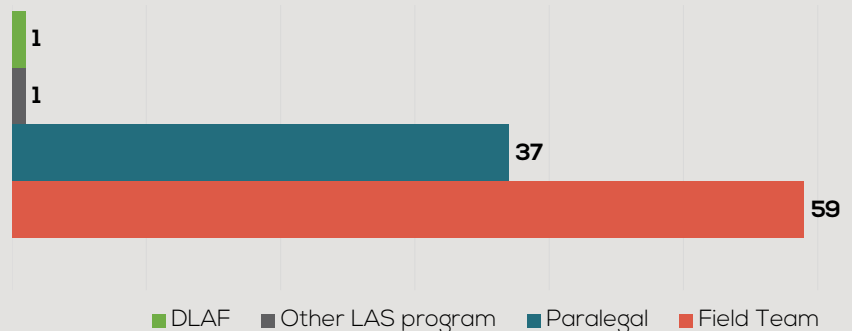
RESTORING FAITH IN JUSTICE: by institutionalizing ADR in Pakistan

LAS aims to strengthen community trust and reliance on the justice system by offering alternative avenues for dispute resolution that prioritize fairness, impartiality, and respect for all parties involved.



DIVERSION OF CASES toward ADR Mechanisms

During the reporting quarter, we successfully directed **98 cases** in our eight designated districts toward ADR methods. Among these, males reported the highest number at 50 cases (51%), while females accounted for 48 cases (49%). Most of these cases were classified as Federal Ombudsman cases, totaling 82 instances, followed by provincial ombudsman with 8 cases, 5 cases in court-annexed mediation, 3 cases in and private mediation categories. Out of these 98 cases, 5% (5) cases have already been resolved successfully, and 4.08% (4) cases were disposed of, further establishing ADR as an effective and efficient mode of dispute resolution.



Number of cases referred toward ADR mechanisms

Our field teams are dedicated to empowering communities by disseminating knowledge about alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and conducting awareness sessions on accessible channels. During the reporting quarter, our field advocates reported the highest number of cases at 59, while our paralegals reported 61 cases, accounting for a total of 37 cases.

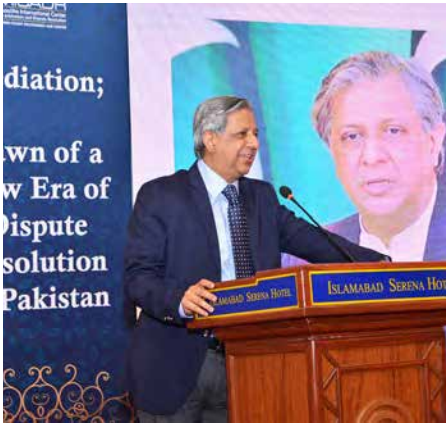
IMPROVING THE DEMAND SIDE of ADR in Pakistan

MEDIATION: DAWN OF A NEW ERA OF DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN PAKISTAN

In a groundbreaking initiative aimed at reshaping Pakistan's dispute resolution landscape, LAS and MICADR (Musaliha International Center for Arbitration and Dispute Resolution) organized

a conference titled **"Mediation; A Dawn of a New Era of Dispute Resolution in Pakistan"** on March 19, 2024, at Hotel Serena in Islamabad. The event brought together various stakeholders,

including representatives from superior courts, regulatory bodies, corporate entities, foreign missions, and international donor agencies in Pakistan.



The conference aimed to underscore the pivotal role of ADR, particularly mediation, in ensuring swift and efficient justice delivery. The event witnessed keynote speeches from **Justice Arif Hussain Khilji** (Chief Legal Advisor, LAS and Former Supreme Court Judge) and distinguished guests including **Mr. Azam Nazeer Tarar** (Federal Law Minister), **Mr. Raja Naeem Akbar** (Federal Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice), **Mr. H.E. Mr. Donald Blome** (U.S.

Ambassador to Pakistan), Justice Mansoor Ali Shah (Honorable Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan), along with the CEO of CEDR.

The event also observed a panel discussion featuring contributions from a diverse range of speakers, including judges of the High Court, Secretary Law, along with representation from regulatory bodies and corporate entities.

The conference concluded with mutual consensus on the institutionalization of mediation nationwide, reflecting a shared dedication to improving the landscape of ADR in Pakistan. Participants affirmed their commitment to working collaboratively towards further refining the mechanisms of ADR, fostering greater accessibility, fairness, and efficiency in the country's legal system.



STRENGTHENING THE SUPPLY of State-Recognized ADR across Pakistan

Consultation session with the HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE OF GILGIT BALTISTAN ASSEMBLY



After receiving approval from the GB Cabinet, LAS is honored to announce that the GB Model Mediation Bill 2023 is now referred to the Select Committee (SC) of the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly (GBA) for a thorough review.

To address the apprehensions and observations raised by the select committee members regarding

the GB Mediation Bill 2023, a consultation workshop was held on January 15, 2024, at Serena Hotel Islamabad. The meeting was presided over by **Mr. Nazir Ahmad** (Honorable Speaker, GBA). It was attended by members of the SC, including Secretary Law and Secretary GBA. During this session, the LAS team diligently responded to the select committee's inquiries. Consequently, an updated version

of the GB Model Mediation Bill 2023 will be submitted for final approval in the GBA.

On the day, **Mr. Javed Ali Manwa** (Chairperson, Select Committee) discussed the role and structure of the ADR Accreditation Committee and highly appreciated LAS's efforts to introduce and promote formal ADR in Gilgit-Baltistan.



"This bill will be useful for local disputes and boost investment and economic opportunities for GB. The role of the GB Chief Court and the new CJ is hopeful regarding the pendency of cases in the Gilgit-Baltistan Region. However, GB is a scattered area, so there is a need to develop this system at the grassroots level".

~ Mr. Nazir Ahmad (Honorable Speaker GBA) on the occasion.



UNDERSTANDING MEDIATION for the legal fraternity to benefit



LAS and MICADR, in collaboration with the Islamabad Bar Council, Islamabad Bar Association, and International Dispute Resolution Institute, commenced an awareness session titled **“UNDERSTANDING MEDIATION: How Legal Fraternity**

Can Benefit from ADR” at the Islamabad District Court.

The primary purpose of this session was to acquaint a large number of lawyers with the benefits of mediation, recent developments



made in the Islamabad mediation ecosystem, and upcoming opportunities such as mediator and mediation advocacy training to expedite referrals of potential civil, family, and commercial disputes towards ADR.



“Mediation is a structured negotiation in a legal dispute. We encourage lawyers to be part of the recently developed ADR ecosystem and represent your parties as mediators or mediation advocates in potential civil, family, and commercial disputes to elevate the justice delivery by providing expeditious cost and time-effective justice to litigants.”

~ Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan (Islamabad High Court) speaking at the event.

PREPARING A ROBUST ADR ECOSYSTEM through the Change Makers Model

LAS was honored to host a delegation of law students from the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) at the Islamabad High Court Court-Annexed Mediation Center (IHC-CAMC), which was established and is currently managed by LAS.



On the occasion, the student delegation was given a detailed briefing on the need for ADR and the strides made by LAS in institutionalizing mediation across the country. The students visited the IHC-CAMC and were briefed on the mediation process, including private and joint sessions. They were given awareness of the various training programs available to law students to help upskill themselves and enter the mediation ecosystem. **LAS looks forward to working closely with the NUST Law School to deploy ADR-specific training programs in the near future.**



ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY EFFORTS to increase public awareness of ADR

Supporting state interventions in fulfilling constitutional obligations



Article 19-A (Right to Information) of the constitution of Pakistan grants that every citizen shall have the right to access information in all matters of public importance subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law. LAS is undertaking efforts to ensure that every citizen is cognizant of the state's initiatives for the citizens' benefit.

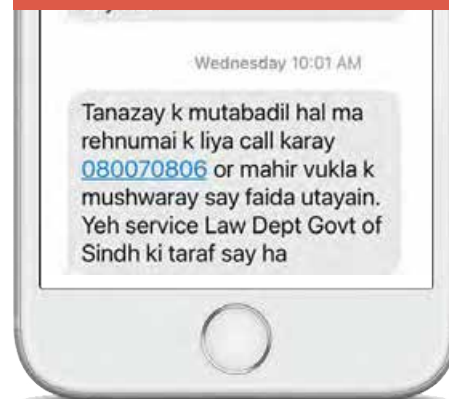
Furthermore, LAS is also strengthening stakeholder bonds by disseminating information and is enabling individuals to navigate the ADR landscape.



Distribution of the ADR Directory

The ADR Directory was disseminated to several stakeholders across 8 districts of Sindh. These directories serve as comprehensive guides, mapping out stakeholders within each district and providing essential resources for beneficiaries. Whether it's accessing legal services, mediation facilities, or other dispute resolution mechanisms, these directories serve as invaluable tools for empowerment and advocacy.

SMS campaigns



During the reporting quarter, 1.2 million individuals were reached through an SMS campaign to create awareness about ADR mechanisms and provide information to the public about the legal remedies available to them for the resolution of their disputes.

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ENSURING RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PAKISTAN

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Collaborating with the NATIONAL RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME (NRSP)



National Rural Support Programme

LAS's Hyderabad team held a productive meeting with **Mr. Ghulam Mustafa** (Regional General Manager, NRSP) on March 11, 2024, to solidify a collaborative relationship through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between LAS and NRSP, aiming to enhance access to legal awareness and aid for the community, ensuring equitable justice.

Mr. Ghulam, on the occasion, highlighted three critical community issues, including land disputes, biometric verification challenges, and post-death payment issues in banks, which parties committed to addressing collaboratively. As we look forward to future engagements, we anticipate delving deeper into these pressing issues and devising sustainable solutions.

Engaging with BHAGWAN GOTH RESIDENTS



In continuation of LAS's advocacy efforts, led by **Ms. Nazia Sultana** (LAS Field Officer, Karachi) and **Mr. Ali Ahmed** (Delivery Associate, LAS), LAS engaged with the residents of Bhagwan Goth in the

Kemari district on March 18, 2024, and addressed pertinent issues related to obtaining Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) and marriage certificates within the local Hindu and Sikh communities.



A JOURNEY OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND EMPOWERMENT

As we reflect on the remarkable journey of our legal aid and awareness program, team LAS successfully reached out to 8,303 members of religious minorities across eight districts in Sindh: Karachi, Hyderabad, Dadu, Shaheed Benazir Abad, Sanghar, Sukkur, Larkana, and Khairpur.

From educating the community through Information Education and communication (IEC) material and conducting paralegal interviews to establishing legal clinics in each community, from taking up the cases of the disfranchised to having the judgments passed in due time, each interaction with the beneficiaries reinforced LAS's mission and helped us to revisit the commitment to serve the vulnerable. While our journey towards enabling justice continues, we will always continue with such unwavering commitment to ensure justice and empowerment for everyone.

During the session, community members voiced their concerns and challenges regarding the documentation process. Mr. Ali Ahmed facilitated an open discussion, providing valuable guidance and information to navigate these bureaucratic hurdles effectively. Following our interaction with the residents, we proceeded to meet with the Chairman of UC-12, District Kemari, to delve deeper into these matters and explore their potential solutions.

Through these engagements, LAS remains steadfast in empowering communities by advocating for their rights and facilitating access to essential legal documentation.

FOSTERING COLLABORATIONS for Strengthening Human Rights Advocacy

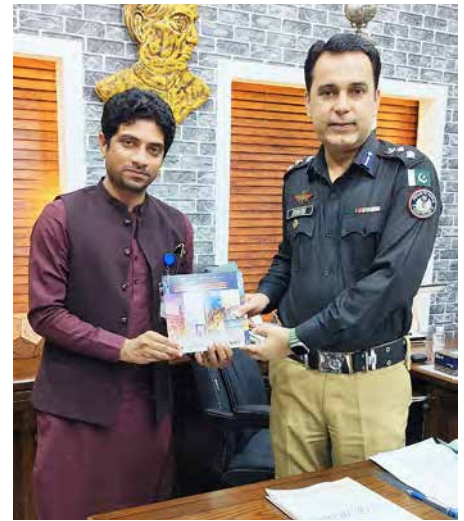
Collaborating with LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES

Mr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro (Field Officer, LAS) met with **Shabir Ahmed Sethar** (SSP Dadu) on February 26, 2024, to brief him about LAS's ongoing activities and explore opportunities for collaborative solutions to pending cases.

SSP Sethar pledged support for LAS initiatives and committed to referring suitable cases to LAS. SSP Sethar further reiterated

his commitment to advocating for the religious rights of non-Muslim communities in Dadu district, emphasizing the importance of upholding the rule of law.

We hope this partnership will underscore a shared commitment to promoting legal equity and fostering peace and harmony in the district.



Partnering with GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Ms. Rukhsana Parveen (Senior Program Manager, LAS) met with **Mr. Akram Ali Khawaja** (Secretary of the Minority Affairs Department, Sindh) on February 29, 2024, to discuss crucial matters concerning the promotion of interfaith harmony and the protection of minority rights.

During the meeting, Mr. Khawaja was provided with insights into the comprehensive work undertaken by LAS, as discussions encompassed ongoing programs, revival for the District Peace Committees (DPCs), and the constitution of interfaith harmony committees. Mr. Khawaja also expressed his commitment to collaborating with LAS by agreeing to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalize this partnership. The proposed MoU shall cover various areas of cooperation, including efforts to implement interfaith harmony



committees, capacity building for committee members, and formulating legislation to address minority rights issues, such as the Hindu inheritance law.

Through strategic partnerships and concerted efforts, we remain dedicated to fostering inclusivity, promoting dialogue, and advocating for the rights of all members of society.

PIONEERING SENSITIZATION WORKSHOPS for Sindh's Legal Community

In a groundbreaking initiative to bolster the justice sector's capacity, LAS took the lead in organizing a series of enlightening sensitization workshops in collaboration with AAN Consulting (Private) Limited. These workshops were meticulously crafted to empower legal professionals and law enforcement officers with the nuanced understanding and tools required to navigate the intricate challenges faced by religiously marginalized communities across Sindh.



Setting the stage for this transformative endeavor, LAS orchestrated a dynamic training session on February 26-27, 2024, at the esteemed Sindh Judicial Academy. Led by a distinguished panel of legal luminaries, including the eminent **Muhammad Shahid Shafique** (District and Sessions Judge), **Mr. Iqbal Ahmed Detho** (Chairperson, Sindh Human Rights Commission), and **Advocate Mukesh Kumar**, the workshop served as a comprehensive platform for participants to delve deep into the legal intricacies of pertinent laws, such as the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act and blasphemy legislation. Through immersive discussions, interactive exercises, and insightful case studies, attendees gained invaluable insights and practical strategies for effectively navigating the complexities of the legal landscape.



Building upon this momentum, LAS convened a follow-up workshop on March 1-2, 2024, sensitizing a cohort of 20 dedicated police officers to the unique challenges and sensitivities encountered by religious minorities. Facilitated by an illustrious cadre of experts, including **Mr. Iqbal Ahmed Detho**, **Muhammad Shahid Shafique**, **Mr. Zeeshan Manzoor** (Additional DSJ), **Advocate Mukesh Kumar**, and **Honorable Justice Mehta Kohli** (Former Judge of Balochistan

High Court), the workshop provided a nuanced exploration of investigative methodologies and legal frameworks pertaining to cases involving forced conversions and blasphemy allegations. By fostering an environment of open dialogue and mutual understanding, participants emerged equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to navigate these complex issues with empathy and diligence. These workshops represent a landmark step forward in LAS's

unwavering commitment to championing access to justice and fostering greater inclusivity within the legal fraternity. By equipping legal practitioners and law enforcement personnel with the tools and insights needed to address the needs of religious minorities, LAS is paving the way for a more equitable and just society in Sindh, where the rights and dignity of all communities are upheld and protected.

Closing the Gap between Law, Policy, and Practice on WOMEN'S RIGHT TO PROPERTY

LAS continues its commitment to empowering women through increasing awareness of their legal and matrimonial property rights. Through a sustainable, community-led, and women-centric approach, we continue to

make strides in addressing the legal needs of marginalized and underserved populations.

As LAS remains dedicated to its mission of empowering women and advocating for their rights,

it is grateful for the ongoing support from its partners and the communities that it serves and looks forward to sharing more successes in the future.

LEGAL EDUCATION AND AWARENESS Clinics

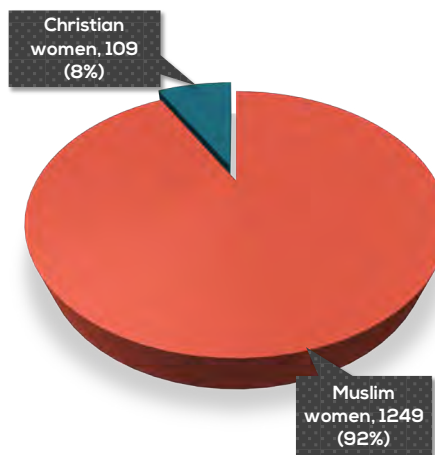
Focusing on legal and marital property rights, the second round of community awareness (on women's property rights) sessions commenced on January 22, 2024, following the completion of the first round in November, which reached 3,330 individuals across 246 sessions. The ongoing sessions aim to educate and empower community members on critical issues.

As of March 2024, **86 sessions** have been conducted in all three districts, with a total attendance of **1,358 participants**. The community awareness sessions serve as platforms for empowerment and community building, creating a demand for women's property rights at the grassroots level.

Anticipating continued success in our efforts, LAS aims to reach more community members through awareness sessions in the coming months.



Breakdown by participation



Empowering the Women of KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

LAS, in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Ombudsperson Office, has been at the forefront of promoting women's property rights through a series of awareness sessions conducted consecutively from February 20 to 23, 2024. These sessions aimed to address the challenges women face in KP, including the Newly Merged Districts, in acquiring properties under the prevailing laws. A total of four sessions were conducted, targeting diverse participants such as police officers, revenue staff, government officials, civil society members, and community leaders. Three of the sessions were conducted in the urban center of Peshawar, and one was held in Haripur.

The objective of these sessions was to raise awareness among stakeholders about the jurisdiction, role, and procedures of the KP Ombudsperson Office, particularly concerning the enforcement of the Women Property Rights Act 2019. With 116 participants in attendance, the sessions successfully disseminated crucial information about the law and the department,



aiming to direct vulnerable women litigants to appropriate avenues for seeking justice regarding their property rights.

The awareness sessions also highlighted the Ombudsperson Office's procedure for filing complaints under the Enforcement of Women Property Rights Act 2019. The salient features of the law were discussed, including the definition of a complainant, the filing of a complaint, the proceedings, and the delivery of property possession to women complainants.

The feedback from the sessions was overwhelmingly positive, with participants expressing a better understanding of the legal framework and procedures related to women's property rights. LAS remains committed to continuing such interventions and working closely with the KP Ombudsperson Office to ensure that women's rights to property are protected and upheld.

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL SECURITY MECHANISMS for Women

During the reporting quarter, LAS disseminated its latest research, **"Challenges and Gaps in Women's Acquisition and Access to Social Security Mechanisms in Sindh."** This research product is a cornerstone of our efforts to shed light on the systemic issues that hinder women's ability to secure and access social security benefits.

The research meticulously outlines the challenges and gaps women face in acquiring and accessing social security mechanisms as it delves into the legal, institutional, and sociocultural barriers that impede women's rights to social security. The findings of this research are instrumental in advocating for policy reforms and implementing practical solutions

to enhance women's economic security and empowerment.



Identifying Gaps and Challenges in Women's Acquisition and Access to Social Security Mechanisms and Property

A Product of Advocacy Analytics, the Research Development Unit, at the Legal Aid Society

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The research was shared with influential audiences, including policymakers, legal professionals, academics, and civil society organizations.

You can read/download the research study by clicking (in case of a softcopy) or scanning this QR code.





LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO FLOOD AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Thus far **8,700+** beneficiaries attended LAS's community sessions (pertaining to civil documentation), while more sessions are scheduled to take place in the coming months.

Furthermore, a service delivery phase was initiated in July 2023 to take up cases from the most vulnerable cases for the loss and recovery of civil documentation. These cases were resolved with the respective institutions/offices (NADRA/Benazir Income Support Programme, and the like). Through this initiative, **cases of 800+ individuals** have been taken up thus far, and more cases are being taken up to the relevant offices. The resolution of these cases would enable the affected to exercise their citizenship rights and access state-sponsored financial assistance if they are eligible.

PROTECTING CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

The Legal Aid Society joined forces with the International Organization for Migration (UN IOM) in February 2023 for Safeguarding and Enhancing Access to Civil Documentation for Flood-Affected Population in Sindh. The interventions resulting from this partnership were implemented in the flood-affected districts of Dadu, Sanghar, Shaheed Benazirabad, Khairpur, and Umerkot. This collaboration aimed to address the urgent needs of the local population regarding civil documentation and legal support by providing vital assistance to the communities severely affected by the devastating floods of 2022.

Due to these interventions, beneficiaries who could not earlier renew or acquire their CNICs for the very first time were also made eligible to cast their votes prior to the general elections in February 2024 and exercise their right as citizens of Pakistan.



PROVISION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE to the destitute



Since December of 2023, in addition to the legal assistance, LAS has also provided financial assistance to beneficiaries who may require it to cover the processing costs of their

civil documents, such as renewing expired CNICs, birth certificates, death certificates, and Domicile/PRCs. A total of **275 beneficiaries** have been extended financial assistance so far.

One-day CAPACITY STRENGTHENING DIALOGUE



One-day Capacity Strengthening Dialogue was also organized in Karachi in January 2024 for government stakeholders from the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), the Provincial and District Disaster Management Authorities (PDMA) and (DDMA), and representatives

from the DC Office from all targeted districts as well as Karachi.

The objective of this dialogue was to shed light on the progress made as a result of such interventions and to engage in a meaningful discourse on how legal identities and other civil documents can be better protected or recovered during climatic disasters. The need to synergize

to form a coordinated response mechanism on a provincial level for those impacted by floods was also discussed.

A total of 258 stakeholders from different government agencies have been engaged thus far in such dialogues.

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IMPROVING THE UNDERSTANDING OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS under Muslim Family Laws

The Nikahnama holds profound importance in outlining the rights and responsibilities of both partners. However, women's rights within this contract are sometimes overlooked or misunderstood. To bridge this gap, LAS organized community awareness sessions at the grassroots level to ensure that women are fully informed about their rights and privileges and can assert them confidently.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS SESSIONS on Women's Rights and Privileges in the Nikahnama

To promote gender equality and women empowerment, LAS conducts Community Awareness Sessions with trained paralegals in Karachi, Larkana, and Shaheed Benazirabad. 75 paralegals across 3 districts were earlier trained, who act as the focal persons for their communities. They are equipped with the expertise to guide women through the complexities of laws relating to Muslim marriages and families and

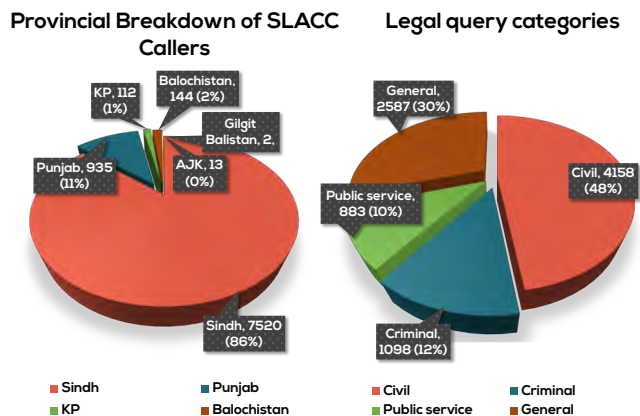
ensure women's access to privileges granted under the Nikahnama.

During the reporting quarter, LAS conducted **41 sessions** across Karachi, Larkana, and Shaheed Benazirabad, engaging 1,230 married and soon-to-be-married women to ensure increased understanding and implementation of rights to foster healthier and more equitable marital relationships.



EMPOWERING CITIZENS THROUGH THE SINDH LEGAL ADVISORY CALL CENTRE (Toll-free number: 0800-70806) - a public-private partnership between the Government of Sindh and the Legal Aid Society

The Sindh Legal Advisory Call Center (SLACC) is a flagship project of the Legal Aid Society (LAS) and the Government of Sindh (GoS). This is Pakistan’s first and one-of-a-kind toll-free helpline, which through its Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) system has amassed an impressive record of 430,379 calls received, encompassing a diverse range of 222,377 queries registered from more than 600 cities across Pakistan. These queries are appropriately addressed by High Court enrolled Agent Lawyers and Callers are provided conclusive guidance on each query.



During this last quarter, SLACC registered **8,726 queries**. This quarter’s statistics reveal that 76% of queries originated from male callers, while 23.9% came from female callers, with an additional 2 calls from individuals who identified their gender as ‘Other.’

FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS with key stakeholders

Visit of Community Leaders from the SHELTER PARTICIPATORY ORGANIZATION

Women Community leaders representing the Shelter Participatory Organization (SPO) visited SLACC on February 14, 2024. The purpose of the visit was to expose them to SLACC’s day-to-day operations, introduce them to SLACC’s state-of-the-art system, and promote the work being done to improve people’s access to justice.

During this visit, potential ideas were discussed on how SPO can take SLACC’s message forward in their respective communities so that more people could benefit from this facility.



TRAININGS at the SLACC

LABOR LAW WORKSHOP

A training on labor laws by Advocate Aftab Ayub (Subject expert on labor laws) was held on January 19, 2024. Advocate Aftab covered various topics, including the steps

to be undertaken by those facing wrongful termination, and how to get their pending gratuity released. This training helped our on-call lawyers to stay updated, and hence can help the callers accordingly.



TRAINING ON IP LAWS

Training on Intellectual Property (IP) laws was conducted by **Advocate Bassam Ali Dahri** (Manager Litigation, LAS) on February 16, 2024. The topics covered included understanding the relevant IP laws in Pakistan and the differences between copyrights, patents, and trademarks. On the day, the

SLACC lawyers were guided on the different procedures for filing copyrights, patents and trademarks so that they may also be able to guide artists and entrepreneurs who are looking to protect their creative work.



PUBLIC AWARENESS AND MARKETING EFFORTS



Visits to Bol News and Dharti TV



Placement of Posters and Boards at Lyari Expressway



Newspaper advertisements

Team SLACC, spearheaded by Ms. **Rukhsana Parveen Khokhar** (Senior Project Manager), participated in the talk show at **Dharti TV** on the occasion of Women's Day, where she was a part of a distinguished panel that highlighted the different issues faced by women in Pakistan, especially in rural Sindh.

Ms. Rukhsana Parveen spoke about the issues faced by the community related to accessing justice while navigating through the justice system, its possible solutions, and how the free-of-cost services provided by SLACC help in bringing relief to justice seekers (especially to sexual and gender-based violence victims, and women seeking their rightful share in inheritance).

Ms. Rukhsana also participated in another talk show on **Bol News** channel on February 14, 2024, where she highlighted the services of SLACC and shed light on the recent marital rape conviction scored by LAS.

After obtaining the requisite permission from the Head of Revenue Department at the National Highway Authority (NHA) regional office in Karachi, SLACC successfully placed its posters on the Lyari expressway.

With an estimate of 30,000+ cars passing through the expressway daily, this activity shall leverage to promote SLACC's number. As a part of our marketing strategy to circulate SLACC's number far and beyond certain community jurisdictions, these posters were placed on different interchanges of the Lyari Expressway, including Mauripur, Garden, Ghareebabad, Hasan Square, and Sohrab Goth interchange, such that it becomes a part of the national discourse.

With substantial support from the Law Department, GoS, SLACC published advertisements in major newspapers during the reporting quarter, including Kawish, Dawn, and Jang.



Speak to a qualified & high-court registered lawyer - TOLL FREE number:

0800 - 70806



PROTECTING AND PROMOTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM in Pakistan



Legal empowerment efforts at LAS are carried beyond taking cases and having them timely processed in courts; they are deeply entrenched in fostering sustainable change and empowerment amongst our communities. By providing extensive training sessions on personal laws, fundamental rights, digital skills, and financial literacy, we are equipping the Religiously Marginalized Communities (RMCs) with the comprehensive knowledge and skills to effectively assert their rights and navigate through legal complexities.

By conducting overt dialogue and engagement, we are looking to develop a sustainable and supportive landscape for advocacy and empowerment, augmenting the voices of RMCs and ensuring their troubles are noted and addressed.

2-DAY STAFF ORIENTATION WORKSHOP for Community engagement & empowerment



LAS held a two-day orientation workshop on January 11, 2024, at the Pakistan Society for Training and Development (PSTD) in Karachi. The orientation workshop detailed a spectrum of topics from the legal landscape encompassing religious freedom to strategies for community engagement and

empowerment, equipping the teams with the comprehensive knowledge and tools required for the successful execution of the project.

As we forge ahead, our devotion to protecting religious freedom and preventing forced conversions within

our communities in Pakistan remains unflinching. As LAS progresses, with every interaction, every training session, and its advocacy efforts, it is looking to rebuild communities that would welcome everyone to practice their beliefs without fear of discrimination and retaliation.

JUSTICE SUCCESS STORIES

Mr. Amir Shehzad Masih, a dedicated manager at a well-known pizza restaurant, was unjustly expelled from his position without being granted the opportunity to present his side of the story.

Upon reaching out to our office for assistance, LAS's team listened attentively to Mr. Masih's plight and swiftly took action to advocate for his rights in court. With unwavering determination, **Advocate Zahid Hussain Maral** (Community Lawyer, LAS) argued wholeheartedly against the unlawful termination in the court, emphasizing its detrimental impact on Mr. Masih's mental well-being.

LAS is proud to announce that these efforts bore fruit as the court, recognizing the severity

of the injustice inflicted upon Mr. Masih, the court announced damages totaling 0.5 million rupees for the mental trauma awarded to Mr. Masih as compensation for suffering bore as a result of the wrongful termination. Furthermore, in an appeal filed by the opposing party, the Xth Additional District Judge East upheld the initial ruling and additionally awarded Mr. Masih 200 liters of fuel.

This landmark decision marks the first instance where compensation was granted for mental anguish arising from such circumstances. This case also sets a precedent for future instances of wrongful termination, underscoring the importance of upholding employee rights and holding employers accountable for their actions.

Compensation for Mental Trauma in a wrongful termination case



LAS remains steadfast in its mission to provide unwavering support to individuals facing legal challenges, ensuring that justice prevails for all. We thank Mr. Masih for placing his trust in us and reaffirming our dedication to serving our community with integrity and excellence.

JUSTICE SUCCESS STORIES

Sabiha married Bilal Ahmed Sheikh in December of 2021, with traditional celebrations and a dowry of three tola gold. Unfortunately, the celebrations soon deteriorated due to Bilal's increasing demands and abusive behavior. Despite efforts by Sabiha's family to calm Bilal, his hostility escalated, compelling Sabiha to seek legal recourse for her safety and dignity.

Sabiha approached LAS for assistance, and her case was handled by **Advocate Reema Laghari** (Community Lawyer, LAS) in Larkana. Under Advocate Reema's guidance, Sabiha filed for Khula (an Islamic legal process for the dissolution of marriage) and for the recovery of her dowry. The LAS team meticulously prepared and submitted a plea to the court on September 20, 2023, outlining



the severe emotional and physical abuse Sabiha endured and highlighting the failed attempts at reconciliation.

After carefully considering the evidence and arguments presented, the court ruled in Sabiha's favor on December 5, 2023. This judgment not only marked the end of Sabiha's sufferings but also set a precedent

From suffering to peace: A Legal Journey to Justice

for the protection of women's rights in matrimonial disputes.

Sabiha's case highlights the judiciary's role in upholding the principles of equity and fairness in family law matters, as well as the dedication of legal professionals like Advocate Reema Laghari to championing the cause of vulnerable clients.

JUSTICE SUCCESS STORIES

Empowering farmers to survive through the Government's financial support programs

Abdul Wahab, Waleed, and Ishaque Ali work as farmers in the sugarcane fields of village Tando Mureed Hyder, district Khairpur. The three of them attended a community awareness session in their village organized by LAS that centered around the recovery and protection of civil documents.

Following what was learned from the session, the three put forth their grievances with **Yasir Ali** (Field Officer, LAS), who filed out a client intake form to document their case and sat with them to hear about their experiences. Narrating the horrors of the unprecedented floods of 2022, and the havoc that was wreaked, they stated how the disaster only exacerbated their existing problems and marginalized them even further.

They shared that the standard CNIC renewal cost was too high for them

to pay. Dealing with the aftermath of the floods made renewing their CNICs the least of their priorities, eventually discouraging them from applying for a renewal. Their financial problems only doubled when their wives were suddenly taken off the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) - an initiative by the Government of Pakistan, which aims to empower economically disadvantaged women via cash transfers to alleviate the alarmingly high poverty rates. Abdul Wahab's, Waleed's, and Ishaque Ali's wives were eligible to receive a quarterly BISP installment of PKR 8,500 each. However, their BISP cards were blocked because they no longer met the eligibility criteria.

Taking immediate measures, Yasir Ali not only took up their cases to renew their expired CNICs but also helped their wives re-register for BISP through their ongoing dynamic survey across Sindh. All



costs incurred for processing the expired CNIC were covered by LAS, setting the beneficiaries free of any financial burden. As a result of timely interventions, the women of the house also started receiving their BISP payments again, which enabled them to send their children back to school.

All three beneficiaries are grateful to LAS for protecting their civil documents and restoring their legal identity and citizenship status.

Now you can also speedily resolve your CNIC issues which are not properly entertained by NADRA, by filing an online complaint at the Federal Ombudsman portal



Get more information by calling
0800-70806

LAS is facilitating community members in 8 districts of Sindh who have been unsuccessful in resolving issues such as correction/change in name, date of birth, father/spouse name, address, and the like.

Your FREE legal advice is just a call away . . .

JUSTICE SUCCESS **STORIES**

Navigating family harmony in property disputes through amicable means

A family from district Sukkur faced a significant disagreement regarding the sale of inheritance property. The complainant's son was insisting all the family members to sell the property. In contrast, the opposing party (including the complainant) and other family members were against this idea. This disagreement caused emotional distress and potential financial losses within the family.

Seeking a peaceful resolution

to their dispute, the family approached the Women Protection Cell, Sukkur, who directed the case to LAS. After which, LAS introduced both parties to ADR mechanisms, providing an alternative to lengthy court proceedings. Both parties then willingly engaged in private mediation facilitated by LAS. Throughout the mediation process, the parties reached a mutually acceptable settlement.

The family agreed to retain ownership of the inheritance

property and offered the other party their share of its market value, who then accepted the proposed share of the property's market value, with payment facilitated by a family member by a specified date. They also agreed that outstanding property expenses, such as the electricity bill, shall be divided among all family members according to their respective shares. Commitments were made to ensure peaceful coexistence within the family after the settlement and for the future ownership of the property.



Both families in dispute during a peaceful mediation at the LAS Sukkur regional office

After the peaceful resolution of the matter, both parties appreciated the LAS team's guidance and support throughout the ADR process. They valued the simplicity and efficiency of resolving such a complex matter without resorting

to costly and protracted court litigation, a matter that could have had potentially disastrous outcomes if its resolution had been delayed or not handled properly.

This success story underscores

the effectiveness of ADR mechanisms, particularly private mediation, in amicably resolving disputes while minimizing financial burdens and emotional strain.



JUSTICE SUCCESS **STORIES**

Securing Pakistan's First-ever Marital rape conviction

In a groundbreaking turn of events, the conviction of **Javed in State vs. Javed** on January 15, 2024, for a marital rape marked a pivotal moment in Pakistan's legal landscape. His wife, **Sher Bano**, courageously stood against intimate partner violence, filing a complaint against her husband's forcible acts of sodomy. Despite facing societal stigma and familial pressure, she persisted in seeking justice.

With our support, Sher Bano's case navigated the intricacies of the legal system, challenging the prevailing notion that marital rape was not prosecutable. The court's verdict, though under Section 377, acknowledged the gravity of the offense, signaling a shift towards recognizing marital rape as a criminal act. Javed was sentenced to three years of rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs. 30,000, with an additional one month of simple imprisonment if he fails to pay the fine.



Advocate Bahzad Akbar (Community Lawyer, LAS) and the counsel for this case emphasized the importance of this ruling, highlighting its potential to serve as a deterrent against marital rape. The case not only secured justice for Sher Bano but also set a precedent for future legal proceedings, as this marked the country's first-ever conviction in a marital

rape case. It underscored the imperative of reforming archaic laws and challenging entrenched patriarchal norms that perpetuate violence against women.

Sher Bano's resilience and the unwavering support of LAS exemplify the power of collective action in effecting change.

Speak to a qualified & high-court registered lawyer - TOLL FREE number:

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