

Facilitating Access to Justice and Social Change: Legal Education and Empowerment

Centre for Social Justice and Legal Empowerment

THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (CSJ) is a socio-legal, non-governmental organization (NGO) initiated by the Institute for Development Education and Learning (IDEAL). CSJ is one of the first organizations of its kind in India that uses the judicial system to fight for the rights of marginalized people.

CSJ first began operating through a network of law centers across Gujarat in 1993. Today, CSJ has expanded to several states, including Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and responds to nearly 3,000 cases a year.

Its law centers in different states have lawyers, paralegals and researchers who are passionate about making a difference. They affect change every day by ensuring minorities like women, Dalits, tribals and other socially vulnerable groups get access to the rights guaranteed to them. The lawyers, paralegals and researchers have been handling cases of different sectors such as women, laborers, fisherfolk, consumers, farmers and children, and issues involving land, identity, amenities and social security.¹

It intervenes at various points including providing legal aid, helping document complaints and leading fact-finding activities, filing cases, contacting relevant authorities, pushing entitlement claims, spreading legal awareness, public advocacy campaigns, training young lawyers and paralegals, identifying violations of civil liberties and serving as a watchdog for human rights violations and abuses.

It is registered under the Societies Registration Act (1860) and Bombay Public Trust Act (1950).

Vision, Mission and Programs

CSJ has adopted the following vision and mission:

Vision

To strengthen human rights culture and an all-inclusive pluralist society, free of violence, injustice, discrimination, prejudices and stereotyping.

Mission

- To use law for social change to ensure access to justice to vulnerable communities and to secure social justice, equity and equality, and fraternity;
- To promote an enabling policy and legislative environment that respects, promotes and protects human rights of vulnerable communities.

Core Engagements

As an organization that uses the law to bring about systemic changes to remove barriers in accessing justice, particularly for marginalized communities, CSJ also works to expand the reach of mechanisms already in place.



Csj engages in the following programs:

- Legal awareness - disseminating information about legal rights and entitlements through awareness programs including campaigns, radio shows and street plays;
- Legal aid - addressing legal issues of individuals and communities by assisting them in litigation and facilitating their entitlements and claims under various laws and enactments;
- Alternative dispute resolution - using formal and informal dispute resolution mechanisms to resolve a legal dispute between two parties by activating formal state agencies such as permanent conciliation boards and mediation centers. It also involves activating and working with informal spaces including *Anjuman*, *mahila mandals*, village heads, etc.;
- Legal capacity-building - conducting various capacity-building programs to develop the capacities of young lawyers, paralegals, volunteers, Civil Society Organizations and government stakeholders to use the law to ensure that rights and entitlements are guaranteed to the vulnerable;
- Legal reform - using experiences, learnings and best practices from grassroots intervention to critique existing laws and policies to make them more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups.

Further, it has always advocated for the formation of platforms that would expand the reach of justice by making legal processes and mechanisms more responsive to the needs of communities.

Csj implements its programs through the following activities:

a. Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms

It works with the *Asil Manch* (Litigant's Forum), a forum for litigants to come together to generate awareness about their rights, provide legal support and raise issues of efficiency, transparency and accountability of the judiciary.

Csj provides support to the *Asil Manch* in generating awareness about the rights of litigants, and provides legal support in raising issues of efficiency, transparency and accountability of judiciary. *Asil Manch* works as a countervailing force against the erring justice delivery mechanisms and

operates from the perspective not of rights to be needed but of rights to be exercised and demanded.

The legal support of CSJ to *Asil Manch* facilitates the participation of the community at large in accessing the justice delivery mechanisms. It aims at setting up of a system where the forum itself, the justice delivery mechanism and CSJ are mutually accountable. *Asil Manch* also contributes in building the efficiency and effectiveness of the social justice lawyers by demanding a more transparent approach towards its stakeholders.

Asil Manch advocates different issues through its centers and field units. These include:

- Activating Consumer Redressal Forum
- Permanent office of Assistant Labour Commissioner
- Abolishing the time limit in cases of recovery
- Litigant defending herself/himself
- Active participation of women in *nyay panch* (traditional court)
- Demand for full-court hearing
- Asking for clarity regarding the powers of District Panchayat or the Collector under Section 73 (A) (A)
- Issues of human rights violations and labor rights
- Issues pertaining to police
- Issue of speedy disposal of cases in the labor court
- Administrative and civic amenities in the court
- Pressuring the judiciary for disposal of maintenance-related cases within three months of their admission.

b. Advocacy Efforts

CSJ joined the development of the only comprehensive quantitative index using the government's own statistics to rank the capacity of the formal justice system operating in various states. This is known as the India Justice Report (IJR) that was first issued in 2019.³ This is a groundbreaking national periodic reporting initiative that systematically evaluates the performance and capacity of the key pillars of the justice delivery system in each Indian state. Focused on the police, prison system, judiciary, and legal aid, the report uniquely brings together previously segregated information to measure each state's justice system against its own declared standards. By employing criteria such as human resources, infrastructure, workload, and diversity, the IJR assesses the collective ability of these pillars to fulfill their mandates.

The report includes a trend analysis over a five-year period, offering insights into the ongoing efforts of state governments to enhance the administration of justice and adapt to evolving needs.

Recognizing the inadequacies of the government's relief measures and the exacerbated difficulties in implementing Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes, CSJ embarked on a multifaceted approach named *Talatod*. It was a strategic response to the profound challenges faced by marginalized communities during the COVID-19 lockdown in India. This innovative initiative involved the institutionalization of paid telephone volunteers, activating District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) for service camps, and crafting a comprehensive COVID-19 Lockdown Monitoring Toolkit. The intervention not only facilitated the direct delivery of entitlements to around 3,000 individuals in vulnerable areas but also extended its impact through awareness-building and training programs, engaging over seven hundred participants from diverse organizations across the country. *Talatod* stands as a testament to CSJ's commitment to social justice lawyering, demonstrating the integration of legal expertise with creative solutions to address systemic issues and advocate for holistic policy designs.

c. Engagement with the Legal Services Authorities

CSJ makes recommendations on how legal service authorities in India can help women and other marginalized groups in availing justice. Constant advocacy with the Department of Justice and National Legal Service Authority (NALSA)³ is a key step in ensuring implementation of three key reforms, namely:

- Ensuring effective implementation of the NALSA Standard Operating Procedures for Undertrial Review Committees;
- Strengthening the free legal aid system;
- Ensuring effective implementation of the 2018 Victim Compensation Scheme.

Recently, CSJ also initiated action research to understand how well these schemes have been implemented and presented some recommendations.

d. Research and knowledge creation

Since its inception, CSJ has been involved in extensive action-based research on various themes of social justice and human rights. CSJ has pro-

vided a grassroots perspective to the application and implementation of numerous laws related to abortion, forest rights, disaster relief, gender and land rights, labor rights, rights of religious minorities, right to information, Scheduled Castes and many more.

CsJ produced a compelling compilation showcasing transformative stories of lawyers it has trained. The book entitled *Appearances and Beyond* reflects on the challenges faced by young lawyers from vulnerable communities, emphasizing the importance of identity-building in their professional journey. CsJ's approach combines legal training with broader social awareness, creating a cadre of lawyers committed to social justice lawyering. Through this book, CsJ aims to inspire others and contribute to the larger discourse on access to justice for the vulnerable.

Social Justice Lawyering, within the framework of CsJ, represents an activist legal practice aimed at transforming power dynamics and facilitating the assertion of rights for the marginalized. CsJ's approach involves not only providing legal aid but also focuses on social transformation through principles of empowerment. The organization strategically strengthens and sensitizes systems for ensuring human rights, develops paralegals as community bridges, and fosters community lawyers as change agents. This methodology creates a cadre of lawyers recognized for their commitment to social justice, challenging traditional legal paradigms and contributing to broader human rights advocacy.

Capacity-building

CsJ engages in extensive capacity-building activities because empowering communities is an institutional mandate. It undertakes various activities to build internal capacity-building of members of the organization, while engaging with various stakeholders who aid or assist its goal of furthering access to justice for all.

Capacity-building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organization and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in the fast-changing world. It is a combination of knowledge (the underlying mental and psychological readiness to use the knowledge) and the threshold of skills that encourages self-practice. It includes:

- Human resources development, which is the process of equipping individuals with understanding and skills, along with access to information, knowledge and training to enable them to perform effectively;
- Creation of an enabling physical and infrastructural environment to promote development;
- Organizational development, which includes the elaboration of management structures, processes and procedures, not only within organizations but between the different organizations and sectors;
- Institutional and legal framework development, the scope of which includes making legal and regulatory changes to enable organizations, institutions and agencies at all levels and in all sectors to enhance their capacities.

It works in the lawyer-paralegal framework and trainings are not just aimed at strengthening the understanding of legal systems but also to ensure inclusion of the voices of members of marginalized communities to help them understand the reality of the legal systems.

It adopted the following Guiding Principles for its capacity-building efforts:

1. We are: Recipient oriented—

It is imperative that the curriculum is tailored to suit the participants to ensure its relevance. Systems undertaking training are mindful of the participants' social context, their surroundings and experiences, and assimilate this into the curriculum.

Using CSJ's clear perspective on vulnerability and victimhood, the capacity-building process should result in empowerment of the marginalized communities. This makes it essential that the collective and ever-changing understanding of vulnerability that CSJ has developed is constantly reflected in the implementation of its capacity-building initiatives.

CSJ approaches vulnerability and victimhood with a transformative lens, aligning with the ethos that vulnerability is a strength rather than a weakness. CSJ embraces collective vulnerability derived from

Freirean pedagogy, emphasizing a rights-based perspective that transcends a simplistic win-lose framework. Vulnerability becomes a powerful tool for societal change, fostering a collective effort for social development.

Csj rejects the notion of victimhood as a stagnant state and, instead, focuses on developing identities of community leaders and activists who become agents of social change. Its commitment to strengthening media messaging, utilizing technology, and engaging with diverse stakeholders reflects a nuanced understanding of vulnerability as a dynamic force that propels meaningful discourse and societal transformation.

Csj's perspective on vulnerability transcends traditional victimhood narratives, aligning with Freire's vision by embracing collective vulnerability as a catalyst for action and progress. This approach translates into the idea that acknowledging and navigating vulnerability is integral to fostering genuine connections, building authentic relationships, and creating a society grounded in self-acceptance and empathy. Csj recognizes the pivotal role of vulnerability in understanding complex social situations and navigating through messy data to arrive at clear outcomes.

2. Pedagogy Matters—

The content used in capacity-building reflects its core philosophy: the need for alternative legal education with a focus on the identity of the individuals and their collective identities, combining skills, information and perspective.

Csj believes that traditional capacity-building curriculums place undue emphasis on cognitive aspects. Its approach has a wider reach and considers other aspects such as perspective building, identity formation, in addition to skill development, to facilitate individual learning.

It also takes into account the fact that individuals benefitting from this are adults, and therefore, they prefer and even appreciate a self-

determined pace to learning. As a consequence, the curriculum is not designed to spoon-feed but to enable them to learn for themselves. This means learning is a continuous process, and must remain flexible to newer ways, ideas and changes.

3. **Sharing the Responsibility—**

The responsibility to learn and empower must be shared jointly by individuals participating in these activities and in the structures responsible for designing capacity-building initiatives.

4. **Must Enable Interacting with the External Environment—**

Since the intervention is systemic and feeds into the work that CSJ does, it is imperative that capacity-building initiatives further the contact between recipients (participants) and their surroundings as opposed to being seen as independent from social and economic contexts.

This means that economic and social empowerment is a logical extension of such activities. Ensuring that individuals are equipped in more than one way and are able to see connections between what they are taught and their circumstances are essential. For instance, securing property rights for women involved in domestic violence cases or obtaining compensation in instances of rape not only ensures justice but also prevents undue compromises compelled by adverse circumstances.

Land Rights: An intersection of law and multiple identities

CSJ is actively involved in the crucial work of promoting legal empowerment for land rights, with a particular focus on rural women. The aim is to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women in controlling and owning land, considering both social and legal factors. CSJ also operates through coalitions of civil society organizations and development professionals dedicated to advancing women's land ownership rights.

The land rights work undertaken by CSJ is driven by the recognition of key factors influencing women's control and ownership of land that include social barriers and lack of legal empowerment. Social factors include prevailing mindsets against women owning land, limited social status, and inadequate skills in managing land. Legal empowerment encompasses creating awareness, establishing responsive mechanisms, removing procedural/systemic blocks, and ensuring a positive legal environment.

Since its establishment, CSJ has been actively involved in legal interventions concerning various aspects of Adivasi rights. This includes forest land rights, addressing atrocities, labor cases, and ensuring the effective implementation of constitutional amendments, particularly the 73rd amendment (establishment of self-government institutions [called Panchayats] in rural areas).

Operating within a comprehensive framework that systematically analyzes the intricate relationship between Adivasis and the State, CSJ engages proactively with progressive laws such as Forest Rights Act (FRA), Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA), and government schemes tailored for the education and skill development of Adivasis. CSJ is committed to generating awareness, filing claims, and collaborating with communities to facilitate the realization of their forest rights.

CSJ collaborates with voluntary agencies on land and forest rights, providing logistical and media support to Adivasi Mahasabha—a movement dedicated to tribal rights. The establishment of Adivasi Mahila Manch and Swabhumi Kendra underscores CSJ's focused intervention in women's rights, emphasizing the mutation of women's names in property records and the transfer of property titles as per customary practices and laws within Adivasi communities.

Through targeted interventions, CSJ operationalizes PESA at the Gram Sabha level, creating awareness, mobilizing communities, and collaborating with the state for law implementation. Its intervention deploys preventive measures to unite the community based on its Adivasi identity, prevent conflict, and preserve cultural heritage. Legal aid, legal advice, strengthening alternate dispute resolution mechanisms, investigation of human rights violations, legal awareness, and social-legal research are key activities undertaken. CSJ has also conducted an action research project on the implementation of the 73rd amendment. Additionally, it works on issues related to the FRA, ensuring the passage of pending claims and undertaking legal actions for wrongly rejected claims.

CSJ's work involves a comprehensive strategy, including the creation of awareness through trained paralegals, innovative approaches like games, quizzes, and educational materials. The implementation of a paralegal training program, initiated as an action research, proved instrumental in enhancing women's ability to claim their land rights. This process included the selection, identity-building, and assimilation of paralegals within organizational settings.

Guided by CSJ, the initiative goes beyond awareness creation and also focuses on creating a mechanism to respond to claims. Trained paralegals under this program have successfully settled numerous land claims, underscoring the need for responsive mechanisms. Additionally, CSJ addresses procedural and systemic blocks by working at two levels: fostering a positive environment among duty bearers and understanding and overcoming systemic hindrances.

The ongoing efforts by CSJ exemplify a transformative approach towards achieving women's land rights. Through targeted legal empowerment strategies, the initiative not only raises awareness but also actively engages in creating practical mechanisms and advocating for systemic changes to ensure a more just and equitable land ownership landscape for women

Women's Rights: CSJ's Impact in Legal Empowerment

CSJ has been actively involved in the pursuit of social justice, particularly concerning the intricate challenges faced by women within the socio-legal framework. It is dedicated to unraveling com-

plexities hindering women's access to justice and has made substantial progress in enhancing the implementation of legal provisions related to violence against women. Through strategic capacity-building initiatives, it cultivates women's leadership, especially in marginalized communities, and conducts awareness campaigns to sensitize officials, thereby fostering a more responsive legal environment for women.

CSJ's impactful interventions extend to strengthening existing mechanisms and advocating for crucial reforms. Key initiatives include the evaluation study on Nari Adalats, spearheading the appointment of Protection Officers under the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, and successfully campaigning for the establishment of Family Courts in Gujarat. Its research and knowledge creation efforts, collaborations with key stakeholders like Working Group on Women's Land Rights (WGWLRL), and policy recommendations significantly contribute to shaping a more equitable legal landscape for women.

CSJ actively engages in targeted interventions, such as addressing the alarming issue of witch hunting, demonstrating its commitment to effecting positive change and ensuring justice for all women.

Socio-legal intervention: Amidst court and community

In dealing with cases of sexual harassment, rape, and child abuse, CSJ implemented strategic interventions to safeguard the rights of the individuals affected.

One instance involved a child sexual harassment case, where CSJ meticulously prepared the survivor for court proceedings. The outcome included a compensation of Rs 50,000 and a three-year imprisonment term for the accused. In another case, where a pregnant minor was raped, CSJ provided vital support during the trial, securing a conviction and advocating for the victim's protection under Child Welfare Committee care. Despite initial challenges, CSJ's efforts resulted in an interim compensation of Rs 175,000 for the survivor.

For cases related to false allegations and domestic violence, CSJ employed conciliation strategies to facilitate resolution, emphasizing community involvement and awareness. The organization effec-

tively navigated threats and arrests, ensuring safety for the victims. In a different case, false abduction charges were withdrawn as CSJ sensitized families about respecting individual choices and preventing the misuse of legal provisions.

These interventions not only achieved legal justice but also addressed socio-economic aspects, including compensation for survivors and heightened awareness about additional compensation for rape-related pregnancy. Furthermore, community sensitization initiatives sought to create an atmosphere of respect and understanding, curbing the misuse of legal mechanisms.

CSJ's multifaceted legal interventions, spanning various issues, exemplify its commitment to economic and social empowerment. By strategically navigating legal processes, providing essential support, and securing fair compensation, CSJ not only ensures legal justice but also empowers survivors economically and socially, fostering broader community awareness and understanding. It actively engages in capacity-building, equipping individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate legal systems effectively. Through international collaborations, CSJ extends its impact globally, contributing to a collective effort to address global challenges and promote legal empowerment. Advocating for minority rights, prisoners' rights, and socio-economic rights, CSJ champions inclusivity, equal opportunities, and social justice. In its pursuit of access to justice, CSJ's interventions transcend normative legal boundaries, fostering positive change and empowering communities worldwide.

5. **Keep in Line with CSJ's Systemic Intervention—**
Capacity-building efforts should be aligned with the ongoing work of the organization. The usefulness or application of learnings must have a direct relationship with enhancing CSJ's work. This means training inputs are linked directly to action in the field. To illustrate, CSJ works on land rehabilitation issues in Katni district in Madhya Pradesh. The issue was identified through a campaign organized in May 2015. After following up with the residents, sur-

veying the area for rehabilitation beneficiaries was considered imperative to carry forward the efforts. The Capacity Building Unit, in consultation with the operational unit in the district, scheduled training activities on land awareness and land rights so that paralegals and volunteers are trained to contribute to interventions that pertain to these issues.

The outcome of these guiding principles accounts for two ideas: maintaining a balance between the bare minimum knowledge and skills that must be ensured to be learned and the emerging practical realities that have to be considered in applying the knowledge and skills learned. CSJ developed a structure based on its decades-long experience of working in the field of access to justice that is best suited to accommodate these principles.

Capacity-building Interventions

Broadly, people working in the field of legal advocacy comprise the legal community. Capacity-building interventions for the people in the legal community take the following forms:

- a. Awareness campaign (Level 0)
Expected outcome: Identifying volunteers.

- b. Orientation of Identified Volunteers (Level 1)
Expected outcome for institution: Link to the community.
Expected outcome for target group: Formation of a new identity, understanding vulnerability better and learning to identify human rights issues.

- c. Training for Paralegals (Level 2)
Expected outcome for institution: Solidifying grip on identification of issues through volunteers: first step towards identifying individuals who are capable of furthering the access to justice framework.
Expected outcome for target group: Familiarity with basic laws like Right to Information, basic schemes, etc.

d. Training for Paralegals (Level 3)

Expected outcome for institution: Solidifying the pool of individuals, assistance in drafting, learning to file basic applications, etc.

Expected outcome for target group: Drafting skills, understanding the legal system and its processes, and participating in those processes at an elementary level.

Paralegals play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between communities, legal processes, and the judicial system. Trained to simplify complex legal procedures, they empower individuals by disseminating legal information, aiding in pre-litigative work, and facilitating out-of-court settlements. Their unique ability to convert social problems into legal cases contributes to a rights-based approach, addressing injustices through strategic use of the legal system. Paralegals serve crucial roles in delivering services, enhancing legal awareness, updating dispute resolution systems, and adding a social perspective to courtroom proceedings. Their involvement spans diverse areas, from family counseling centers and family courts to environmental issues, prisons, and *Gram Nyayalayas*. Recognizing the need for formal legitimacy, paralegals can be strategically appointed in various capacities to ensure effective access to justice. Their role extends to training and education, emphasizing a contextualized, need-based, and rights-focused approach that goes beyond mere information dissemination. Integrating pedagogical strategies and socio-legal justice principles, paralegal training becomes a key element in empowering communities and fostering legal empowerment.

An Account of a Paralegal (From Appearances and Beyond):

Dipak Acharya's journey from paralegal volunteer at CSJ to a recognized lawyer showcases the impact of hands-on legal experience. Trained by CSJ, he gained insights into human rights, labor rights and environmental laws. His role in securing compensation for farmers without court intervention demonstrates the effectiveness of alternative lawyering. Now, with over five years of experience, Acharya emphasizes solving cases at minimum expense and prioritizing client satisfaction over monetary gains. His story underscores the significance of paralegals in delivering justice and earning the trust of the community.

Human Rights Education in the School System

In its fifteen-year journey, CSJ realized that reactionary strategies for justice do not suffice. In order to truly see justice, the following aspects also need to be considered:

1. The root causes of human rights violations/abuses must be identified;
2. Children are part and parcel of a larger system and are also perpetrators, victims, and bystanders of human rights abuses;
3. Awareness about rights among vulnerable communities is essential;
4. Respect for human rights must be instilled in perpetrators;
5. Human rights education is serious business but the process for the same can be positive which supports the larger mission of establishing human rights culture in society;
6. Human rights education must be integrated in the existing National Curriculum Framework (2005) in the state curriculum.

Recognizing the need to take not only a reactive approach to the protection of human rights, CSJ decided to initiate a human rights education program in order to take a more proactive preventative approach to human rights violations/abuses. The program was envisioned to employ democratic teaching/learning processes, provide space for dialogue, address stereotypes and prejudices, and internalize respect for human rights for all.

Therefore, in 2005, when the Institute of Human Rights Education in Tamil Nadu was looking for a partner in the State of Gujarat, CSJ agreed to take on the task. Over the course of three years, CSJ extended its human rights education program to fifty schools in three districts of Gujarat. Human rights were taught as an independent subject matter for two periods a week of forty-five minutes each.

Human rights education has been understood by different stakeholders in different ways. The 2005 National Curriculum Framework takes a Democracy-centered approach where democracy is not just as mode of governance but rather a set of principles to be internalized consisting of Equality, Social Justice, Freedom, and secularism all of which are inherent in the Constitution of India. The curriculum also mentions the diversity of the country and specifies that education should enhance respect for this diversity. The curriculum also presents the importance of peace education, specifying that education has a special role to play in establishing peace.

CSJ human rights education curriculum

Considering all aspects of human rights education, and recognizing the situation in Gujarat, CSJ decided to adapt an integrated framework where diversity, peace and citizenship education were merged with human rights education. Following the Godhra carnage in 2002,⁴ it was strongly felt that conflicts between communities were increasing and that tolerance levels were being reduced. Thus, after a three-year effort of research and training, CSJ developed the first curriculum for peace, citizenship, diversity and human rights education in the state of Gujarat.

CSJ started its human rights education program for school children in 2005 on a pilot phase. Teachers and human rights education experts in Gujarat initiated the first steps by building their understanding of diversity, discrimination, peace, conflict, methods of conflict resolution, and citizenship in relation to human rights at a five-day workshop. At the end of five days, teachers were able to design the framework and lesson plans for the CSJ Human Rights Education curriculum. This framework was then given to a team of artists who worked on creating poems, stories, dramas and other creative methods for the themes of each lesson. Following the two steps of curriculum development, the program went into its final stages and three booklets and two audio cassettes were produced.

CSJ methodology

It was clear from CSJ's earlier experiences with ALE and training sessions for different cadres on Access to Justice that a simple knowledge of human rights does not lead to the internalization of human rights values. Along with knowledge, it is critical that the right attitude and belief as well as the skills to exercise one's own rights are developed.

Therefore, in designing the human rights education curriculum for school children, the CSJ team chose to focus on three areas:

- Knowledge
- Values, beliefs and attitudes
- Action.

Through its human rights education program, CSJ hoped to achieve the following objectives:

- To strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedom;

- To facilitate the full development of the human personality and its inherent dignity;
- To internalize respect for diversity; and
- To inculcate courage to take a stance against rights violations.

These are important objectives in creating a model for human rights education for school children and for advocating with the government to integrate human rights education in the state education curriculum.

Teacher's training methodology

The educator plays a central role in human rights education. The human rights educator is the change agent in this whole process. Thus, looking at the traditional teacher-student relationship which is very constricted and based on fear and give and take, CSJ initiated a change process among the teachers through training.

CSJ had the following objectives in mind:

- To train the teachers to become co-learners with the students in order to create a democratic environment where the facilitator self-introspects in terms of his or her own stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes;
- To motivate educators to adapt creative, interactive methods of teaching rather than using only lecture methods;
- To foster new skills for human rights education and develop the educators' knowledge base on human rights; and
- To strengthen the educators' conviction to bring about change in society, be an agent for change and take stands as and when needed.

CSJ developed several training programs for human rights education facilitators. It took the following steps in the trainings:

1. Basic training on human rights education

The basic training is mainly a change-oriented training. For this training, the participating teachers preferably constitute a mixed group in terms of caste, class, gender and religion. This situation helps the teachers to explore their own identity, understand the politics of identity, delve into their own stereotypes and prejudices, and explore the skills and methods necessary to facilitate the teaching of human rights education lessons.

2. Module-specific training

After the basic training, there are module-specific trainings designed to take up different issues including diversity, discrimination leading to violation of rights, peace, conflict, conflict resolution skills and citizenship. The module-specific trainings rigorously integrate knowledge, attitude and skills. This phase is focused more on building understanding on issues.

3. Methodology training

Methodology trainings focus on designing teaching and learning materials, building clarity on methodology as well as practicing it.

The experience built during the initial human rights education phase in CSJ later led to conducting national-level Training of Trainers on human rights education in eight states of India.

Awareness-raising Materials

CSJ has produced films on several topics, particularly on the issues affecting women, for its public awareness program. It produced a film on witch-hunting that affects women in southern Gujarat. The film entitled “Aad” is explained as follows:⁵

Aad is a *dangi* word which literally means Allegation (*Ilzam*). Witch hunting is [a] superstitious practice from medieval ages which targets people especially women to rob [them of] their land and property, to blame them for any incident. The film is in *dangi* dialect which is spoken in southern Gujarat. The film accounts interviews of lived experiences of women - widows, middle aged, from districts of Dangs, Dahod, [who] are ostracized, targeted to rob their property [and grab] land from them. The film also talks about legal remedies for witch hunting.

It also has two other films on the women issue:

- “Bhage Padti Bhoys” - Gujarati film on women’s land rights;
- “Bharan Uposhan” - Maintenance right for women in case of domestic violence, rape and violence against women.

All CSJ films are available on YouTube.⁶

CSJ reviews the impact of its materials through different engagement strategies such as campaigns. The awareness materials employed in the dif-

ferent campaigns as well as engagement strategies, such as *patrikas* (cards), audios, videos, posters, music, and *sutras* (religious texts), were strategically utilized to disseminate socio-legal information. Door-to-door campaigns leveraged *patrikas* effectively for emotive responses and addressing language barriers. In public spaces and *Anganwadi* (rural child care centers), *patrikas* initiated discussions on key legal issues. Audio and video materials were impactful in public spaces, schools, and *bastis* (group of houses), facilitating discussions and engagement, although some information-heavy videos required planned interactions for optimal responsiveness. Posters were effective in public spaces and *Anganwadi*, drawing attention and fostering awareness. Music, while effective in gathering people at service camps and *shivirs* (camps), was identified as the least engaging medium. *Sutras*, painted on walls during conversations, garnered attention, particularly in focused spaces like Adivasi communities, requiring strategic engagement for meaningful discussions.

The materials include a series on domestic and sexual violence as well as atrocities against Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes through the Neela audio and video series and the film “Main Chup Nahi Rahungi,” videos on labor compensation, a short film of POCSO through Komal and songs in regional languages along with posters on the various labor, gender, caste, land, farmers issues and rights that CSJ works on.



Screening “Komal” for villagers.



Screening “Main Chup Nahi Rahungi.”



Showing “Nyaypur ki Neela” through flex where screening is not possible.

Young Professionals Program for Legal Empowerment⁷

Law students are CSJ’s specific target group. In 2014, it started the Young Professionals Program for Legal Empowerment (YPPLE) with the objective of equipping young legal professionals to become powerful change agents by giving them the opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of how legal empowerment at the grassroots play a catalytic role in bringing social change.

YPPLE is a two-year program open to young law graduates/legal professionals who wish to pursue a career in the field of human rights. Willingness to engage with field realities, to live in challenging conditions and to travel extensively, are things every candidate must be willing to do. Candidates must, above all, display a strong drive, motivation and commitment towards working for social change.

A group of young legal professionals is assigned to support the implementation of CSJ activities. Each young legal professional spends a substantial duration in the field areas and the remaining time is dedicated towards research and writing, reflections, inputs and capacity-building. They undertake the following activities:

- Conduct field-based research on law and policy issues for formulating interventions and creating policy documents;
- Coordinate training and capacity building programs;
- Collaborate/coordinate programs with stakeholders including representations with various government authorities;
- Contribute to the legal work of the organization;
- Organize events to initiate public debate on issues; and
- Bring in creative approaches and perspectives to the existing work of the organization.



YPPLE volunteers with children.

YPPLE is now entering its tenth year. Till now, CSJ has placed around forty young aspiring researchers in its field areas, where they engage with



YPPLE volunteers with children.

grassroots realities and in the process grow immensely both professionally and personally. The program allows these young minds to pursue their true interests, with each individual finding something that they can call their own, be it a particular sphere of law, a work profile or a social cause they care about.

Many YPPLES continue to be associated with CSJ beyond the duration of the program and are helping CSJ work towards realizing its vision for a just and equitable society.

Conclusion

Since its inception in 1993, CSJ has expanded its reach across Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, responding to thousands of cases annually. The organization's dedicated team of lawyers, paralegals, and researchers operate across diverse sectors, addressing issues faced by women, laborers, fisherfolk, consumers, farmers, and children.

CSJ's core engagements, rooted in its vision and mission, aim to strengthen a human rights culture and foster an all-inclusive, pluralist society free from violence and discrimination. The organization pursues systemic changes through various programs, including legal awareness campaigns, providing legal aid, alternative dispute resolution, legal capacity building,

and legal reform. CSJ is committed to ensuring that vulnerable communities have access to justice and advocating for an enabling policy environment that respects and protects human rights.

Looking ahead, CSJ envisions expanding its impact through digitizing programs, mainstreaming grassroots learning, and collaborating with colleges to run courses. The organization remains dedicated to its mission of creating a more just, equitable, and fraternal society, empowered by the transformative potential of law.

Endnotes

1 See the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Centre for Social Justice for the number of cases handled during the 2022-2023 period, page 6.

2 See the 2022 report, *India Justice Report: Ranking States on Police, Judiciary, Prisons and Legal Aid*, https://indiajusticereport.org/files/IJR%202022_Full_Report1.pdf.

3 For more information on the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), visit <https://nalsa.gov.in/about-us>.

4 Also known as the 2002 Godhra train burning case that occurred in Gujarat. For more information, read What is the 2002 Godhra train burning case?, *The Indian Express*, <https://indianexpress.com/article/what-is/what-is-godhra-case-gujarat-riots-sabarmati-express-narendra-modi-4881537/>.

5 Text from Aad: Film by Centre for Social Justice on social issue of Witch hunting in Dangi Dialect, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rKB2lmV2HU.

6 Centre for Social Justice YouTube channel:

“Aad” - film by Centre for Social Justice on social issue of Witch hunting in Dangi Dialect, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rKB2lmV2HU.

“Bhage Padti Bhoje” - Gujarati film on Women Land Rights, www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaMGN2uvvuw

“Bharan Poshan” - Maintenance Right #Women_Rights #fundamental_rights, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3B8l_gHjKsE

7 For more information on YPPLE, see its 2023 brochure, www.centreforsocialjustice.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ypple_brochure_2023_24.pdf.

Annex A. Stakeholders

1. Trainers

Internal: Apart from the pool of people in the RaCB unit and the Rehbar group, other members of the operational units also fall into this category. The CSJ's mandates require the conduct of capacity-building activities at the local level and to support the members of the operational units, CSJ conducts training sessions for trainers.

External: These include resource persons in the field, who have specialized information and engagement with laws and the legal system. They are invited to join the training activities of CSJ.

2. Recipients

Volunteers

They are CSJ's connection to communities the organization works with. They primarily help in identifying issues relevant to the community. Thus, it is essential for them to develop an understanding of vulnerability and the rights framework CSJ focuses on.

(note: please add info on who are the volunteers and how are they recruited.)

Internal Paralegals

CSJ works on the lawyer-paralegal framework. Under this framework, paralegals compose the group of individuals who have been associated with the organization for a certain period and reflected a desire and competence to work in the field of access to justice since they were volunteers. They are expected to have a skill set which contributes to the work of the unit. In addition to having an identity in the community, they should aid the litigation and advocacy work being carried out by CSJ.

External Paralegals

They are paralegals associated with different outfits (institutions? organizations?) but work on the access to justice framework, i.e., use law to further their work. The capacity-building initiatives directed at them respond to the demand from the target group, or a result of the environment mapping undertaken by the RaCB unit. The specific objective of this program is determined using processes mentioned above.

Internal Lawyers

They are lawyers who work with the organization on interventions. CSJ assesses their needs and then designs the capacity-building activities for them.

External Lawyers

This is either the outcome of specific demands of target groups or identified by mapping the environment. They serve to add to the pool of social justice lawyers that CSJ is continually building.

Organizations

This includes organizations doing similar work, or those that need assistance in understanding laws to further their work.

Public Representatives

Since the organization has worked with legal systems to further access to justice, there are representatives at every level that constitute an important element when building capacity.

Annex B. Architecture of CSJ

RaCB Unit

It is the responsibility of CSJ's research and capacity-building unit to periodically assess internal training needs and mapping the environment to identify external capacity building requirements. The unit is also responsible for creating materials in addition to scheduling and organizing training events.

Rehbar

Rehbar, meaning "guide," is a virtual group to help implement the vision, strategic orientation and values of the organization. Rehbar is a group of individuals who have been trained by the organization and display an interest in continuing their association. Its members include:

- The young professionals for legal empowerment;
- The anchors from respective units who act as liaisons between the RaCB and field units;
- Consistent members assigned to each unit for regular hand-holding;
- Subject experts invited for specific inputs.

Each unit has been provided a dedicated person to hand-hold them through their journey. This reflects a flexible support model where trainers are expected to oversee the output of the operational unit in terms of the quality of legal aid and litigation undertaken, identify gaps, and offer support in terms of experience, practicality and innovation in strategies.

Local Systems

In order to contextualize capacity-building, operational units are expected to conduct periodic reflection meetings. These reflection meetings encourage analysis of issues and laws where they originate. These meetings involve peer-learning practices and inputs from persons who are well versed with local laws.