A welfare state stresses that no one should be deprived of legal justice. Legal aid was first established in England and Wales as part of the postwar effort to create a welfare state for those too poor to afford basic services. India that claims to be a welfare state seeks to provide necessary legal aid service to the poor, to the helpless, to an individual unable to bear expenses to start and continue a legal battle for legal justice. Legal Aid in India is governed by the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 and various related regulations and State based legislations. A combination of governmental and nongovernmental efforts work towards increasing the incidence of legal aid. This paper analyses how the lack of awareness and a negative perception of legal aid in Mumbai has created a service delivery problem that needs intensive policy driven corrective measures for ensuring access to justice. The paper recommends solutions towards building a more robust legal aid delivery system.

Key words: legal aid, access to justice, service delivery, perception, awareness

Welfare state is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life. Welfare state is a concept of government where the state plays a significant role in protecting and promoting the economic and social well-being of its people. Welfare states in their very meaning encompass the need for adequate means of access to justice for all without hindrance due to economic incapacity or need. Without the provision of means to access enforcement of legislations meant to protect one’s rights or advance social welfare, the legislations and welfare schemes cannot be fully realised. Legal aid ensures that no one loses out on the protection of their rights and access to the legal system by virtue of financial constraints. Legal aid, in its basic essence, involves the providing of public funds or services to those who are incapable of providing for legal costs by themselves.

Article 39A, under the Directive Principles of State Policy, inserted by way of a Constitutional Amendment in 1976 to the Constitution of India, reads,

Equal justice and free legal aid - The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities.
Article 39A envisages that the State shall provide for all its citizens a legal system that is based on the tenets of justice and equality and will ensure that justice is not denied to any person due to any sort of economic incapacity or other disability. The Directive Principles of State Policy, though non-enforceable, form the guiding principles for directing socio-economic development of the nation, legal aid is incorporated here as a fundamental principle that needs to be fulfilled to ensure that the state provides adequately for the welfare of all.

Further, Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India also provide for the fundamental right to equality before law and the right to protection of life and personal liberty. These rights have been interpreted in such manner by the judiciary, so as to ensure that the need for legal aid and upholding of the fundamental rights of citizens are not trampled upon and that access to justice does not become a function of economic capacity or prowess. The Supreme Court, in its various judgements, has upheld the right to free legal aid services as essential to ensuring that the principles of natural justice are met and that fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 21 are ensured.

The need for legal aid can also be seen in international resolutions and agreements. Principle 1, Clause 14 of Resolution No. 67/187 of the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems states:

> The right to legal aid, therefore, has been recognised as an essential element of a fair, humane and efficient criminal justice system that is based on the rule of law. This right is a foundation for the enjoyment of other rights, including the right to a fair trial, and is an important safeguard that ensures fundamental fairness and public trust in the criminal justice process.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights under Article 14 (3)(d) also guarantees to everyone,

> Right to be tried in his presence, and to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing; to be informed, if he does not have legal assistance, of this right; and to have legal assistance assigned to him, in any case where the interests of justice so require, and without payment by him in any such case if he does not have sufficient means to pay for it.

It clearly states that it is the right of every person to have legal aid where they are unable to pay the costs for legal assistance.

While Article 39A falls under the Directive Principles of State Policy, legislation, by way of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, gives it enforceable backing and brings to fruition the effort of the Constitution makers to build a more just and equitable society. The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, covers a wide array of legal aid services and also outlines to whom legal aid is applicable. It looks at Lok Adalats (people’s courts), legal aid camps and the setting up of legal aid funds and legal aid services authorities at various levels. Later legislation and government efforts have highlighted further aspects of the need to provide competent legal services, as under National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010.
Legal aid awareness programme

In pursuance of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and otherwise, several schemes and programmes have been formulated to increase legal aid awareness and legal literacy in general. NALSA, under whose purview these schemes and programs lie, has built a plan that aims at ensuring delivery of basic legal knowledge to specific groups in an attempt to aid them in the recognition and assertion of their legal rights. NALSA works with various bodies like the National Commission for Women, Ministry of Social Welfare etc., to ensure holistic development of its strategy. It does make efforts to increase publicity through the Broadcasting Ministry and Prasar Bharti and undertakes measures like setting up hoardings, producing short documentaries, carrying out advertisements, providing publicity material to State Authorities etc.

It organises legal aid camps, workshops, seminars across the country in partnership with other Legal Service Authorities, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) etc. towards increasing legal awareness. It has developed audio visual content that is distributed through the Directorate of Field Publicity, Government of India. A scheme to provide for accreditation of Voluntary Social Service Institutions, to build an interlinked network of voluntary organisations aimed at increasing legal literacy, awareness and legal services publicity has been developed as well. Alongside, it develops micro legal literacy projects in all States. Specific legal awareness and grievance redressal programs for supporting schemes through the State Legal Services Authorities have also been evolved. It also trains social workers and volunteers as paralegals to help bridge the gap between the community and the legal system.

The 222nd report of the Law Commission of India also stresses on the need for legal literacy and the need to create awareness regarding legal aid provisions. It also touches upon how such awareness can aid the use of Lok Adalats and Nyaaya Panchayats and lead to speedier settlement of disputes (Law Commission of India, 2009). Several NGOs like Majlis, India Centre for Human Rights Law, in Mumbai and Sahyog in Pune etc., work towards legal aid awareness and training of social workers as paralegals - these efforts though are often restrained due to a lack of adequate resources, in terms of finances and human resources. (Majlis Research Centre, 2000)

The Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India is implementing a Project on ‘Access to Justice for Marginalized People’ (A2J) with support from the United Nations Development Programme. This project is geared at strengthening access to justice for the marginalised, by giving support to efforts that aim to reduce barriers faced by them. These barriers are identified as being a result of a lack of awareness, inaccessibility of legal aid and the absence of support services to facilitate access to justice. It had reached about two million people in seven States by 2012 and had trained 7000 paralegal workers and 300 lawyers. (Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, Department of Justice and United Nations Development Program, 2012) It worked in association with Tata Institute of Social Sciences to set up helpdesks at Observation Homes in Maharashtra to provide social and legal guidance to those falling under the juvenile justice system. It is also supporting legal aid and legal empowerment initiatives, these details are highlighted in the report of the International

However, a persistent problem with policy in India is its implementation. Well formulated and well intentioned policies lose steam because of not gauging possible delivery faults in time and taking precautionary measures to correct them to ensure that policy initiatives are effective in reality. It is this concern that this study seeks to examine. Lack of awareness can result in a underutilisation of a service provided by the government. Problems of perception towards the quality of a service can lead to the reduction or complete nonusage of a service, especially in legal cases where persons involved generally have high stakes in the outcome of the case, services that are perceived as being of poor or subpar quality are less likely to be utilised as legal cases have immense impact on the lives of persons involved. Failure of most welfare state measures are linked to a lack of awareness and issues of implementation, this holds true for delivery of legal aid services as well.

Assessing legal aid in Mumbai: Awareness and perception as service delivery problems

The objectives of this study are:

• To measure awareness legal aid in Mumbai.
• To measure perception of legal aid.

Survey Design

The survey was the research tool designed to assess legal aid awareness and perception among the following categories of persons, all of whom had lived in Mumbai for at least a year:

• Low income groups
• Middle/High income groups
• Lawyers

The survey questionnaire for those of low and middle/high income groups was the same while that for lawyers had some additional questions. Categories in terms of those who are engaged as lawyers and are thereby de facto providers of such legal aid services and those who are of the low or middle/high income groups, where most are beneficiaries of such legal aid services helped gauge the difference in opinion from both ends of the spectrum in terms of service delivery. Income categories helped assess if there is any fundamental difference in legal aid perception and awareness between those who have the economic capacity to pay for legal services by themselves and those who do not have such capacity. Income categories were defined as follows: low income category was defined as annual income below three lakh rupees for a household, middle income was defined as annual income between three to six lakh rupees for a household, and high income was defined as annual income above six
lakh rupees for a household; the middle and high income group was taken as one group while collecting responses. No such income division was made amongst lawyer respondents. Care was taken to ensure that only one member from a each household responded to the survey. The survey also proposed to understand gaps in awareness and perception amongst people with regard to legal aid in terms of their income level and which end of the service delivery spectrum they lie at.

A stratified sampling method was followed and accordingly, groups were identified to ensure a diversity of thought and experiences in terms of legal aid awareness and perception; data was collected using the snowball technique. Initially the survey was distributed amongst known persons and they were asked to distribute it further, this was done through online and offline methods. Surveys for low income categories were collected by visiting the locations and getting more respondents through references from the initial respondent. Surveys were collected by way of Google forms online, as well as through printed forms, manually. Google forms were circulated online by way of social media channels, Facebook and Twitter, and sent personally to individuals over WhatsApp and Email and were further distributed by recipients. Printed forms were manually distributed to low income respondents that could read, while those who could not were taken through the survey orally. Each survey group had 100 respondents, with a total of 300 respondents. The survey was translated to Hindi and Marathi orally, where required. The questionnaire included a mix of open ended and binary response questions.

The overall objective of the research study is to understand the awareness and perception of legal aid in Mumbai and to examine corresponding results against the axiom of service delivery. To this effect, the limitations of the study are:

- Short duration of time available for the study.
- Limitation of resources, in terms of human resources.
- Location focused on is only Mumbai.
- Unwillingness of lawyers, especially younger lawyers to speak openly about issues regarding legal aid from amongst the legal fraternity.

Demographics of the respondents

In terms of age, seven respondents were below the age of 18, 118 respondents were between 19 and 25 years of age, 146 respondents were between 26 and 40 years of age, 25 respondents were between 41 and 60 years of age and four respondents were above the age of 60. In terms of gender, 121 of the 300 respondents were female, 179 were male, there were no respondents of the third gender. Forty-two of the 100 low income group respondents had no education at all, there were no such middle/high income respondents. Forty-three of the 100 middle/high income respondents had an undergraduate degree whereas only four of the 100 low income respondents had an undergraduate degree. Amongst lawyers, 73 of the 100 respondents had LL.B and 26 LL.M. degree; one had another postgraduate degree.
Key findings

The survey had several questions that were aimed at gauging awareness and perception of legal aid among respondents. Further results and discussions pertaining to these questions are analysed here within the frameworks of ‘awareness’, ‘perception’, ‘direct involvement’, ‘right to legal aid’ and ‘suggested solutions’.

Awareness

1. Awareness of legal aid provisions is very low amongst low income group and relatively better in the middle/high income group.

Figure 1. Did you know that India has a law that provides legal aid to those who can’t afford legal services?

As shown in Figure 1, all lawyers knew of the law that provides for legal aid services, 34 middle/high income respondents and 87 low income respondents did not know that the law provides for legal aid provisions at all. There is a marked lack of awareness in the lower income group and even a large portion of the middle/high income group do not know of the law regarding legal aid. In terms of service delivery, this is a failure at the first step itself. This creates an information asymmetry between service providers and beneficiaries of the service.

2. Awareness of details of legal provisions contained within legal aid legislation was even lower among low and middle/high income groups.

As can be seen from Figure 2, only two respondents of the low income group and 36 respondents of the middle/high income groups knew of Lok Adalats, while earlier 13 and 66 respondents of respective groups had known of legal aid legislation, highlighting gaps in knowledge and a problem of incomplete information of those who have some awareness as well. All lawyers knew of Lok Adalats.
Figure 2. Did you know that the law provides for *Lok Adalats* for speedy settlement of disputes?

The distribution of responses to the question, “Did you know that the law provides for legal aid camps to dispense information about laws and help persons with legal issues on a mass scale?” are as in Figure 3. Similar results are seen here, none of the low income respondents knew of such a provision and only 19 of the middle/high income respondents knew of such a provision. Here three lawyers did not know of this provision as well, still, the stark difference among all three categories remains visible.

Figure 3. Awareness about law providing for legal aid camps

Other questions also assessed awareness of respondents to various facets of the law regarding legal aid and newly launched services in India, a similar pattern was observed. Most respondents did not know of *Lok Adalats*, legal aid camps or regulations providing for competent and good quality legal aid.

3. Awareness of new legal aid services and initiatives launched by the government was low amongst all groups. This question was put to the respondents, “Do you know of any of these services launched recently by the Government of India towards
legal aid?”. A list of options was provided, including services like Pro Bono Legal Services, Tele Law, Nyaaya Mitra. The respondents could select more than one answer as well.

Figure 4. Awareness about services launched by the Government of India towards legal aid

As shown in Figure 4, 95, 72 and 38 respondents of the low income group, middle/high income group, and lawyers group, respectively, did not know of even one of these services recently launched by the Government. When the service provider itself does not have knowledge of the new services that they must provide, then conceptualising such a service on paper makes no difference towards changing ground realities.

4. The distribution of responses to the question, “Did you know that there are regulations that make it mandatory for the State to provide you competent, good quality legal services?” – are as in Figure 5 below. Regulations controlling this fall under the NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010 while the earlier provisions fell under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. Four, 36 and 95 respondents from the low income group, middle/high income group and lawyers group knew of these regulations respectively. There is a marked information asymmetry between groups and it is such asymmetry that leads to market failures.
5. The distribution of responses to the question, “Do you know someone who has accessed legal aid services?” are as in Figure 6 below. Only four respondents of the lower income group and 22 persons of the middle/high income group knew of persons who had availed of legal aid services. Of all lawyers, 10 did not know of anyone who has accessed legal aid services.

Majority of the respondents agree that there is a need for awareness creation regarding legal aid services.

It is worth mentioning here that one of the reasons for the lack of awareness could be lack of adequate funds. The 2017-18 Union Budget gives ₹ 1,744.13 crore for administration of justice: including justice delivery, legal reforms, development of infrastructural facilities and autonomous bodies associated with legal matters and education. This is far less than one per cent of the total budget of ₹ 21.47 lakh crore; one
must especially consider such lack of funding in light of the judiciary being burdened with a backlog of over three crore cases. The allocation for National Legal Services Authority in revised estimates for 2016-17 was ₹83.95 crore and for 2017-18 it is ₹100 crore (LiveLaw News Network, 2017). These budgetary allocations are much less than what is needed and serve as a roadblock on the path to an effective and efficient legal system in general. This will in turn hamper the projects in place for building awareness and will reduce quality of service perception.

Figure 7. Quality of legal aid in India

Perception

Perception of legal aid is uniformly negative; surprisingly lawyers are most strongly of the opinion that legal aid in India is of poor quality.

1. Responses to the question asked respondents, “What do you think about the quality of legal aid in India?” are as in Figure 7.

Most respondents who did know of legal aid have marked its quality as poor or very poor. In fact even the lawyers that form a part of the provider side of the service has marked it poorly: 55 lawyers have marked the quality of legal aid as poor and 22 lawyers have marked it as very poor. Of the few that did know of legal aid in the low income community, only two have marked the quality of legal aid as good or anywhere average/above average. Thirty six respondents of the middle/high income group have also marked the quality of legal aid as poor and 14 have marked it as very poor. This reflection of the perception of people towards legal aid may lead to their lack of use of legal aid services even in times of need, as seen later, and is in general also a reflection of the bad quality of the legal aid system as it stands today.

2. Most respondents across groups stated that they believe lawyers provide subpar services in legal aid cases, this belief was reflected most strongly in responses from the lawyers itself. A question asked respondents, “Do you think that lawyers provide subpar legal services in legal aid cases?”
As shown in Figure 8, 86 lawyers, 41 middle/high income respondents and nine low income respondents agreed with this. Of the remaining, 11 lawyers, 11 middle/high income respondents and two low income respondents were neutral, the others disagreed and thought the lawyers provided quality legal services in legal aid cases. This highlights how such belief may be derived in itself from actual experiences of subpar services by lawyers. Lawyers themselves stating this definitely highlights a problematic trend in the quality of service delivered. Also, it is surprisingly that lawyers themselves are the largest group that believe lawyers provide subpar services in legal aid cases. Even amongst those of the low income groups and middle/high income groups that know of legal aid, the perception is mostly that lawyers provide subpar legal services when dealing with legal aid cases. This has important implications as it may cause parties to refrain from accessing legal aid from fear of bad service. Providing services that are not up to the mark in effect violates the right of a person to legal aid. It is beneficial to look at causes of such subpar delivery of services and bring in more effective monitoring and evaluation measures to prevent such further subpar delivery.

3. Low and middle/high income respondents mostly state that perception of legal aid quality has an effect on usage of legal aid, while lawyers mostly don’t think so.

While 66 of the low income group respondents and 76 of the middle/high income group respondents stated that perception of legal aid affects people’s use of it, 63 lawyers
disagreed and stated that perception of legal aid does not affect use of legal aid, as shown in Figure 9. Surprisingly then, on being asked for reasons why clients refuse legal aid, most lawyers stated that lack of belief in the quality of the legal aid system is what drove clients to not seeking legal aid even in dire financial circumstances. This highlights a strong lack of understanding of the needs of the beneficiaries of a services by the providers of it, even when such needs are directly expressed by the beneficiaries themselves. Such flawed understanding makes addressing service delivery problems difficult.

4. A question was asked of lawyer respondents, “Why do clients refuse legal aid even when legal fees are prohibitive or unaffordable for them?” As shown in Figure 10, a fear of quality of legal service being provided through legal aid being bad/subpar is what kept most clients away from accessing legal aid, as told to the lawyers. There was an additional concern of the process being time consuming. Clients also seemed to be unsure of the legal aid in general and a primary driving force away from legal aid was the fear of losing their case as a combination of the above stated factors. This contrasts with what the lawyers had earlier stated, that they do not think perception of legal aid matters as much for persons to use legal aid, although clearly clients themselves had made it clear that perception of legal aid is a strong factor in deciding if they use legal aid or not.

Figure 10. Reasons why clients refuse free legal aid

Direct Involvement

1. 16 respondents of the low income group and 18 respondents of the middle/high income group stated that they had been part of a legal case, only one respondent from each category stated that they had used legal aid services. Only 60 of the lawyer respondents had been part of a legal aid case, 77 of them had referred a case for legal aid.

2. None of the lawyers had registered for providing any of the new legal aid services provided for by the government. The purpose was to assess the motivation towards engagement of lawyers with legal aid services.
Right to Legal Aid

The survey also had questions to understand subjective beliefs of citizens surrounding legal aid. These questions looked at assessing what the respondents felt about their personal right to legal aid and how necessary such a right was for them towards building a just and equitable society. 87 of the respondents of the low income group and 87 of the middle/high income group believe they have a right to legal aid. 94 of the lawyer respondents believe they have a right to legal aid.

A question asked respondents, “Why do you/Why do you not believe you have a right to legal aid?” - responses are highlighted in Figure 11 (a), (b) and (c) below. Most respondents expressed the belief that legal aid is a fundamental right under the Constitution of India that is accorded to them by virtue of them being citizens of India. All highlighted the need of effective legal aid services as a means to securing access to justice. There is though a difference in responses as well; persons of the low income group veered towards stressing on the need for legal aid in terms of affordability of legal services and help for the poor alongside their claim of it as a right towards securing the future of their family. Respondents of the middle/high income group and the lawyers group spoke primarily in terms of fundamental rights, constitutional provisions and citizenship guarantees. This creates a difference in the approach respondents of different groups take towards legal aid and the need to maybe account for the needs of certain groups more as opposed to that of others. Clearly for certain groups legal aid is a matter of securing basic interests which are otherwise unaffordable while for others it forms more of an important part of the fabric of constitutionality and upholding of rights.

Fig. 11. Why do you/Why do you not believe you have a right to legal aid?

(a) Low Income
Majority of the respondents said that they believed they had a right to legal aid and that effective legal aid was important towards a just and equitable society. A belief in legal aid as a fundamental right, constitutionality of equality before law and guarantees of citizenship were the driving reasons behind such belief in a right to legal aid. Additionally, for low income groups, the right to legal aid also stemmed from the need for help in cases of economic incapacity in terms of legal expenses.

**Suggested solutions**

To an open ended question, “What do you think can be done to improve perception of legal aid?”, the key solutions suggested were geared, as can be seen in Figure 12 (a), (b) and (c) below, towards creation of awareness and improving the perception of legal aid. There was also a focus on use of on-ground activities amongst low income group and educational programs at various levels in the middle/high income group and lawyers group. Lawyers also suggested a need for student participation and direct
engagement of lawyers with various communities to improve perception of legal aid.

Figure 12. Measures to improve perception of legal aid

(a) Low Income

(b) Middle/High Income
Policy recommendations

While the government has taken steps towards building legal aid frameworks and providing for its awareness and quality improvement, the survey results clearly highlight a marked lack of awareness amongst the targeted beneficiary. Awareness creation programmes by government agencies and other bodies have not yielded expected results. While schemes on paper highlight India’s commitment to provision of legal aid to all its citizens, lack of effective implementation and ineffectual delivery channels ensure that legal aid, and thereby a component of the corollary of access to justice for all, is not realised.

To that effect, some policy recommendations are suggested here that look at improving awareness and perception of legal aid. There is an urgent need to formulate an action plan that is solely directed towards ensuring that more and more people are aware of their legal rights and legal aid provisions - to ensure that the ideals of legal aid under a welfare state set up can be realised. Policy recommendations here are looked at under the heads of recommendations for ‘Awareness Creation’ and ‘Perception Improvement’.

Awareness creation

1. National legal aid policy: There is a need for India to develop a comprehensive national legal aid policy that covers under its ambit all possible legal aid schemes and programmes and gives it a definite institutional structure. Such national policy needs to account for definite measures of creating awareness of legal aid programmes and improving the perception of legal aid. Provision of capacity support, in terms of funding and provision of trained human resources, is imperative.

2. Comprehensive media strategy: Awareness creation at a larger scale for legal aid services requires concentrated effort and a clear and defined media strategy. The media strategy and content needs to be such that it engages persons so as to make them want to know more about legal aid provisions and that captures on audiences of already existing mediums rather than necessarily creating new mediums for delivery of such information, some ways in which this can be done are:
i. Television Advertisements can be issued in multiple languages, in public interest, that provide for creating awareness amongst people about the awareness of legal aid laws in the country and how those interested can know more about these services. The content of such advertisements can be built or mentored by leading media houses while a nationwide contest for creating such content can be launched to engage young professionals in the media space and thereby create more interest and publicity for legal aid provisions.

ii. Radio shows could be utilised to have similar advertisements regarding legal aid services. A portion of Mann Ki Baat (Mind’s Voice) by the Prime Minister can focus on legal aid provisions and its intertwined nature with access to justice and social welfare. A radio channel/show, similar to the TV channel proposed, can also be launched to engage listeners on legal aid issues. Otherwise a radio hour that daily deal with key issues regarding legal aid can be launched in various languages in an easy to follow question and answer format, this would engage listeners more effectively and increase publicity.

iii. Newspaper advertisements that provide easy to understand and visually appealing infographics of legal aid in India will be beneficial towards providing legal aid knowledge to a larger audience.

iv. Display of informative posters on legal aid in trains, buses and other local transport along with announcements over their intercom system will boost the audience reached towards legal aid awareness.

3. On ground efforts: Along with a comprehensive media strategy, the need remains for on ground efforts to create legal aid awareness. Any national legal aid policy will have to provide for a set framework for carrying out on ground activities regarding legal aid awareness creation and also develop government approved toolkits that allow for easy training of individuals in delivering legal aid based information and ensure uniformity of content and correctness of material delivered. Using theatre groups to create content that is engaging for audiences by means of street plays and musical performances is an effective engagement tool, especially in urban slum areas and rural and tribal backward areas. This would also make the idea of door to door legal aid service and information delivery easier to achieve.

4. Education programmes: Educational institutes must also engage their students to promote the cause of legal aid through programmes that can serve as immersive learning for their students. A well defined National Service Scheme project that aims at expanding awareness of legal aid by student volunteers can help achieve this. All law related courses must include a compulsory project to further legal aid awareness as part of a one’s practical training assessment, this could be by way of organisation of legal aid camps by these students or door to door dissemination of information.

5. Legal fraternity engagement: All legal offices and premises, private or public, must have a compulsory conspicuous display of legal aid provisions in the form of banners or posters as prescribed by the government.
Perception improvement

Awareness improvement efforts will automatically highlight governmental support and commitment towards building legal aid services. Alongside those measures, certain quality control and improvement measures can be adopted to improve the perception of legal aid.

I. *Public legal aid cases directory:* All cases that are delivered under legal aid must be registered onto a separate web portal with prescribed details and a unique legal aid case number must be provided to ensure public tracking of such legal aid cases in real. Making such information public in real time will ensure that undue delays, lack of counsel provision etc. are accounted for as they happen and allow for people to take action accordingly.

II. *Helpline number:* A single helpline number that allows for beneficiaries of legal aid to register complaints regarding quality of service with their unique legal aid case number, as provided above, would aid in building public trust towards governmental desire to improve legal aid. This helpline number could also be used to access legal advice from lawyers.

III. *Publishing of success stories:* To build a better image of the existing legal aid set up and thereby increase its usage, it is imperative to inform people of the benefits that other people are receiving through use of legal aid. Use of traditional media and social media to start legal aid success stories campaigns would be beneficial. Television advertisements can also include snippets of beneficiaries speaking of how legal aid has benefited them.

IV. *Legal aid jan sabhas (people’s assembly):* Arrangement of such public gatherings in designated locations for people to air grievances regarding legal aid procedures and/or realities will aid discussion between the lawyers and beneficiary groups and remove the barrier that exists between service providers and service beneficiaries and help devise systems to improve legal aid delivery and give beneficiaries a chance to be heard and to get their grievances resolved.

Policy that aims to address legal aid awareness and perception issues must assess why there is a lack in quality of service delivery and aim to improve it through better incentives, training programs and quality based intervention programs that undertake continuous monitoring and evaluation of legal aid service delivery from both the demand and supply side and corrects gaps as they may arise.

Conclusions

Access to justice should be one of the key factors that governments account for while designing welfare based policies. Availability of services on paper do not amount to much when there is a lack of delivery in real terms, irrespective of whether this lack of delivery exists because of faults in the delivery line or due to general lack of awareness of such services even existing. The survey analysis highlights the lack of awareness of legal aid services amongst respondents who are beneficiaries of these services and a
very poor perception of legal aid services amongst all respondents, including lawyers, who are key service providers of these services. A uniform line of thought that emerged through the survey is that all persons perceive legal aid provision as necessary and consider it imperative to achieve a just and equitable society. This emphasises the need for the State to formulate an effective and comprehensive national legal aid policy that covers all dimensions of service delivery, including media strategy, on ground efforts, education programmes, involvement of the legal fraternity as well as quality improvement and better grievance.

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