



NEWSLETTER

December & January, 2016-017

1st
DECEMBER

WORLD
AIDS
DAY

26th
JANUARY

World
Disability
Day

3rd
DECEMBER

Inside

Legal Literacy Camps

Mediation Awareness Programmes

Implementation of NALSA Schemes

Visits to Observation Home etc.

Training Programme for Panel Lawyers

LEGAL LITERACY CAMPS: COLLABORATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND DISTRICT LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITIES TO BETTER SERVE THE PUBLIC

By Navneet Narwal & Jane E. Schukoske¹

“Legal Services Authorities have the unique potential to rapidly expand access to justice for India's poor and marginalized who face routine discrimination and denial of rights.” Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator & UNDP Resident Representative (2012-14).²

Citizens, aware of their legal rights, can lead dignified lives as promised in the Constitution of India. In order to achieve this vision of legal empowerment, the Indian Parliament adopted the Legal Services Authorities Act in 1987. LSA form the basis of the three-tier system of legal aid in India, including National Legal Services Authority (NALSA),³ State Legal Services Authority (SLSA), and District Legal Services Authority (DLSA). DLSA has the mandate under Legal Services Authority Act to provide free legal services to eligible citizens through Legal Care and Support Centers and organize Legal Literacy Camps⁴ and Lok Adalat (People's Court).

Indian government welfare programs can provide urgently needed relief if people know what's available, how to apply for services, and how to appeal delays and wrongful denial. It is clear that DLSA's mandate to provide access to justice includes government schemes as well court access. NALSA has issued a number of legal aid schemes for workers in the unorganized sector related to Workers Facilitation Centers, Decent Working Conditions, Rehabilitation Schemes, and Legal Assistance and Legal Representation. In 2015, NALSA also specifically addressed entitlements in the document, “Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Schemes”.⁵

Civil society organizations working in villages and slums bridge the legal community and the grassroots. For example, the Good Governance Now (Sushasan Abhi!) initiative, part of the Governance and Policy Advocacy program of S M Sehgal Foundation⁶, creates awareness among rural communities regarding the benefits, application procedure, and appeals process of welfare programs and other grievance mechanisms. Knowing the local communities, the NGO analyses ways to fine tune outreach and materials to better reach the villagers.

1. Navneet Narwal is program officer, Governance and Policy Advocacy, S M Sehgal Foundation, www.smsfoundation.org. Jane Schukoske is an advisor to the foundation.
2. Lise Grande, Foreword, Needs Assessment Study for Selected Legal Services Authorities (2012) at p. vi, available at <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/DG/needs-assessment-study-of-selected-legal-services-authorities.pdf>
3. NALSA Introduction, <http://nalsa.gov.in/>
4. HSLSA Legal Literacy Programmes, <http://hslsa.nic.in/LL.htm>
5. Brochures: Schemes of NALSA (2015), http://nalsa.gov.in/sites/default/files/Schemes_of_%20Nalsa%20English.pdf
6. S M Sehgal Foundation: What We Do: Good Rural Governance, <http://www.smsfoundation.org/good-rural-governance/>

This article describes collaboration between a DLSA and a civil society organization and analyzes the strengths of the joint effort. It closes with learning regarding good practices for organizing legal literacy camps.

Partnership paves the way

To help realize the potential of legal empowerment and develop a model replicable throughout India, Sehgal Foundation and DLSA, Nuh,⁷ Haryana started a collaborative initiative to jointly host legal literacy camps throughout the district. In this series, a legal literacy camp was organized at Nuh district of Haryana. The camp, titled National Labour Rights Consultation was held at Mini Secretariat, Nuh, on June 15, 2016, under the guidance of Haryana State Legal Services Authority (HSLSA),⁸ Panchkula.

DLSA's lead in organizing the camp was remarkable. The selection of the topic was extremely relevant and essential as most poor and marginalized people working as labour force lack awareness about the benefits provided and guaranteed to them. The idea behind organizing such a camp was to inform rural citizens and make them aware of their rights and entitlements with specific emphasis on twenty-two key government programs of Labour Department⁹, Haryana. The schemes include health insurance, financial help for marriage of their children, monetary support to the widow or any dependent, construction and repair of house, maternity benefits, scholarship for education of girl child and so on.

In addition to generating awareness of labour rights, the camp provided an important platform for citizen-government dialogue. The government officials who attended interacted with the poor and marginalized population and could better understand their problems and grievances at the grassroots level. It is hoped that with the feedback of the villagers, the government officials will now concentrate on improved implementation of the Labour Department and other government schemes. Additionally, the camp provided an opportunity to the villagers to directly interact with the government officials as well as share their grievances and hopes from the government. As an interface platform, the camp became extremely successful and DLSA's contribution in making it such a success is noteworthy.

Sehgal Foundation's involvement in the camp was very critical as well. The last mile reach of the organization in villages of the district attracted DLSA to rely on the foundation with regard to mobilization of the poor and marginalized people. Foundation staff used their field level contacts in the entire district to motivate a large number of villagers to join the camp and become legally aware. Furthermore, Sehgal Foundation staff provided follow-up, encouraging villagers to avail the benefits provided by the Labour Department, and groomed them about the application process.

Processes of organizing the camp: Roles of the collaborators

1. **Camp Design:** DLSA selected the theme of Labour Rights as the core idea of the half-day camp which was organized held from 10 am to 2 pm. The main purpose of organizing the camp

7. Nuh is erstwhile Mewat district of Haryana. The name changed in 2016.

8. <http://hslsa.nic.in/>

9. Scheme Detail, Labour Department Haryana webpages
<http://hrylabour.gov.in/bocw/settings/schemeDetail/105> and
<http://hrylabour.gov.in/welfare/users/schemeDetailFront/58>.

was to sign up attendees for membership of the Worker's Welfare Board for three years and to avail their benefits under programs of the Labour Department. In addition, DLSA primarily organized the venue, stalls and other arrangements for the camp. DLSA chose the Mini Secretariat as the venue as it is the seat of district headquarters and invited Labour Department officials, and officers from other government departments to participate. Sehgal Foundation representatives guided DLSA on the design of the stalls and required materials to be distributed to the villagers.

2. **Mobilization:** A week before the camp, the Sehgal Foundation field team mobilized the villagers through community meetings organized in fifty villages in all five blocks of Nuh district. Invitations were sent to sarpanches and other Panchayati Raj Institution members of these villages. Both DLSA and Sehgal Foundation secured coverage in the local newspapers. The field team visited door-to-door to disseminate information about the camp such as its importance, objectives, relevance to their lives, and logistical details. Pamphlets were distributed and wall posters were used to let villagers know about the camp. Announcements through loudspeaker and community radio also disseminated information about the details of the camp.

3. **Building of Knowledge Base:** A week before the camp day, DLSA and Labour Department officers jointly conducted a training of trainers (ToT) of sixteen Sehgal Foundation staff and a few Para Legal Volunteers on twenty two Labour Department schemes so that they could spread awareness among the villagers on the same. The TOT generated awareness among the trainees about the details of the schemes as well as the procedures to avail those benefits. This training broadened the Good Governance Now! initiative of Sehgal Foundation which seeks to create awareness about key government programs and available grievance redressal mechanisms in case any of the programs are not being implemented effectively.

4. **Literacy Camp physical lay-out:** The camp's basic infrastructure was designed for the convenience of the villagers. There were separate registration stalls for males and females. Sixteen Sehgal Foundation staff assisted participants in signing in and distributed Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials. The IEC materials included a four-page pamphlet on government programs, such as Swachh Bharat Mission and the National Food Security Act, and a district pocket booklet of contact numbers and addresses of grievance redressal officers of selected government departments supplying essential services (e.g., women and child development, social welfare, education, electricity, and public health) and institutions including DLSA. There were tables staffed by the Sehgal Foundation team on specific labour schemes with banners in Hindi. There was a seating area for the public where officials spoke to the group throughout the program. In a central area, sarpanches were available to sign documents that required their approval.

5. **Happenings of the camp day:** The camp attracted a total of 939 villagers, including 612 males and 327 females, and participants had the chance to interact with state and local officials. Mr. R. K. Yadav (Additional District Session Judge), Mr. Sunil Chauhan (Joint Secretary, HSLSA), Mr. Sunil Shoeran (Chief Judicial Magistrate), Mr. Narender Singh (Chief Judicial Magistrate and Secretary, DLSA), Mr. Dinesh Shashtri (District Education Officer), Ashok Nain (Director, Labor Department) and sarpanches of thirty-six villages participated in the camp. Officers from HSLSA, DLSA, and the Labour department shared information about various programs and details of helpline numbers at district and state levels. Some Para Legal Volunteers were also present to guide the villagers who attended the camp.

Of the 939 participants, 569 registered their names by filling out appropriate forms and submitting necessary documents (a copy of an Aadhaar card, proof of bank account, and photographs) along with prescribed nominal fee of Rs. 205 (Rs. 25 as membership, Rs. 5 as monthly charges) for the membership of Worker's Welfare Board for three years and to avail their benefits under programs of the Labour Department.

Students of Maharashtra National Law University who were interning with Sehgal Foundation during that time participated as well in the camp. They interacted with the villagers and government officials, including DLSA officials who visited the camp, and also learned about the organization of such camps. The camp provided a hands-on learning opportunity for students to interact directly with rural citizens and learn about their problems. Inspired by the success of the collaboration, students expressed willingness to replicate the same by engaging both DLSA and students of clinical legal education at their university in their areas of work in Maharashtra.

6. **Follow-up:** SMSF and DLSA joined hands in the follow-up processes of the camp. Both encouraged the attendees of the camp to fill up forms and submit the same at the proper office within proper timeline with the stipulated cash amount. Registration sheets and contact numbers of the enquiring villagers were recorded and preserved for future follow-ups.

Lessons Learned

Organizing legal literacy camps is no doubt crucial, but information dissemination at a half-day event is just a beginning. For rural citizens to access justice, success comes from following up on the complaints registered and applications filed through the camp. This can be facilitated with the help of paralegal volunteers of DLSAs and staff of civil society organizations working in the area. They can visit the complainants to track the progress of their complaints and guide them through the documentation processes needed for accessing their rights.

The role of the gram panchayat is critical as well, because they are key stakeholders in mobilizing people to claim entitlements. Keeping this in mind, Sehgal Foundation involved the Panchayati Raj members from early stages of mobilization. These local bodies have a better understanding of local issues and can help make the camp become more inclusive. They may also help in follow-up and cooperate with village individuals and groups to address the gaps of service delivery within their capacities. Sarpanches and panches of villages should be invited to the DLSA institutions and law schools to help build stronger relationships.

Specialised camps such as this one on Labour Rights are a vital factor in the whole legal awareness effort. After this camp, the new topic of Labour Department schemes has been integrated in all the legal literacy camps organized by Sehgal Foundation in collaboration with DLSA.

Legal literacy camp platforms act as catalysts to help citizens engage constructively with the government and access their basic rights and entitlements, which are key for their survival and well-being. Collaborative efforts by DLSAs, law schools, civil society organizations, and gram panchayats can ensure access to justice for rural communities.