

One-Day Online Awareness Session on “District Legal Empowerment Committee (DLEC) and Referral Mechanism for ADR under the Scheme of CPC” (21 JUNE 2023)



Background Context

❖ The Governing Body, Access to Justice Development Fund (AJDF) convened a meeting on 09 December 2022 under the Chairmanship of the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan/Chairman LJCP. During the said meeting, the performance of the District Legal Empowerment Committee (DLEC) was also reviewed and it was observed that to enhance the effectiveness of these Committees, awareness about the free legal aid facility was of utmost importance, especially regarding the utilization of funds through these Committees and the procedure for grant of free-legal aid to deserving litigants.

❖ Accordingly, the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan/Chairman, Governing Body, AJDF pleased to direct that exclusive components for DLECs may be included in training programs under Judicial Academies.

❖ Hence, it was decided to organize exclusive training sessions on the provision of free legal aid, the functioning of DLECs, and the process to avail of free legal aid facilities.

Brief Introduction

❖ In light of the above context, the Sindh Judicial Academy arranged an Online Awareness Session on “District Legal Empowerment Committee (DLEC) and Referral Mechanism for ADR under the Scheme of CPC” on 21 June 2023 at Sindh

Judicial Academy. In this online awareness session, a total of 53 Senior Civil Judges attended over the Zoom Call.

Salient Proceedings

❖ In the Introductory Session, **Mr. Muhammad Shahid Shafiq** (District & Sessions Judge/Senior Faculty Member, SJA) delivered the welcome address and also described the aims and objectives of the training program.

❖ **Mr. Muhammad Shahid Shafiq** and **Mr. Javed Ahmed Keerio** (District & Sessions Judge) discussed the importance of the DLEC, utilization of funds, and awareness of litigants and Advocates.

❖ **Mr. Faheem Ahmed Khan** (District & Sessions Judge) suggested that it is necessary to raise awareness among the general public about the existence of the DLEC.

❖ **Ms. Ambreen Aslam** (District & Sessions Judge) shared her experience while serving in District Tando Allahyar. She shared that she used panaflex to spread awareness among the public, encouraging them to approach the District and Session Judge if they couldn't afford legal representation. As a

result of her campaign, she received several applications and utilized the available funds to provide legal services to deserving litigants.

❖ **Mr. Abdul Qudoos Memon** (District & Sessions Judge) emphasized that not only District & Sessions Judges but all the Judicial Officers should forward applications of deserving individuals for the engagement of advocates in their cases.

❖ **Mr. Javed Ahmed Keerio** informed the committee that he already has taken initiatives to raise awareness among deserving litigants for approaching him to avail DLEC facility for the appointment of advocates in their cases. He shared that he displayed panaflexes and ground standees with clear messages and invitations for people to seek legal assistance. As a result, he received several applications, and therefore appropriate action was taken against each application.

❖ The participants agreed that the current mechanism for the appointment of advocates is time-consuming. This process includes a meeting of all DLEC members, including the Deputy Commissioner, Senior Superintendent of Police, Jail Superintendents, a representative from the Bar Association, and a member from the civil society. It was suggested that the process should be simplified, granting the authority to the District and Session Judges to make decisions on applications from deserving litigants.

❖ The fee of Rs. 20,000 for advocates was considered insufficient, leading senior advocates to avoid engagement under the DLEC. The participants suggested increasing the fees to Rs. 50,000 per case.

❖ **Mr. Muhammad Shahid Shafiq** (District & Sessions Judge) proposed that the requirement of a 5-year experience for advocates should be relaxed to 2 years. This would encourage more advocates to volunteer for engagement under the DLEC program.

❖ The training session concluded with an agreement to further discuss and refine the proposals regarding the DLEC, utilization of funds, the appointment of advocates, and the enhancement of fees and experience requirements.

Action Items:

❖ **Mr. Javed Ahmed Keerio** and **Mr. Muhammad Shahid Shafiq** will compile the suggestions discussed in the meeting and present them for further consideration.

❖ District and Session Judges will explore the feasibility of simplifying the appointment process and assuming the authority to decide applications from deserving litigants.

❖ A committee will be formed to review the current fee structure and propose an increase to Rs. 50,000 per case.

❖ The feasibility of relaxing the experience requirement for advocates to 2 years will be examined by the relevant authorities.