

NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Article 39A of the Constitution of India provides for free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society and ensures justice for all. Articles 14 and 22(1) of the Constitution also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before law and a legal system which promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity to all. In the year 1987, the Legal Services Authorities Act was enacted by the Parliament which came into force on 9th November, 1995 to establish a nationwide uniform network for providing free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society on the basis of equal opportunity. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to monitor and evaluate implementation of legal aid programmes and to lay down policies and principles for making legal services available under the Act.

In every State, a State Legal Services Authority and in every High Court, a High Court Legal Services Committee have been constituted. District Legal Services Authorities, Taluk Legal Services Committees have been constituted in the Districts and most of the Taluks to give effect to the policies and directions of the NALSA and to provide free legal services to the people and conduct Lok Adalats in the State.

Supreme Court Legal Services Committee has been constituted to administer and implement the legal services programme insofar as it relates to the Supreme Court of India.

Functioning of NALSA

NALSA lays down policies, principles, guidelines and frames effective and economical schemes for the State Legal Services Authorities to implement the Legal Services Programmes throughout the country.

Primarily, the State Legal Services Authorities, District Legal Services Authorities, Taluk Legal Services Committees, etc. have been asked to discharge the following main functions on regular basis:

- I. To Provide Free and Competent Legal Services to the eligible persons;
- II. To organize Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes and
- III. To organize legal awareness camps in the rural areas.

I. FREE LEGAL SERVICES

The Free Legal Services include:-

- a) Payment of court fee, process fees and all other charges payable or incurred in connection with any legal proceedings;
- b) Providing service of lawyers in legal proceedings;

- c) Obtaining and supply of certified copies of orders and other documents in legal proceedings.
- d) Preparation of appeal, paper book including printing and translation of documents in legal proceedings.

Persons eligible for getting free legal services include:-

- i) Women and children;
- ii) Members of SC/ST
- iii) Industrial workmen
- iv) Victims of mass disaster, violence, flood, drought, earthquake, industrial disaster.
- v) Disabled persons.
- vi) Persons in custody
- vii) Persons whose annual income does not exceed Rs. 1 lakh (in the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee the limit is Rs. 1,25,000/-).
- viii) Victims of Trafficking in Human beings or begar

Till 31.12.2014, total no. of 1,77,85,875 eligible persons including women, children, persons in custody, persons belonging to SC/ST and backward categories have been benefitted through various free legal services authorities, viz. SLSAs/DLSAs/TLSc/Legal Aid Clinics/Village Legal Care and Support Centres.

II. LOK ADALATS

Lok Adalat is one of the Alternative Disputes Resolution Mechanisms. It is a forum where the disputes/cases pending in the court of law or at pre-litigation stage are settled/ compromised amicably. The Lok Adalat has been given statutory status under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. Under this Act, an award made by a Lok Adalat is deemed to be a decree of a civil court and is final and binding on all parties and no appeal lies against thereto before any court.

(a) Lok Adalats are being organized by the Legal Services Authorities/Committees for settlement of cases pending before courts u/s 19 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 and also for matters at pre-Litigative stage, under the guidance of NALSA.

(b) Chapter VI-A has been inserted in the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 in the year 2002, with a view to provide compulsory pre-Litigative mechanism for conciliation and settlement of disputes relating to 'Public Utility Services'.

During the period 01.04.2014 to 30.09.2014 76551 Lok Adalats were organized and they settled more than 34.37 lacs cases. In about 46,768 Motor Vehicle Accident Claim cases, compensation to the tune of Rs.894.85 crores.

LEGAL AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

As a part of the preventive and strategic legal aid, NALSA through the State Legal Services Authorities, conduct legal literacy programmes. In some States, Legal Literacy Programmes are conducted every year in schools and colleges and also for empowerment of women in a routine manner, besides the rural legal literacy camps.

NALSA undertook special legal awareness programmes on **MGNREGA, Rights of Senior Citizens** and **Women's Welfare Programmes**. A special scheme for settlement of grievances relating to MGNREGA through LokAdalat also was implemented by NALSA.