



NEWSLETTER

LAS
LEGAL AID SOCIETY

RESHAPING SOLUTIONS FOR
ACCESSING JUSTICE IN PAKISTAN

January - March 2023

22nd Edition

EDITORIAL SECTION: from the desk of Barrister Haya Emaan Zahid (CEO, LAS)

HUNGER IN PAKISTAN - more than just an economic crisis



Inflation in the last month surged to its highest level since 1974 at 31.5% according to the latest figures released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on March 01, 2023. Stampedes for ration distribution killed 16 in Karachi recently. This should be the single point agenda of the Government – which should be working on a near-war footing for providing relief to millions.

However, the pains and struggles of Pakistan's most vulnerable worsened during the divine month of Ramadan as skyrocketing inflationary pressures further choked on the diminished abilities of families to make ends meet. Despite the obsession of media entities; lambasting their channels and efforts on the ensuing political/constitutional turmoil engulfing us in relation to uncertainty around the polls; the single biggest issue of debate and survival for millions of Pakistanis is how to put the next adequate meal on their table amidst the continued deepening costs of living. It is estimated that the average blue-collar family has been stripped of 35% of its purchasing power in the last few months!

The agreement on debt refinancing with the International Monetary Fund has been pending since March 2020 when the 6.5 billion dollar loan program was suspended however, even if this deal comes through it is not expected to provide immediate relief to the average household for the next year or so. In fact, many analysts say that the worst is yet to come in this economic crisis.



One oft-neglected component of enhancing social security measures in the face of such macro inflationary pressures is reducing wastage and amplifying austerity measures. A 2018 National Nutrition Survey revealed 36.9% of the population was facing food insecurity owing to economic, political, and natural

factors. This position has naturally been worsened by the flash floods of 2022 which government officials estimate damaged more than 80% of the country's crops.

Despite the high levels of poverty and hunger prevailing around us, a significant amount of food is being wasted every day. Legal Aid Society has recently filed a petition before the High Court of Sindh, calling for action to be taken to prevent further food wastage in the province. The petition has gained widespread attention and is expected to have significant implications for the people of Sindh. The petition also points out that food wastage has significant environmental consequences, such as contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and water pollution. A few years ago Pakistan had the privileged status of being a food surplus country with its agricultural sector contributing to 24% of our GDP. The Government must circle back in this distorted political landscape to its constitutional commitment which mandates the provision of necessities of life including food to all citizens. Moreover, another commitment of the state to ensure food availability, accessibility, and a sustainable food production system is envisioned in Pakistan's National Food Security Policy, 2018.



Systematic distribution of ration in Sukkur during the LAS flood relief campaign

Festivities around NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL DAYS

KASHMIR DAY rally



LAS stands in solidarity with the people of Kashmir. On Kashmir Day – February 05, 2023, as we remember the struggles and hardships faced by its people, we condemn the delay in justice for the people of that region. The Legal Aid Society stands in solidarity with Kashmir, condemning all human rights violations in the occupied area.

LAS organized a rally in Shaheed Benazirabad to show our unwavering support for the people of Kashmir and their right to live with dignity and freedom.

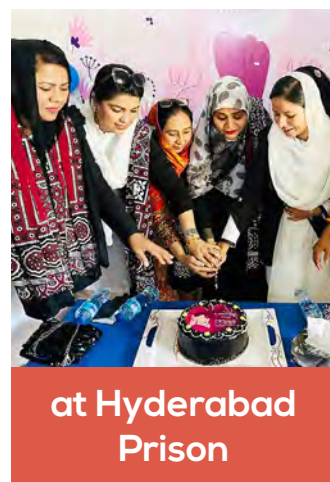
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY celebrations

A woman carries a whole world within her; without her contributions, our world would be incomplete. To pay tribute to all women who had/are devoting their lives to making our world a better place, we celebrated International Women's Day across all our offices.

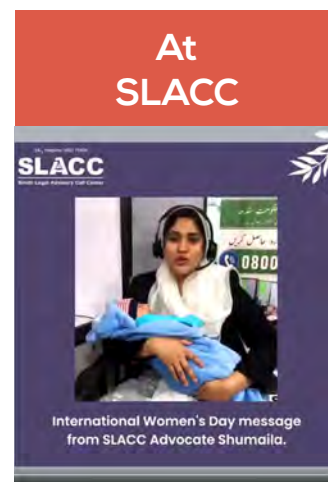


LAS Sanghar team, in collaboration with Shifa Foundation, celebrated women's day at village Faqeer Pir Bux, which was attended by 210 participants, including women's rights activists, representatives of CSOs, social workers, and relevant stakeholders.

On this occasion, LAS also conducted an awareness session on laws dealing with GBV, the rights of women in property, the importance of education for women's empowerment, and the like. The participants of the event also performed a tablo (mini-theatre) to highlight the issues confronted by women.



In collaboration with CWP-LAO, the LAS Hyderabad team organized Women's day celebrations at the Hyderabad Women's prison. This celebration witnessed participation from all women incarcerated in prison. The participants highlighted their issues via different forms of Art and paintings. On the occasion, the Women prisoners came dressed and were very happy to be involved. They expressed their appreciation to the organizers for arranging such an amazing event.



A social media campaign was held, with all SLACC lawyers sharing video messages on their experiences as working women and how SLACC helps its female callers. On this occasion, Mr. Ali Ahmed Baloch (Honorable Secretary of Parliamentary Affairs and Criminal Prosecution Department, Government of Sindh) acknowledged this campaign and remarked it as "a public expression of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country."



LAS regional teams from all districts organized a celebration to pay tribute to the contribution of women working in their office. On the day, the speakers discussed how the intersectionality of gender and religious identities have a compound effect on minority women and also discussed the concrete actions to be undertaken to improve the living condition of minority women.



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MR. Zulfiqar Ali Meera
Legal Aid Society
Sukkur

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FLOOD RELIEF CAMPAIGN IN SINDH: PHASE-II UPDATES

Winters are not the same for everyone. In rural areas of Sindh, poverty and the lack of access to warm clothing leave the financially deprived (especially women & children) extremely vulnerable during winters.

Following Phase-1 of the Flood Relief program (mass-scaled ration distribution across Sindh), our field officers interviewed community members on their urgent essential needs due to the flooding. Communities from all seven districts (Dadu, Hyderabad, Larkana, Khairpur, Shaheed Benazirabad, Sanghar, and Sukkur) informed our field teams about the urgent need for blankets due to the upcoming winter months. People who had lost their homes during the recent flash floods were living in harsh conditions and even without roofs.



Support by the DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SUKKUR

In September 2022, Deputy Commissioner Sukkur and Ghotki reported that 29,299 houses were damaged during the floods. With no access to warm clothes or shoes, LAS stepped in to give back to society and contribute via its flood relief campaigns to assist the disfranchised segments.

Appreciating our winter relief interventions, the Office of the Deputy Commissioner Sukkur allocated 900 blankets to contribute to this cause. **Dr. Shahzad Tahir** (Honorable Dy. Commissioner Sukkur) and **Mr. Samandar Bhutto** (Additional Dy. Commissioner Sukkur) graced the distribution of these blankets.

We wholeheartedly the Office of the Deputy Commissioner Sukkur, whose contributions helped save the vulnerable during the winter spell.

To their aid, we provided blankets & warm clothes to help the affected survive in such conditions as per the second phase of our flood relief interventions. A total of **8,400 blankets** were distributed in 8 districts of Sindh, lending a helping

hand to **4,200 families**. We wholeheartedly thank our donors: The Indus Relief program and the Bay View Academy, who trusted us and whose contributions helped us to save the vulnerable from the harsh winter conditions.

Being honored with the MOHTARMA FATIMA JINNAH - BENAZIR BHUTTO SHAHEED AWARD



Following the floods in 2022, LAS initiated flood relief campaigns to provide life-saving supplies to women, children, and vulnerable communities.

During phase-I, 5,289 deserving families were provided one-month ration bags. While 8,400

blankets were distributed during phase-II of our interventions. In acknowledgment of these efforts, LAS was honored with the **"Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah - Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Award"** by the **Sindh Commission on the Status of Women** on February 13, 2023.

Protecting CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

While the floods may be over, the affected are still derailing from their after-effects. With millions of livestock and properties affected, it was also reported that people also lost their numerous important documents.

To create an enabling environment and strengthen the response mechanism to support the registration and recovery of civil status documentation for at-risk individuals impacted by the floods, the Legal Aid Society is currently implementing a project with support from the International Organization for Migration. The execution of this intervention is being implemented in highly affected districts of Dadu, Sanghar, SBA, Umerkot,



and Khairpur. Our field officers are conducting an intensive mapping exercise in these districts to identify people who lost their civil documents during the floods of 2022, and establishing linkages with financial security support systems in the regions.

Furthermore, our teams conducted

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Government representatives and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at the Umerkot District Commissioner's (DC) office. We visited NADRA & BISP centers on February 01, 2023, to understand the challenges people face in accessing social security/ financial schemes initiated by the Government for flood affectees.

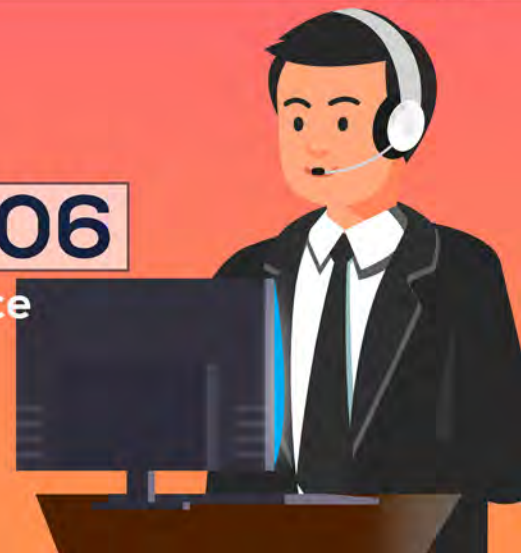


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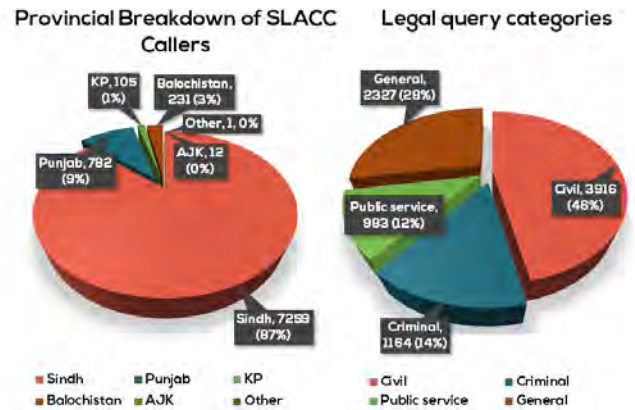
EMPOWERING CITIZENS AT THE FOREFRONT OF CRISES

through its Toll-free number: 0800-70806

The Sindh Legal Advisory Call Center (SLACC) is a flagship project of the Legal Aid Society and the Government of Sindh. This is Pakistan’s first and one-of-a-kind toll-free helpline, which to date has received over 406,683 calls via an Interactive Voice Recording (IVRT) system, with over 204,164 queries registered and resolved from over 450 cities across Pakistan, reaching the 200,000 query milestone this quarter.

Through promotional activities, forming new partnerships, and leveraging social media, we aimed to inform individuals across society about our services. In particular, our aim was to reach out to women and other vulnerable communities. Collaborations with like-minded organizations and our stakeholders were paramount in achieving these goals.

During the reporting quarter, SLACC registered and catered to over **8,390** legal queries across Pakistan. The provincial and category-wise breakdown is such:



PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



Seminar at Oriental Law College Mehrabpur

Advocate Faheem Ahmed (SLACC on-call Lawyer) spoke at Oriental Law College Mehrabpur’s seminar on February 11, 2023, on “Legal Education: The Need of Present Day”. The seminar was attended by law students, professors, and university stakeholders, with whom Advocate Faheem shared the services offered, along with the past achievements of SLACC.



Kiran Foundation’s Salma Ghar

Advocate Izza Rizvi (SLACC on-call Lawyer) delivered a lecture on Women’s Legal Rights at the Kiran Foundation’s Salma Ghar. Aiming to increase legal empowerment for women, she spoke about harassment laws, the procedures to file a complaint, and related matters. The session was highly interactive as the women were advised to reach out to SLACC’s toll-free helpline: 080070806 - for free legal advice and support.



International Women’s Day Conference at HBL

Advocate Izza Rizvi was invited by Habib Bank Limited (HBL) as a guest speaker for a conference on the occasion of International Women’s Day. In her session, Advocate Izza revealed how SLACC works to bring legal awareness to women. Izza also spoke about women’s legal rights, including family laws, marital, divorce, and maintenance laws. The session was attended by over 100 female staff members of HBL.



Sindh Literature Festival

LAS administered a stall at the Sindh Literature Festival in the Arts Council on March 3-5, 2023, with the collaboration of the Human Rights Department, Government of Sindh. SLACC **Advocate Parveen Khurram Sheikh** (SLACC on-call Lawyer) represented SLACC & LAS at the stall. She informed about the services and achievements of SLACC to the many attendees of the event, as well as to the members of the mainstream media.

TRAININGS at SLACC

Workshop on ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

An in-house session was conducted by **Justice Arif Hussain Khilji** (Chief Legal Advisor, SLACC) and **Justice Zafar Sherwani** (former Judge of the Sindh High Court) on January 10, 2023. The SLACC lawyers were trained on how ADR provides quick, efficient & cost-effective mediation to parties at dispute.

The benefits of ADR were expanded upon in the session. With MICADR being the first high court-certified dispute resolution center in Karachi, the SLACC lawyers were trained on how MICADR operates with its 40+ certified mediators and arbitrators. The SLACC advocates were guided on how more callers can be referred to as a tool for resolving various issues.



Workshop on ONLINE HARASSMENT AND DIGITAL SAFETY

An in-house capacity-building workshop for SLACC on-Call Lawyers was on October 31, 2022. The session aimed to build on the existing knowledge and abilities of the lawyers in addressing cases of cyber harassment and bullying of women on social media platforms. The workshop holistically addressed the existing laws under three main thematic areas:

- i. Cyber Harassment: Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016
- ii. Criminal Assault: Prohibitions

outlined by the Pakistan Penal Code

- iii. Harassment at the Workplace: Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Act, 2022.

The training was conducted by **Advocate Basam Ali Dahri** (Litigation Specialist, LAS), who addressed the audience to delineate the existing laws and mechanisms for protecting women against harassment and cybercrime.



EXPOSURE VISITS at SLACC

Visit by the HONORABLE MEMBER OF THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY

Ms. Mangla Sharma (Honorable Member of the Provincial Assembly) paid a visit to the Sindh Legal Advisory Call Center office on March 17, 2023.

Justice Arif Hussain Khilji (Chief Legal Advisor, SLACC) provided Ms. Sharma with a tour of the call center. Justice Arif revealed that SLACC receives calls from across Pakistan and internationally, acting as a medium for callers across the globe to attain free legal guidance related to different issues. Ms. Mangla Sharma appreciated the

tremendous work being performed by SLACC for the rights of marginalized communities and the enabling environment of SLACC in which female advocates manage their work alongside performing their motherhood duties.

Ms. Sharma reaffirmed her commitment to the possibility of a collaboration between LAS and the Pakistan Hindu Council to improve access to justice for the common citizen.



STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SINDH

LAS strives to improve access to justice for survivors and victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) by improving critical Criminal Justice System (CJS) actors’ capacity to respond to sexual violence cases, specifically within Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur.

Launch of FEDERAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESPONSIVE FRAMEWORK

Sexual violence or rape violates human rights and is a heinous crime that should never be ignored, excused, or downplayed. In fact, it should not happen in the first place. However, in a case, it should warrant the most serious consideration and well-coordinated steps from all law enforcement departments.



To eliminate sexual violence in Pakistan, the Federal Government launched a Federal Sexual Response Framework (FSVRF) on March 27, 2023, in collaboration with the Legal Aid Society, Ministry of Law and Justice (MoLJ), UNFPA Pakistan, Awaz Do, & UK Aid. The FSVRF is a plan of action to effectively implement laws, policies & legal precedents that focus on preventing

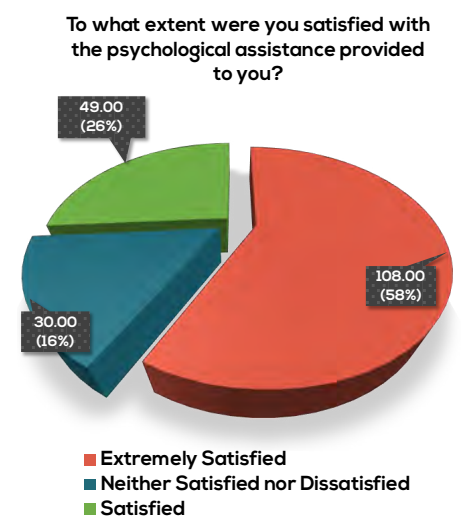
all forms of violence (especially Sexual & Gender-Based) against women. Which will also be further helpful in enforcing the Anti-Rape Investigation and Trial Act, 2021. The event was graced by prominent justice system actors such as **Mr. Azam Nazeer Tarar** (Federal Minister, MoLJ), **Mr. Raja Naeem Akbar** (Secretary, MoLJ), **Ms. Ayesha Raza Farooq** (Chairperson, Special Anti-Rape Committee),

Ms. Amna Baig (Dy. Director, Anti Human Trafficking), **Ms. Valerie Khan** (GBV Expert), **Advocate Maliha Zia Lari** (Associate Director, LAS), along with representatives from UNFPA Pakistan. The witness definition of concrete roles and responsibilities of every relevant stakeholder, such that will result in effective coordination and timely response to any incident of sexual violence.

USER FEEDBACK SURVEY for Provision of Legal Aid and Psychosocial Support to Victims of SGBV

LAS provides free legal aid at the **Women and Children Police Station** and psychological support at the **Medico-Legal Department** in Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center in Karachi South - to support the operationalization of district protection measures. A user-feedback survey was conducted

for assistance provided from July to December 2022 to gauge the impact of these services on the victims’ experience of interacting with the CJS when reporting a crime. 20% of **186 beneficiaries** were surveyed, the results of which were as follows:



3 COORDINATION SESSIONS TO ENHANCE COLLABORATION between Investigation Officers, Medico-Legal Officers, and Special Prosecutors

With the highly prioritized interest of the Government of Sindh in enhancing response to sexual violence, LAS continues to strive for improved access to justice for the victims. The Investigation Officers (IOs), Medico-Legal Officers (MLOs), and Special Prosecutors form the basis of our justice system. The problem occurs when there's little to no coordination between these three actors, compromising the quality of the trial and leading to a higher rate of acquittals in SGBV crimes.



February was dedicated to enhancing coordination between criminal justice system actors to ensure an effective response to victims of sexual and gender-based violence. LAS conducted three capacity-building sessions to create linkages between 80 actors, including investigation officers, medico-legal officers, and prosecutors in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur.

a coordinated response from the criminal justice system, the participants were trained on coordination mechanisms, their roles in the investigation, the building of the prosecution's case, and providing a victim-centric response to SGBV cases. The activity included in-depth discussions for effective investigation, updated definition of rape, pre and post-medicolegal formalities, sampling of evidence, and case laws that can be cited in SGBV cases.



To ensure that a victim receives

EFFORTS TO REDUCE INSTANCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & EARLY CHILD MARRIAGES in Pakistan

LAS was proud to be given a chance to participate in the provincial consultation titled "Prohibition of Child Marriages and Forced Conversion for the Protection of Minority Minors" organized by the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) on February 15, 2023, in Karachi.

The platform called relevant stakeholders to have a detailed conversation about the issue of child marriages and forced conversion within the jurisdiction of Sindh. On the occasion, **Ms. Rukhsana Parveen Khokhar** (Senior Program Manager, LAS) represented LAS as she shared the findings of three earlier LAS researches conducted including:

- i. Legal Needs Assessment (LNA), Knowledge,
- ii. Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey, and
- iii. Case File Analysis (CFA),

along with the recommendation based on the findings of these reports.



Closing the Gap between LAW, POLICY, AND PRACTICE ON WOMEN'S RIGHT TO PROPERTY

Gender disparity in terms of property ownership in Pakistan is created by inadequate policy implementation, along with the lack of legal awareness regarding issues of marital and inheritance rights. This lack of awareness deprives women of their legal rights to marital and inheritance property.



MEN'S CONVERSATIONAL CIRCLES

As part of women's property rights advocacy, it is equally as important to gauge the resistances that women face. Setting up conversational spaces for men can play a radical role in advancing women's rights to legal property because men have historically held more power and influence in our society, including property ownership and inheritance. Men's conversational circles, therefore, provide great opportunities to engage men in conversations about women's rights.

LAS hosted men's conversation circles in Karachi, Larkana, and Shaheed Benazirabad. For the same invited men from all sectors and ages to participate. The activity held two focus group discussions in each district with adolescent boys and males above 18. This (data-driven) study aimed to analyze men's resistance to women's property rights.

Using a preset question tool, men's conversation circles provided valuable qualitative data from a vital community demographic, where

men shared narratives of ground realities and cultural stigma that they believe hinder women from attaining agency. The age division in focus groups also allowed observing different mindsets and ideas across generations. The outcome was a better understanding of local realities laying the foundation for future research and interventions while allowing participants to engage with the idea of women and property ownership in Pakistan.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS SESSIONS

Community awareness sessions are integral to creating a demand for women's property rights at the grassroots level. They become essential sites for women seeking legal aid. These sessions provide community members with information and education on women's rights issues relevant to their daily lives.

From March onwards, the paralegals have begun working in their respective communities by holding awareness sessions on women's legal and marital property. Around 25 community awareness sessions have been conducted in Karachi, Larakana, and Shaheed Benazirabad, with many more scheduled for the coming months. Each paralegal trained in the paralegal project will lead three sessions in a given year cycle.

Paralegals help dispense legal information while relaying community concerns and data to LAS. This line of inquiry ensures a sustainable impact where the women paralegals continue to be effective community organizers even in the absence of an overarching program.



PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN MARRIAGE under the Muslim Family Laws in Pakistan

In Pakistan, Muslim Family Law governs marriage, divorce, and inheritance-related issues. Unfortunately, Muslim married and soon-to-be-married women and girls lack the legal knowledge to negotiate their choice and terms in the Nikkahnama (marriage contract).

The Legal Aid Society is partnering with United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) to raise awareness regarding the Nikkahnama, which is a crucial document that outlines the terms of marriage - including the rights and responsibilities of both the husband and wife.

This intervention is being executed in Karachi, Larkana, and Shaheed Benazirabad, where LAS will be working with Nikkahkhwanas, Paralegals, and communities to make them aware of Muslim women's rights in marriage under the Muslim Family Law (MFL). This will be a groundbreaking initiative aiming to bring awareness to Muslim women's rights in marriage.



Through this intervention, LAS will address women's lack of agency in negotiating their terms within the Nikkahnama. This would be a one-of-its-kind program in Sindh through which we will empower women and promote gender equality by creating a better understanding of the rights enshrined in the Nikkahnama. To achieve this herculean task, LAS will conduct theatre plays in the three mentioned districts of Sindh.



PRIMARY RESEARCH on Women's Property Ownership

The dearth of research on women's property ownership has made advocacy for women's financial rights arduous. Statistics on the percentage of women who hold property in Pakistan and how its ownership affects them are non-existent in the current literature.

To address this lacuna, LAS initiated primary research to explore women's property ownership statistics. The in-house research sought to develop a meticulous research design from data collection across various districts to ensure efficient data analytics. To this end, LAS developed an online survey tool to collect data from **750 households** across Karachi, Larkana, and Shaheed Benazirabad.

The primary data collection was conducted by our community paralegals across Shaheed Benazirabad, Larkana, and Karachi. From January 23-27, 2023, thirty paralegals were trained in recording surveys on the Survey CTO online application. The training workshop

proved to be highly instrumental in teaching the enumerators' research best practices. On the occasion **Ms. Fatima Aamir** (Manager Research) taught the enumerators ethical research practices, such as the mechanics of consent seeking, exploring sensitive topics, and enabling greater community outreach.

The purpose of the training was not just to enable accurate and ethical data collection on women's access to property but to support a first-of-its-kind study on female property rights. The lack of scholarship available on female Matrimonial property rights in Pakistan is a gap that LAS aims to fulfill through this innovative endeavor.



Collaboration with TECH VALLEY PAKISTAN AND GOOGLE

Paralegals (trained personnel in subsidiary legal matters) play a vital role in reaching out to the communities & providing a strong referral mechanism at the grassroots level, where women are in dire need of legal assistance. In places where women are seldom allowed to exercise their claim to property rights, our Paralegals strive to ensure that the unfulfilled demand for legal representation is met.

As a capacity-building endeavor for our Paralegals, LAS is working with Tech Valley Pakistan and Google to access in-demand certifications such as data analytics, digital marketing & e-commerce, IT support, project management, and user experience (UX) design.

LAS presents its women paralegals with a vast network of resources, including access to technology, digital literacy through tablets, and financial emancipation. These



assistances are transferred through a stipend for each survey filled and during more extensive community cooperation. Via this program, our Paralegals will be able to obtain the certifications as mentioned above, taught and developed by Google employees with decades of experience. This will be the first time that Google Career Certificates (flexible online training programs) are being made available to prisoners and paralegals across Sindh.



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PARALEGAL TRAINING & MAPPING

The Legal Aid Society works on this goal through a sustainable, community-led, and women-centric approach. This is achieved through a paralegal program. In places where women are seldom allowed to exercise their claim to property rights, our paralegals in the field strive to ensure that the unfulfilled demand for legal representation is met.

The paralegal program map, collaborate, and train women who are already embedded within the social networks of the community. Once a paralegal is inducted, she receives training through experts on how to conduct educative interventions in communities to increase women's access to information on their property rights and build pathways to help achieve them. We are happy



to share that the identification and training of these paralegals have been completed.

Spanning from February 2-10, 2023, each district hosted an intensive two-day paralegal training session for the shortlisted candidates. Along with teaching legal principles related to women's rights, the training also reinforced practical skills, such as effective



communication and problem-solving skills. Experimental demonstration of activities through mock and role-playing were also effective modes of building confidence and their emotional capacities. While the training prepared the paralegals to work in the community, it also unlocked transferable skills and competencies, empowering the women in multiple ways.



ASSISTANCE AND AWARENESS for vulnerable communities across Sindh

A Consultative Meeting to draft the Human Rights Policy was held by the Human Rights Department, Government of Sindh. This meeting, chaired by **Mr. Surendar Valasai** (Special Assistant to Chief Minister, Sindh for Human Rights) and **Mr. Jawed Sibghatullah Mahar** (Secretary HRD), was held on March 02, 2023.

On this occasion, LAS presented its project report and showcased how it provided free **legal assistance to 214 victims** of human rights violations.



ENSURING RIGHTS & ACCESS TO JUSTICE for Religious Minorities in Pakistan

ACCESS TO JUSTICE CONFERENCE

The white in Pakistan's national flag represents its various religious communities. Despite that, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Shias, and Ahmadis, among other religious minorities, often face discrimination and are even subjected to violence.



To raise the voices of the aggrieved, we organized Access to Justice Conference in collaboration with the National Commission of Human Rights (NCHR) at the 'Zero Discrimination Day' on March 01, 2023, in Islamabad. The event witnessed active participation from esteemed political stakeholders, including the lights of **Ms. Aasiya Nasir** (former MNA), **Mr. Ramesh Singh Arora** (former MNA), **Mr. Naveed Anthony** (MPA, Sindh Assembly), **Ms. Mangla Sharma** (MPA, Sindh Assembly), **Ms. Rabia Javeri** (Chairperson, NCHR), **Mr. Peter Jacob** (Executive

Director, Center for Social Justice), **Dr. Habiba Hassan** (Senior Human Rights activist), along with key representatives from civil society organizations, minority rights activists, and other national stakeholders.

The platform portrayed the efforts which NCHR and LAS have been making to eliminate discrimination against the religious minority community (RMC) members and to improve Access to Justice. This includes 640 legal awareness clinics, extensive evidence-based research, and representation of

the RMCs at various on-ground and policy levels.

The presentations were followed by a round table dialogue, in which participants deliberated upon the issues in the administrative, cultural, and legal systems of Pakistan concerning the rights of religious minorities. The recommendations from findings from key research studies were also presented to members of National and Provincial Assemblies so they could initiate a policy change.



Catch the highlights of the event by clicking this link (in case of a softcopy) or scan the QR code.



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ON FIELD ACTIVITIES

SELECTION OF PARALEGALS & MAPPING for Legal Awareness Clinics



To build a sustainable mechanism for redressal of the grievances by the Religious Minority Communities (RMCs) and to contribute to their easy access to justice, LAS is selecting competent individuals from the communities and is training them to deal with the issues of minority communities and to connect them with relevant organizations and government

bodies that are responsible for the enforcement of laws.

After training these individuals will disseminate information and create awareness within their respective districts to empower the RMCs to take a stand for their rights. For this purpose, LAS has completed the mapping and selection of its paralegals from 8 districts of Sindh.



Meeting with DPCs

The Government of Sindh has constituted District Peace Committees (DPCs) in different districts of Sindh. The DPCs are composed of faith leaders of diverse religions and sects with a mandate to promote religious harmony within their respective districts.

As LAS aims to increase the efficiency of the DPC, we had the privilege to host the members of the Minority District Peace Committee of Korangi District at our office on January 24, 2023. The purpose of the meeting was to understand the structure & mandate of the DPCs, but most importantly, to understand the roadblocks they confronted in the line of their duties. As we look to plan the interventions of this significant body, the participants expressed their willingness to work with the LAS to promote a more inclusive and peaceful society.

POLICY DIALOGUE in Karachi



LAS organized a policy dialogue on January 19, 2023, with the members of the religious minority community, representatives of civil society organizations, media personnel, and other stakeholders. LAS team shared the findings of the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) research survey, which was earlier conducted with justice sector actors, administrative officers, and members of ombudsperson. The findings of the research indicated that;

i. There is a lack of understanding and knowledge about the

personal laws of religious minority communities.

ii. There is an inclination among members of justice sector actors to apply Islamic law to the members of religious communities.

iii. Otherization of members of religious minorities.

In the policy dialogue, the participants shared their experiences and recommended measures to address the issues identified in the reports.



DECONGESTING COURT DOCKETS: by institutionalizing ADR in Pakistan

The current justice system could collapse due to procedural and technical complications. The huge backlog of cases due to frivolous litigation and frequent procrastination leads to frustration and dissatisfaction, resulting in mistrust of the justice system.

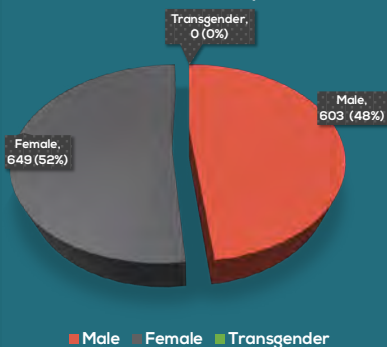
From being deprived of basic fundamental rights to lack of access to justice, the lives of poor and vulnerable people are becoming more miserable and is shattering their trust in the justice system. LAS has been continuously engaging with these vulnerable communities to raise awareness about their rights, along with the available channels for a speedy resolution of their disputes.

LEGAL AWARENESS CLINICS on ADR

To make people aware of ADR mechanisms, LAS initiated legal awareness clinics in the communities with the support of LAS-trained paralegals in Sindh.

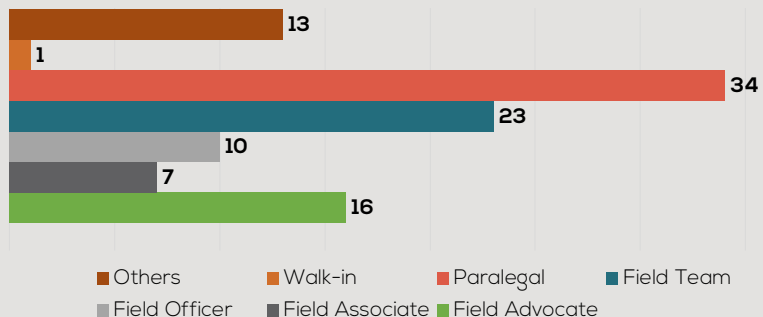
45 clinics were conducted in Hyderabad, Larkana, Karachi, Sukkur, Sanghar, SBA, and Khairpur during the reporting. Where a total of 1,249 (646 females and 603 males) engaged community members were educated about ADR, along with the correct forums where citizens can report relevant cases. These clinics aim to empower communities by equipping them with knowledge of dispute resolution mechanisms, ultimately contributing towards improving the justice system in Pakistan.

Participants of Legal Awareness Clinics: Breakdown by Gender



DIVERSION OF CASES toward ADR Mechanisms

During the reporting quarter, 104 cases in 8 targeted districts were diverted toward ADR Mechanisms. The highest number of cases were reported by females 60 (58%). The majority of cases fell under Federal Ombudsperson (92), court-annexed mediation (6), provincial ombudsman (4), and private mediation (2).



Number of cases referred toward ADR mechanisms

Recently trained ADR paralegals are also empowering the communities by equipping them with knowledge of ADR, its mechanisms, and channels through different legal awareness clinics. During the reporting quarter, 34 cases (out of 104 cases) were referred through our trained paralegals.

IMPROVING THE DEMAND side of ADR

Dispute Resolution through Mediation: ADR AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE INDUSTRY

Foreign investors actively seek to invest in countries that have robust Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) systems as a security for significant investments. There has been a dire need for a platform for business leaders, mediators, legal practitioners, and government officials to come together and discuss how mediation can transform the dispute resolution landscape in Pakistan – which may also result in increased domestic and foreign investment in the country.



To cater to this situation, LAS and Musaliha International Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution (MICADR), in collaboration with the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FPCCI) hosted Pakistan's first-ever ADR Conference for Industry Leaders and Business Experts in Islamabad.

The conference was attended by prominent **judges of the Supreme Court and Islamabad High**

Court, Internationally Accredited Mediators and master mediation trainers, representatives from the **Chamber of Commerce & Industry** in Karachi, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Special **Technology Zones Authority (STZA)**, **Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)**, **Ministry of Law and Justice (MoLJ)**, **Federal Tax Ombudsman of Pakistan, Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGC)**, **Jazz**, and other leading

entities across Pakistan.

The conference introduced and promoted mediation as a premier means for Business-to-Business, Industry-to-Industry, and business/industry-to-regulator dispute resolution in Pakistan. The occasion also portrayed MICADR's offerings, including state-of-the-art mediation, arbitration, and negotiation services for organizations, corporate entities, and regulatory bodies.



Catch the highlights of the event by clicking this link (in case of a softcopy) or scan the QR code.

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PREDICTIVE ANALYSIS STUDY:

Mapping legal needs of Communities in 8 districts of Sindh



We are excited to report that LAS has recently completed conducting an ADR survey for over 2,300 individuals in Sindh. This survey aimed to gain a deeper understanding of perceptions, knowledge, pain points, and access to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the region. Simultaneously, the survey creates a predictive model of the types and nature of cases reported in the 8 targeted districts of Sindh.

The survey's preliminary findings reveal that Public Service Delivery and Family Disputes are the most chronic cases faced by communities in Sindh. It also depicts that the local courts are inaccessible for most individuals (being as far as 50 km away) in terms of distance/commute from some communities. The survey portrays ADR as a crucial tool for resolving disputes outside traditional court systems. Overall, the survey is envisioned as

an advocacy tool to allow for cost-free, speedy, and inclusive justice in the upcoming years in Sindh.

The findings from this survey will be instrumental in informing our future programs and initiatives and advocating for the rights of those who may not have access to the justice system.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ADR in Umerkot and Thatta



LAS is undertaking several steps and initiatives to engage critical stakeholders in the justice sector to institutionalize and streamline ADR – ultimately leading to sensitization on international best practices and globally practiced models of ADR. With this objective, LAS is engaging with the District Administration and Judiciary to institutionalize ADR at the district level.

To achieve this goal, LAS organized seminars in Umerkot and Thatta on February 18 & 19, 2023, respectively, in collaboration with district administration and district judiciary. These seminars aimed to generate a debate within legal fraternity, institutionalize ADR mechanisms, and resolve civil and commercial disputes across the country.

These seminars were attended by

Justice Arif Hussain Khilji (former Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan), **Justice Zafar Sherwani** (former Judge of Sindh High Court), District and Sessions Judges of Umerkot and Thatta, members of district judiciary, District Bar Council Representatives, Salis Members and members of the civil society, who demanded to for the legislation to make ADR mandatory for commercial and civil cases before opting for litigation.

IMPROVING THE SUPPLY OF ADR across Pakistan

STUDENT EXCHANGE FOCUS: A Capstone project of LAS



Through its Street Law program, LAS hopes to equip law students with the knowledge and skills they need to become successful ADR practitioners. For which LAS hosted a student exchange focus event to bring together students from five law schools across Sindh. The event

was attended by 100 students from:

- School of Law University of Karachi,
- Hamdard School of Law,
- University of Sindh Law College, Hyderabad,
- ABD Law College, Sukkur, and
- Government Law College, Khairpur.

This capstone event allowed the students to discuss their experiences, learnings, and takeaways after completing a 10-hour Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) course in Pakistan, which was earlier held in collaboration with Street Law Inc-US.

Upon taking the class, the students found ADR a much faster and cost-effective dispute resolution mechanism compared to litigation or a court trial. They discussed the different types of ADR, their advantages and disadvantages, and the best practices for successful implementation. The students also had the opportunity to interact with experienced ADR practitioners, Foreign law students, and legal experts who shared their personal experiences and insights, along with the challenges they face while in practice and the measures to overcome them.

MEDIATION ADVOCACY TRAINING PROGRAM

LAS & MICADR, along with its honorable partners, are committed to creating an ADR-friendly Ecosystem by producing ADR and mediation practitioners in the context of a formal & state-recognized dispute resolution system.

In collaboration with the Islamabad Bar Council, Islamabad High Court Bar Association, and Islamabad District Bar Association, LAS has completed Pakistan's first-ever Mediation Advocacy training program, which is also recognized by the Islamabad Bar Council. The mediation advocacy training program aims to enrich the legal

fraternity with key skills that are required to effectively represent parties in Mediation proceedings.

The Mediation Advocacy Training Program took place at the Islamabad Bar Council Training Academy, where internationally accredited Mediators and ADR Practitioners trained the first-ever batch of 27 (21 Male & 6 Female) mediation advocates on soft skills, including problem-solving skills, work through stalemates and cooperation. The participants in the program included legal practitioners from leading law firms and attorneys from legal and state institutions.



ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY EFFORTS for the promotion of ADR

LAS has been continuously bringing awareness among the general public, legal fraternity, and government institutions on ADR using different approaches, including awareness sessions, conferences, and different campaigns through print and electronic media.



MEETINGS WITH KEY ADR STAKEHOLDERS



Meeting the HONOURABLE SUPREME COURT OF PAKISTAN

The Delegation was called on by **Justice Justice Ijaz Ul Ahsan** (Honourable Judge, Supreme Court of Pakistan) on January 12, 2023, to brainstorm on the current developments on institutionalizing ADR in Pakistan and how the Supreme court can support the same. **Barrister Haya Eman Zahid** (CEO LAS) and **Mr. Shahzar Ilahi** (Program Delivery Specialist, LAS) gave a detailed presentation on the recent developments, including the accreditation of 39 IHC lawyers as mediators from an international firm, and the Orientation workshop of Judges of the Islamabad High Court.

Honourable Justice Ijaz Ul Ahsan acknowledged and appreciated LAS's efforts and reaffirmed the need for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, which can take the weight of small and minor cases, leading to a decrease in the backlog of the cases from the judiciary.

Meeting with TURKISH AMBASSADOR MEHMET PAÇACI

A Senior delegation from LAS visited the Turkish Embassy on January 12, 2023, and met **Mr. Mehmet Paçacı** (Respected Turkish Ambassador) to discuss the importance of ADR in Pakistan and how the Turkish ADR model can be implemented to resolve judicial issues in Pakistan.

The purpose of the meeting was to exchange ideas about the Turkish ADR model, which has proven to be successful in resolving disputes outside of the court system. Ambassador Mehmet Paçacı, shared the history, challenges, and future plans for ADR in Turkey. Furthermore, the Turkish Ambassador ensured that he would fully support LAS with future endeavors.

Participation in RENOWNED TALK SHOWS

Alternative Dispute Resolution is quickly gaining adherence across the globe, with mediation becoming mandatory in foreign jurisdictions in appropriate civil and commercial cases before disputing parties can approach the court. It is high time that such systems are implemented in Pakistan as well. Mainstream media is an effective tool to spread awareness about ADR amongst businesses, the judiciary, and the masses to opt for ADR in a clogged justice system.

LAS's ongoing national media campaign is playing the role of raising awareness regarding the benefits of ADR through TV talk shows, radio shows, and prime-time news on major TV channels.

In February 2023, **Mr. Shahzar Ilahi** (Program Delivery Specialist, LAS) was invited to leading intellectual talk shows on:

1. "Zara Hut Kay" on Dawns News, and
2. "Espresso on Express" on Express TV

During these shows, Mr. Shahzar spoke extensively about the current case pendency problem in the courts of Pakistan and how ADR (specifically mediation) can help to decongest this pending backlog.



Media Meet with JOURNALISTS FROM PRINT AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA



In continuation of efforts to raise awareness about ADR, LAS organized a media meeting with some senior journalists, writers, and columnists from different print and electronic media to share the developments made by LAS in ADR. LAS provided the media personnel with the narrative needed to build in electronic and print media to initiate debate on ADR and its importance in transforming the justice landscape in Pakistan.

The media meet witnessed a healthy and detailed discussion, where all related queries were answered by **Justice Arif Hussain Khilji** (Chief Legal Advisor, SLACC), **Justice Zafar Sherwani** (former Judge of the Sindh High Court), and **Barrister Haya Eman Zahid** (CEO LAS). It was agreed that all developments and interventions by LAS will be shared with the media from time to time, and such interactions will be conducted on a regular basis.



Justice Arif Khilji also spoke about the deficiencies in the legal system, especially to the underprivileged class. He also mentioned the injustices meted out to women when it comes to sharing inheritance. Keeping all these problems and issues in mind, an alternative means of dispute resolution must be explored.

JUSTICE SUCCESS **STORIES**

Successful Mediation in a family matter

Ms. **Sheeba Hans** belonging to a Religious Minority Community was attacked by her relatives in her house and was threatened with grave consequences following a family feud.

Sheeba's family tried to approach the police multiple times to ensure their safety, but

they did not receive any positive response. Much frightened and having nowhere to go, Sheeba requested help from the LAS team in Dadu. Taking a quick approach, **Advocate Sunbul Kazmi** (Community Lawyer, LAS) facilitated the family in launching the FIR against the aggressors. The LAS team has also filed a case in court to ensure the

family's safety. Upon which the aggressors had no option but to retreat their activities.

For timely actions taken, the beneficiary and her family highly appreciated the help by LAS and for the provision of free legal aid by its team.



Advocate Sunbul Kazmi discussing the case with Ms. Sheeba her family.

JUSTICE SUCCESS **STORIES**

Helping a woman with the recovery of her dowry items & maintenance

Fatima Bibi initially filed a case in 2021 under the dissolution of marriage, recovery of dowry articles, along with her minor children's maintenance. However, the complexity of the case rendered it a long fight.

When her husband Ali Raza was notified, he claimed that all furniture and dowry articles were not given by Fatima Bibi's parents but were purchased by him. Ali Raza made his case even stronger by presenting

Fatima Bibi's uncle and cousin as witnesses confirming his statement.

To this point, **Advocate Rashid Mahar** (Field Advocate, LAS) took the case and strategically made use of the law, which explains that 'all material belongings given to the bride at the time of marriage or during the legally married timeline, are the sole property of the bride'. This rendered all dowry articles to be the property of Fatima Bibi, whether purchased by her

husband or her parents.

This was a landmark ruling as the family court declared Fatima Bibi entitled to all dowry articles given (both by her parents or husband) to her. The court also dissolved their marriage through khula, and Fatima Bibi is entitled to receive maintenance for the iddat period. Moreover, her minor child is also entitled to receive maintenance (to be recovered from birth till the time of her marriage with a 10% annual increment).

JUSTICE SUCCESS **STORIES**

Protecting a woman from a toxic relationship and ensuring her rightful maintenance

Shrimati Shanti, belonging to a Religious Minority Community, grew up in an underprivileged household and was married off at a young age. Now 35 years old, Shanti and her husband nurtured a family of five children over 12 years of marriage. However, the intoxicated marriage was an utterly difficult time for Shanti as her husband constantly maltreated her, and she was subject to physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. While actively financing his drug addictions, Shanti's husband failed to take care of his wife and children.

Shanti reached out to a community paralegal who had set up her meeting with Advocate Babar Chandio (LAS Field Advocate). Shanti visited the LAS Shaheed Benazirabad

office with all the relevant documents to take action on her matter. With her approval **Advocate Babar Chandio** filed her case for judicial separation and recovery of maintenance on November 17, 2022.

After a few months, the court granted shanti a decree of judicial separation from her husband. She is also entitled to receive maintenance from the time of filing the case until the decision. Moreover, all her minor daughters are entitled to monthly maintenance from their father until their marriage with a 10% annual increment. Today Shanti and her children have their rightful share in property even if those long, unhappy years of marriage could not be returned.



Ms. Shrimati with Advocate Babar while preparing the case

JUSTICE SUCCESS **STORIES**

Giving Protection to a woman belonging to a religious minority

Mr. Abdul Razzak, a resident of Larkana, requested the LAS office to file Khula on behalf of her daughter, who was facing harsh behavior from her husband. According to the complainant, his son-in-law was not allowing his daughter to meet her father (complainant) & her mental state has deteriorated.

Advocate Nouman A. Shaikh (Field Advocate, LAS) briefly narrated the concept of mediation through ADR, where

the parties could resolve their family issues in less time and without going to court. After getting the other party's consent, mediation was conducted at a mutually agreed time and location. After a 4-hour-long mediation, the parties agreed to settle the issue on mutually agreed conditions. Furthermore, her husband agreed to let her wife visit her parents and pay for the expenses of his wife and children. His wife also agreed to maintain peace, love & tranquility among all family members.

The mediation proved to be a win-win situation for both parties, which not saved the matter from getting out of hand, but also only saved their relationship.

JUSTICE SUCCESS STORIES

Getting sisters their rightful share in father's property

Samina and Nishat are sisters who grew up in a male-dominated house. Their brothers were assumed to receive all inherited property while they were married off. When Samina and Nishat demanded their rightful share from their brothers in inheritance, they were told they had already got their part in

the form of dowry articles at the time of their marriages and could lay no further claim.

Things are different when the law tells you otherwise. Our Karachi field advocates filed a case of partition on behalf of Samina and Nishat against their brothers. Following this, the court notified the brothers, and

family mediation was pursued. It was decided in the court that the brothers were liable to pay each sister a sum of fifteen lacs in two years. Furthermore, it was declared that Nishat would also reside in her father's house until she receives all her rightful inheritance claim.



Advocate Rashid Mahar (Field Advocate, LAS) with Fatima Bibi and her family in City court, Karachi.

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