

## **Bihar State Legal Services Authority**

(Activities of the Legal Services Till 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020)

One of the objectives of creation of legal services authority is to prop up downtrodden, depressed and weaker section of society to enjoy the rights guaranteed by the constitution as effectively as being enjoyed by privileged class. Disability of any kind may not come in the way to utilise the fruits of a welfare state. This responsibility requires more attention when the world is undergoing the biggest ever crisis of the century in the form of covid pandemic. The efforts made and sensitivity shown by the National Legal Services Authority and its instrumentalities have brilliantly justified their creation and existence and Bihar State Legal Services Authority is not an exception to this.

At the initial stage of the corona crisis, in March 2020, the activities of District Legal Services Authorities in Bihar were centred around making people aware of this contagious novel disease, its symptoms and prevention through organising Awareness camps, plying *Jagrukta-raths*, sticking posters, displaying banners etc. Jingles making people aware about the corona and arrangements made in Judicial System for availing judicial remedy during lockdown were also prepared and aired on all FM channels.

Soon with the advent of nationwide lockdown, the focus shifted on providing food to that section of society who had lost the means of livelihood due to lockdown and cessation of economic activities. Soon a new phenomenon emerged. A remarkable part of Labourers community, could not remain long to their work places due to dearth of resources and started moving with their family towards their native places, mostly on their feet on roads defying the lockdown. Para Legal Volunteers were especially directed to help them by providing meals with help of government and non-government agencies and other altruistic persons of the locality. It was also realised that as they were coming from highly infected part of the country, many of them might have carrying the virus with them unknowingly, hence by end of April 2020, the State Government, in order to prevent mingling of these migrants to native population

established quarantine centres in every block and these migrants and also those who are being carried through trains from distant places, are being kept in these centres for 14 days. The role of DLSAs and team expanded to supervise the food and other arrangements in these Quarantine Centres. Secretaries of all DLSA are visiting these centres regularly and through the team of PLV helping the inmates kept there. The team DLSAs is also working as bridge between the suspected cases of corona infection and health authorities so that immediate action be taken for identification of positive cases and its immediate treatment and to negate its spread in others. PLVs are also engaged at Primary Health Centres for helping in registration and other formalities to those coming there for any kind of medical needs. Number of beneficiaries accorded medical help by various DLSAs is 6978 in the month of April 2020.

Migrants are facing myriad of challenges. There are some who wanted to go to their native places outside the state of Bihar. PLVs are extending their help in getting them registered to website portal of respective states launched for the purpose.

Prevention of spread of covid -19 in prisons was foremost consideration since the inception of the pandemic. Preventive arrangements at jails were being supervised on daily basis by the Secretaries of DLSAs. Provisions of isolation and quarantine wards are being strictly followed. Cleanliness and hygienic conditions in jails were ensured through surprise visits and video calls made regularly by DLSAs Secretary of respective places. Consequent there to, no case of corona infection has been reported from any of jails in Bihar so far.

So far as release of prisoners on interim bail and parole in light of order of Hon'ble Supreme Court is concerned, High Powered Committee's recommendation are still pending for consideration before the State Authorities, however many inmates were released on bail on applications received from jails with the help of Panel Advocates by hearing conducted through video conferencing. For instance in District of Nalanda, 46 accused of Excise Act cases were released on personal bond in a single day and arrangements were

made to take them to their respective homes through government vehicles during lockdown. Similar activities were carried on in almost all districts with the efforts of Chairmen and Secretaries of DLSAs.

The prime object of providing legal aid and counseling to needy continued with the help of Panel Advocates. For redressal of complaints related to domestic violence, two female advocates were deputed for the purpose in every district. At village level PLVs in co-ordination with Panchayat officials including Mukhiya and Sarpanch got several disputes settled amicably. In the month of April 2020 alone altogether 5461 legal issues were redressed related to Bail, Domestic violence, Bank Loan, Government sponsored beneficial schemes etc. Secretary of DLSAs also took interest in ensuring payment of compensation by the Government officials to the dependents of victims of natural calamity like lightning stroke in the Districts of Saran, Nalanda, Jamui etc. Government has launched several schemes to Ration Card holders but a large number of entitled population was not having ration card with them, our PLVs helped 18505 families in getting ration from PDS shops as well as also helped in preparation of new Ration Card for them.

In the Month of April 2020 several incidents of crow/bats deaths raised alarm of spread of another disease Bird flu. Mechanism was developed to get these incidents reported in every district with help of PLVs and Municipal and Health authorities were made to take steps to prevent spread of the disease by carrying out medical tests as well as rapid fogging of disinfectant.

On the direction of Hon'ble High Court, conditions of leprosy patients were evaluated by all DLSAs and a compiled report was submitted before the Hon'ble Court highlighting their requirements. It was ensured that all such patients must get their monthly stipend of Rs 1500/each regularly.

DLSAs are very enthusiastic to reaching out to people to fulfill their daily basic needs. Food grains were distributed to around 60,000/- persons with the help of government agencies and other benevolent business community. Cooked food

was fed to about 45000/- such beneficiaries. All these were done following the requirements of social distancing.

Bihar State Legal Services Authority in association with DLSAs and TLSCs is making all efforts to meet not only the legal requirement of the needy class but also to feel them secured and assured.