



A **NALSA** Initiative

Towards a Litigation
Free Rural India – 2026

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SANDHI SETU

— Towards a Litigation-Free Rural India —

| DIALOGUE • HARMONY • COOPERATION • RESPECT |

“Justice is best arrived at
when disputes end, not when they continue.”

United Village
Stronger Communities
A New Era of Trust

STRONG DIALOGUE
STRONGER SOCIETY
Together on the path
of Harmony



Empowering communities through
dialogue, understanding and trust.

Building a **harmonious**
and inclusive rural India!



STRENGTHENING
VILLAGES
Through Dialogue



NO DISPUTES,
MORE HARMONY
Peaceful Coexistence



MUTUAL RESPECT,
BETTER TOMORROW
Building Better Lives



STRONG VILLAGES,
STRONG NATION
Empowered Rural India

Empowered Villages.
Empathetic Dialogue. Enduring Peace.

Foreword



Justice is not merely the final decision delivered by a court. Justice is also the opportunity to be heard, the possibility of being understood, and the ability to resolve a dispute with dignity.

In a society as diverse and socially interconnected as India, disputes are an inevitable part of community life. Differences between neighbours, disagreements within families, disputes relating to land, money, minor injuries, relationships and everyday interactions often begin as small disagreements but, when left unresolved, can gradually transform into prolonged hostility and litigation.

For rural communities, the consequences of prolonged litigation can be particularly significant. A visit to the court may involve considerable expenditure, loss of working days, travel, procedural complexities and emotional stress. In many instances, the parties continue to live in the same village even after years of litigation. Community mediation offers a different possibility.

It seeks to bring people together before conflicts become entrenched. It recognises that communities themselves possess knowledge, relationships and informal mechanisms capable of contributing to peaceful dispute resolution. At the same time, community mediation must remain rooted in the principles of fairness, voluntariness, neutrality, confidentiality and respect for law.

The vision of a litigation-free village does not mean that every dispute should be forced into settlement. Rather, it means creating an environment where suitable disputes can be identified early, parties can communicate freely, and resolution can be attempted before conflict escalates unnecessarily.

The initiative of the National Legal Services Authority, *Community Mediation: Towards a Litigation-Free Rural India*, represents an important step in taking access to justice beyond the traditional boundaries of the courtroom.

This magazine is an attempt to understand that vision, examine its legal and practical dimensions, document the journey of community mediation and explore the possibilities that lie ahead.



Editor's Note



This special edition brings together, in one volume, the vision, the law, the institutional design and the lived experience of Community Mediation as it takes root across India and, in particular, across Chhattisgarh.

It draws upon the Standard Operating Procedure for Community Mediation: Towards a Litigation-Free Rural India (2026) issued by the National Legal Services Authority, and upon the ground report of the Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme conducted by the District Legal Services Authority, Durg, under the directions of the Chhattisgarh State Legal Services Authority.

Between the policy document and the training hall lies the real story of Community Mediation — of Community Mediators drawn from village panchayats, of a husband-and-wife duo who together chose to serve their community, of role-plays about wells, walls and wedding halls, and of a five-day journey from strangers to ambassadors of peace.

It is hoped that this magazine will serve not only as a record of what has been achieved, but as an invitation — to judicial officers, to Panel Lawyers, to Para Legal Volunteers, to Panchayats, and above all to citizens — to make dialogue, once again, the first response to conflict.



Message



*Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ramesh Sinha,
Hon'ble The Chief Justice, High Court of
Chhattisgarh & Patron-in-Chief, Chhattisgarh
State Legal Services Authority*

Community Mediation marks a significant evolution in the jurisprudence of access to justice by placing dialogue, reconciliation, participation and social harmony at the heart of dispute resolution. It is a powerful means of promoting fraternity, brotherhood and social harmony. By encouraging dialogue, mutual understanding and consensual resolution, it gives meaningful effect to the constitutional values of justice, equality, dignity and fraternity enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution.

The initiative of NALSA in institutionalising Community Mediation deserves appreciation for bringing justice closer to the people and empowering communities to resolve their own disputes through dialogue and consensus.

The dedicated efforts of the District Legal Services Authority, Durg, in adopting and promoting the NALSA scheme are equally commendable. The launch of this Magazine is a valuable step towards documenting and strengthening this collective endeavour.

May Community Mediation become a catalyst for a wider movement from courts to communities, from confrontation to reconciliation, and from prolonged litigation to peaceful resolution, thereby advancing the vision of a more harmonious and litigation-free rural India.

I extend my appreciation and best wishes to all those contributing to this noble endeavour.

(Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ramesh Sinha)

Hon'ble The Chief Justice, High Court of Chhattisgarh, Bilaspur

Patron-in-Chief, Chhattisgarh State Legal Services Authority



Message



*Hon'ble Mr. Justice, Sanjay K. Agrawal,
Judge, High Court of Chhattisgarh, Bilaspur*

I am deeply pleased to learn about the commendable steps taken by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Durg, to bring dispute resolution directly to the grassroots through the initiative undertaken by NALSA for community mediation. This forward-thinking effort aligns seamlessly with the vision of the 'Litigation-Free Rural India' scheme, empowering villages and local communities to resolve issues amicably at the local level before they ever reach the court system.

Community mediation is far more than a mechanism to reduce judicial pendency; it is a vital instrument for preserving long-standing relationships, promoting constructive dialogue, and settling disputes through mutual understanding and consensus. By taking mediation into the heart of our rural and local communities, this initiative nurtures social harmony, builds mutual trust, and helps secure a peaceful, litigation-free atmosphere where disputes are transformed into enduring agreements.

I extend my heartiest best wishes for the continued success and wider expansion of this valuable programme as we work together towards a more harmonious, dialogue-driven, and litigation-free society.

(Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sanjay K. Agrawal)

Judge, High Court of Chhattisgarh, Bilaspur



Message



*Hon'ble Mr. Justice Naresh Kumar Chandravanshi,
Judge, High Court of Chhattisgarh, Bilaspur*

It brings me immense satisfaction to witness the groundbreaking measures undertaken by the District and Sessions Court, Durg, alongside the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Durg, in taking justice to the doorstep through the vision of community mediation of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

This vibrant endeavor breathes life into the spirit of the 'Litigation-Free Rural India' vision. More than just a legal mechanism, community mediation helps us revive our forgotten heritage—a time-honored tradition where neighborhoods settled differences through genuine dialogue, compassion, and shared understanding. By resurrecting these cultural roots, we shift the focus from adversarial courtroom battles to restorative community healing.

By resolving disputes at their inception, we safeguard cherished social ties and forge a peaceful, resilient rural landscape. I extend my heartiest congratulations to the Principal District and Sessions Judge, Durg, and all dedicated stakeholders. May this transformative initiative continue to pave the way for a harmonious and litigation-free tomorrow.

(Hon'ble Mr. Justice Naresh Kumar Chandravanshi)

Judge, High Court of Chhattisgarh, Bilaspur



Message



Shri K. Vinod Kujur
Principal District & Sessions Judge, Durg, C.G.

It gives me immense pleasure to launch this special edition of our Magazine, celebrating the successful conclusion of the 05 days Community Mediation Training of 2026 in Durg District. The training programme guided by the vision of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) for a “Litigation Free Rural India 2026” and under the directions of the Chhattisgarh State Legal Services Authority (CGSLSA), this event has once again highlighted the importance of dialogue and consensus as one of the most effective ways to resolve disputes by strengthening people centric and restorative justice at the grassroots level.

A distinctive feature of this initiative was the selection of Community Mediators from diverse sections of society. Participants included individuals from different professions, backgrounds, and community groups, reflecting the belief that effective dispute resolution is strengthened when every segment of society actively contributes to the cause of peace and harmony.

The success of community mediation lies not merely in reducing litigation but in fostering trust, cooperation, and a sense of collective responsibility among citizens. Every dispute resolved through mediation strengthens the ideals of access to justice and reinforces the constitutional values of fraternity and social justice.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the resource persons, participants, and all those who contributed to the successful conduct of this programme. I am confident that the knowledge and skills acquired during the training will inspire the participants to become ambassadors of peace and reconciliation in their respective communities.

I am confident that the spirit of cooperation we have built will continue to guide us. May this edition stand as a testament to our collective commitment to a justice system where harmony and reconciliation always remain at the forefront.

Let us continue to promote dialogue over discord and build stronger, more harmonious communities through mediation.

(Shri K. Vinod Kujur)

Principal District & Sessions Judge, Durg, Chhattisgarh



Committee Formed for Community Mediation



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CHAPTER 1

Community Mediation — A New Vision of Justice

"The best justice is not the one that ends a dispute in a courtroom, but the one that prevents the dispute from reaching the courtroom."



Introduction

Justice has traditionally been perceived as the outcome of adjudication rendered by courts after a prolonged judicial process. For decades, litigation has remained the principal mechanism through which citizens sought redressal of their grievances. While the formal justice delivery system has played a pivotal role in protecting constitutional rights and upholding the rule of law, the increasing volume of disputes has imposed an unprecedented burden upon courts across the country.

The exponential growth of civil and criminal litigation has resulted in prolonged delays, escalating litigation costs, and strained relationships among disputing parties. Particularly in rural India, disputes concerning disagreements, agricultural boundaries, access to common resources, irrigation, pathways, minor financial transactions, and social relationships often continue for years despite being capable of resolution through dialogue and mutual understanding.

Recognising these realities, the justice delivery system has gradually embraced Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms as complementary methods for resolving disputes. Mediation has emerged as one of the most successful and internationally recognised methods of consensual dispute resolution because it enables parties themselves to craft mutually acceptable solutions upon them. Community Mediation represents the natural extension of this philosophy. Rather than bringing every

dispute before a court of law, Community Mediation seeks to resolve appropriate community-level disputes within the community itself through structured dialogue facilitated by trained and neutral mediators. It is founded upon the belief that many disagreements arise from misunderstanding, communication gaps, social tensions, or breakdowns in interpersonal relationships.

Unlike adjudication, Community Mediation does not seek to determine winners and losers. Instead, it encourages the restoration of trust, preservation of relationships, and promotion of social harmony through voluntary participation and collaborative problem-solving. It transforms dispute resolution from an adversarial process into a cooperative exercise where all stakeholders work collectively towards a mutually beneficial outcome.

The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), recognising the immense potential of Community Mediation in strengthening access to justice, has developed the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Community Mediation: Towards a Litigation-Free Rural India (2026). The SOP provides a structured institutional framework for establishing Community Mediation Centres, selecting and training Community Mediators, creating referral mechanisms, maintaining records, monitoring implementation, and promoting community participation.

The Evolution of Justice



Throughout history, societies have attempted to resolve conflicts through institutions that reflected their social and cultural realities.

In ancient India, disputes were often settled through village assemblies, councils of elders and Panchayats. These institutions relied upon dialogue, mutual respect, customs, and collective wisdom rather than rigid legal procedures. Their objective was not merely to decide disputes but to preserve harmony within the community.

With the evolution of modern constitutional democracy, formal judicial institutions assumed the responsibility of administering justice through codified laws and established procedures. While this transformation strengthened the rule of law and ensured legal certainty, it also shifted dispute resolution from the community to the courtroom.

Over time, the increasing complexity of social and commercial relationships, rapid urbanisation,

economic development, and expanding legal rights led to a dramatic increase in litigation. Courts began facing enormous case backlogs, making timely justice increasingly difficult to achieve.

This challenge prompted policymakers, jurists, and legal institutions across the world to promote Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, including mediation, conciliation, negotiation, arbitration, and Lok Adalats. Among these, mediation emerged as the most relationship-oriented process because it empowers parties themselves to arrive at voluntary solutions instead of having outcomes imposed by an external authority.

Community Mediation represents the next logical evolution in this journey. It decentralises dispute resolution by bringing justice closer to the people and encouraging communities to become active participants in maintaining peace and social harmony.

Why Community Mediation?



Not every disagreement requires judicial intervention.

A substantial proportion of disputes arising within villages and neighbourhoods involve issues that are interpersonal rather than legal in nature. Such disputes frequently include boundary disagreements between neighbouring landowners, disputes regarding access to family misunderstandings, minor monetary transactions, community resource sharing, social and neighbourhood usage conflicts, agricultural disputes, water usage disagreements, and issues arising from local customs and traditions.

Although these disputes may appear minor individually, their cumulative social impact can be enormous. Left unresolved, they often escalate into prolonged litigation, social fragmentation, or permanent breakdown of relationships.

Community Mediation addresses these disputes at an early stage by facilitating respectful dialogue before positions become entrenched. This early intervention not only reduces litigation but also preserves social relationships and promotes collective responsibility for maintaining peace.

Philosophy of Community Mediation

Community Mediation is founded upon five core beliefs: Dialogue before Litigation — open communication frequently resolves misunderstandings that litigation cannot; Consensus over Conflict — mutually acceptable solutions are generally more durable than imposed judgments; Community Ownership — communities themselves possess the capacity to resolve many of their own disputes when provided with appropriate institutional

support; Restorative Justice — the objective is not punishment but restoration of relationships, trust, dignity, and social harmony; and Access to Justice — justice should be accessible, affordable, participatory, and inclusive for every citizen irrespective of geographical location or economic status.

Community Mediation: More than Dispute Resolution

Community Mediation is not merely a legal process. It is simultaneously a legal reform, a social movement, a governance initiative, a peace-building mechanism, a community development programme, and an instrument for strengthening democracy at the grassroots level.

By involving local communities in dispute resolution, Community Mediation promotes legal awareness, encourages civic responsibility, strengthens local institutions, and contributes towards sustainable social development.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION AT A GLANCE

01 *Voluntary Process*

02 *Community-Based Resolution*

03 *Neutral Mediators*

04 *Confidential Proceedings*

05 *No Court Fees*

06 *Relationship Preservation*

07 *Faster Resolution*

08 *Accessible Justice*

09 *Cost Effective*

10 *Litigation Prevention*



Trainers, officials and participants at the conclusion of the Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme



Visit of DLSA, DURG members to the Ghugsidih village for Community Mediation awareness

HOW A DISPUTE BECOMES PEACE

Conflict Arises

Referral to Community Mediation Centre

Constitution of Mediation Panel

Dialogue & Negotiation

Voluntary Settlement

Community Harmony

Litigation-Free Village



A decorated rally cart with a public address system spreading awareness through village lanes

CHAPTER 2

Need for Community Mediation in India

*“Courts decide legal rights;
communities preserve social
relationships. Community
Mediation bridges the gap
between law and society.”*

Introduction

India is a land of immense cultural diversity, social plurality, and community-based living. From remote villages to expanding urban settlements, interpersonal relationships form the backbone of Indian society. Families, neighbours, farmers, traders, workers, self-help groups, and local institutions interact daily, sharing resources, responsibilities and aspirations. Such interactions give rise to disagreements. While many disputes are minor in nature, their impact on social cohesion can be significant if they remain unresolved.

For decades, the primary response to disputes has been litigation before courts. Although courts remain the ultimate guardians of justice, not every disagreement requires judicial adjudication.

Numerous disputes originate from misunderstandings, communication failures, or local social dynamics rather than complex questions of law. Such disputes are often better resolved through dialogue, cooperation, and voluntary settlement than through prolonged adversarial proceedings.

Recognising this reality, the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), through its Standard Operating Procedure on Community Mediation, has proposed a structured framework that enables communities to resolve appropriate disputes at the grassroots level. The initiative aims to reduce unnecessary litigation while promoting peace, cooperation, and access to justice.

Changing Nature of Disputes in Modern India

Indian society has undergone rapid transformation during the last few decades. Population growth, urbanisation, migration, economic development, technological advancement, and increasing

awareness of legal rights have altered the nature of social interactions.

As communities become more interconnected, the frequency of interpersonal disputes has also increased.

Most of these conflicts arise not because parties intend to violate the law, but because they interpret situations differently or fail to communicate effectively. Common examples include boundary disputes between neighbouring landowners, irrigation and water-sharing disagreements, use of common pathways, family misunderstandings, agricultural disputes, neighbourhood nuisance, community resource management, small financial transactions, local business disagreements and social and cultural conflicts.

Burden on the Justice Delivery System



India possesses one of the world's largest judicial systems. Courts across the country handle millions of cases involving constitutional questions, criminal offences, commercial disputes, family matters, labour conflicts, property issues, and numerous other legal proceedings.

Despite continuous judicial reforms, the increasing inflow of litigation presents enormous administrative and institutional including pendency of cases and delay in disposal, repeated adjournments, high litigation cost, multiple court

Many such disputes initially appear insignificant. However, when ignored, they gradually escalate into police complaints, civil suits, criminal litigation, or long-standing hostility within communities. Community Mediation seeks to intervene at this early stage, preventing escalation before positions become rigid.

appearances, emotional stress upon litigants, loss of productive time, and breakdown of family and community relationships.

Community Mediation does not replace courts; rather, it complements the formal justice delivery system by diverting suitable disputes away from litigation through consensual resolution. This allows courts to focus their resources on matters requiring judicial determination while enabling communities to settle interpersonal disputes efficiently.

Rural India Requires Community-Based Justice



India's villages have traditionally possessed strong community networks. People know one another. Families have social and economic relationships. Local institutions play an important role in everyday life. Yet the same interconnectedness can also make unresolved disputes particularly difficult a person may have to continue meeting the opposing party at the market, school, agricultural field, community function or local gathering.

Litigation may determine legal rights, but it may not necessarily repair the social relationship.

For a person dependent on daily wages or seasonal agricultural income, even a single day away from work may carry significant consequences. Community mediation can potentially reduce some of these burdens by providing an accessible mechanism for suitable disputes.

The Cost of Litigation

- Travel expenses
- Loss of wages or agricultural work
Time spent attending court
- Lawyer's fees
- Repeated adjournments
- Emotional stress
- Strained family relationships
- Social tension
- Uncertainties Regarding the outcome

Access to Justice



Access to justice is not merely the existence of courts. A justice system must also be accessible, understandable and responsive. For rural communities, accessibility includes physical access, financial accessibility, awareness of legal rights and confidence in institutions. Nearly every village functions as a close-knit social ecosystem where individuals interact continuously in agricultural activity, local governance, religious functions, educational institutions and economic exchanges. Because social relationships continue long after

disputes arise, adversarial litigation often creates permanent divisions within villages.

A court may determine ownership of land, but it cannot restore broken neighbourly relationships. A decree may settle a legal issue, yet it cannot rebuild trust between families. Community Mediation recognises that justice in rural society must not only resolve legal disagreements but also preserve social harmony. This philosophy forms the foundation of the vision of Litigation Free Rural India envisaged under the SOP.

Community Mediation as Preventive Justice



Justice should not begin only after disputes become lawsuits. One of the most innovative features of Community Mediation is its preventive approach — instead of waiting until conflicts escalate into formal litigation, Community Mediation encourages timely intervention through constructive dialogue.

This preventive model prevents unnecessary police complaints, prevents filing of avoidable civil suits, reduces burden on courts, saves public expenditure, prevents social polarisation, encourages peaceful coexistence, promotes legal awareness and strengthens confidence in institutions.

Benefits of Community Mediation



For Citizens

- Quick resolution of disputes
- Reduced litigation expenses
- Preservation of family and social relationships
- Easy access to justice
- Voluntary and confidential process

For Communities

- Improved social harmony
- Reduced local conflicts

- Stronger community participation
- Better cooperation among residents
- Promotion of peaceful coexistence

For the Judiciary

- Reduced pendency
- Better allocation of judicial resources
- Efficient justice delivery
- Strengthening of ADR mechanisms
- Enhanced public confidence



DLSA Durg officials with the community mediation awareness banner, listing the villages covered under the initiative



Interaction in the inaugural session of the 5 Days Mediation Training Programme

CHAPTER 3

Background of the SOP & Evolution of Community Mediation

“Justice is strongest when it empowers communities to resolve conflicts with dignity, dialogue, and mutual respect.”



Introduction

The administration of justice has traditionally been associated with courts, judges, and formal adjudicatory processes. However, the growing complexity of modern society, coupled with an ever-increasing volume of litigation, has highlighted the need for complementary mechanisms capable of resolving disputes efficiently, economically, and amicably. Across the world, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has emerged as a practical response to these challenges.

Among the various ADR mechanisms, mediation has gained universal acceptance because it places the parties — not the adjudicator — at the centre of the dispute. Mediation promotes communication, voluntary participation, consensus-building, and restoration of relationships.

India has witnessed significant progress in institutionalising mediation through mediation centres, Lok Adalats, Permanent Lok Adalats, family mediation, commercial mediation, and, more recently, the enactment of the Mediation Act, 2023. The next logical step in this evolution is Community Mediation, which brings mediation directly into villages and local communities, enabling people to resolve appropriate disputes before they escalate into formal litigation.

Recognising this transformative potential, the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) formulated the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Community Mediation: Towards a Litigation-Free Rural India (2026). The SOP establishes a structured national framework for implementing Community Mediation in local community.

Ancient India — Roots in Reconciliation

Historically, disputes were settled by Village Panchayats, Councils of Elders, Community Leaders, Religious Institutions and Family Councils. These institutions emphasised reconciliation rather than punishment. Their objective was to preserve community harmony while ensuring fairness and social acceptance.

Although these traditional systems lacked formal legal procedures, they reflected the fundamental principles of modern mediation: neutral facilitation, voluntary participation, consensus building, restoration of relationships, and community involvement.

The Constitutional Era and the Rise of ADR

After Independence, India adopted a constitutional framework founded upon equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity. The formal judicial system became the principal mechanism for enforcing legal rights. However, as population, economic activity, and legal awareness expanded, litigation increased dramatically, and concerns regarding judicial delays, increasing pendency, high litigation costs and procedural complexity led policymakers to explore consensual methods of dispute resolution .

India progressively institutionalised Arbitration, Conciliation, Lok Adalats, Permanent Lok Adalats, Court-Annexed Mediation, Pre-Litigation Mediation, Commercial Mediation and Family Mediation. These mechanisms demonstrated that numerous disputes could be resolved without prolonged trials. Yet a significant gap remained — most ADR institutions became active only after disputes had already entered the legal system. Community Mediation was conceptualised to intervene before litigation begins.

Why a Separate SOP for Community Mediation?

Community Mediation cannot function merely through general legal principles. It requires institutional support, uniform procedure, monitoring mechanisms, documentation, capacity building and community participation.

Without a structured framework, mediation efforts across different districts could become inconsistent.

To address this need, NALSA prepared a comprehensive SOP providing a standardised implementation model applicable across India. The SOP seeks to ensure that Community Mediation is organised, accountable, transparent, and accessible while remaining rooted in local community participation.

Vision Behind the SOP

The SOP is not merely an administrative guideline. It represents a national vision of transforming the culture of dispute resolution. Its broader vision includes Dialogue Before Litigation encouraging communication before legal proceedings commence; Justice at the Doorstep making dispute resolution available within the community itself;

Community Empowerment enabling citizens to participate actively in maintaining peace; Strengthening Social Harmony preserving relationships instead of creating adversarial divisions; and Reducing Court Pendency allowing courts to devote greater attention to complex legal disputes.

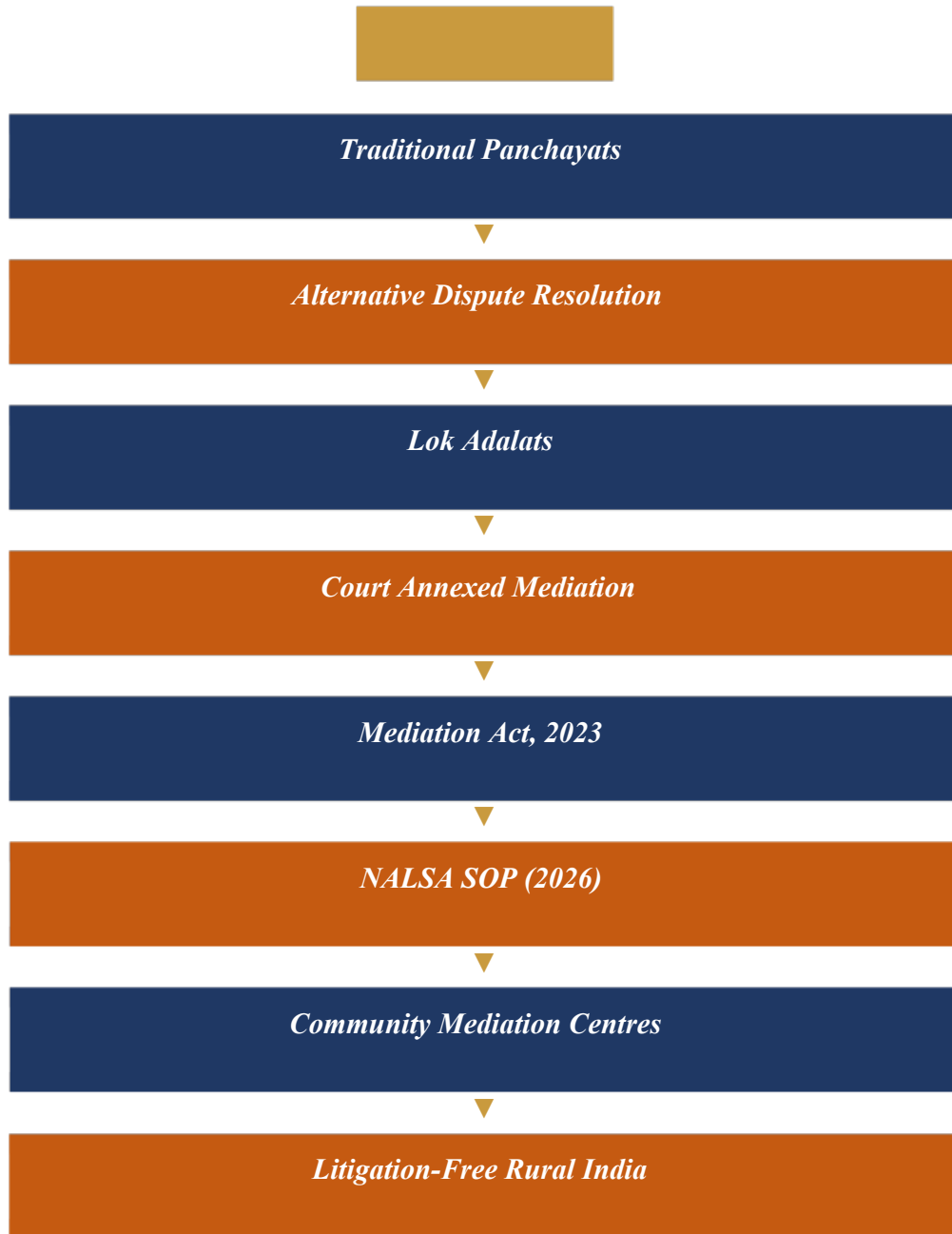
Towards Litigation-Free Rural India

One of the most significant concepts introduced by the SOP is the vision of “Litigation-Free Rural India.” This does not imply that courts will become unnecessary. Rather, it means that avoidable litigation should be prevented, suitable disputes should be settled voluntarily, communities should become

capable of resolving their own conflicts, and courts should remain available for disputes requiring judicial adjudication.

The objective is to create villages where dialogue becomes the first response to conflict.

EVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY MEDIATION



KEY FEATURES OF THE SOP

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <i>National Framework</i> | 5. Ethical standards |
| 2. Uniform Procedures | 6. Monitoring mechanism |
| 3. Institutional supports | 7. Capacity Building |
| 4. Community Participation | 8. Sustainable peace |



The community mediation awareness rath moving through the village, drawing residents into the street



Officials and community members on a field visit walk through the village

CHAPTER 4

Vision, Guiding Principles and Objectives

"Community Mediation is not merely a mechanism for resolving disputes; it is a philosophy of empowering communities to preserve peace, restore relationships and strengthen access to justice."



Introduction

The success of any dispute resolution mechanism depends not only upon its legal framework but also upon the philosophy that guides its implementation. Community Mediation is fundamentally different from conventional litigation because it seeks to transform the manner in which conflicts are perceived and resolved. Instead of encouraging adversarial contests resulting in winners and losers, Community Mediation promotes dialogue,

cooperation, voluntary participation, and mutually acceptable solutions. The Standard Operating Procedure for Community Mediation — Towards a Litigation-Free Rural India, prepared by NALSA, is founded upon a clear vision of bringing justice closer to the people by creating community-based institutions capable of resolving appropriate disputes in a peaceful, accessible, and participatory manner.

Vision of Community Mediation

1. Justice at the Grassroots

Justice should not remain confined to courtrooms. Every citizen, irrespective of geographical location or economic status, should have access to a fair, simple, and dignified mechanism for resolving disputes within the community.

2. Dialogue Before Litigation

Community Mediation encourages parties to attempt dialogue before resorting to formal litigation, resolving

misunderstandings before they harden into legal disputes.

3. Community Ownership of Justice

Communities themselves must participate in preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts with the assistance of trained Community Mediators and Legal Services Institutions.

4. Strengthening Social Harmony

Community Mediation seeks not merely to settle disputes but also to preserve relationships, restore trust, and strengthen social cohesion.

5. Complementing the Formal Justice System

Philosophy of Community Mediation



- Listening instead of accusing.
- Understanding instead of confrontation.
- Cooperation instead of competition.
- Restoration instead of retaliation.
- Consensus instead of imposed decisions.

Guiding Principles of Community Mediation



1. Voluntary Participation

Participation is based upon the free and informed consent of the parties. No person should be compelled to enter into mediation or to accept a settlement against his or her will.

2. Neutrality and Impartiality

A Community Mediator must remain completely neutral and impartial throughout the proceedings — never favouring either party, never imposing a decision, never acting as a judge.

3. Confidentiality

The mediation process must remain confidential. Confidentiality encourages openness, honest communication, and constructive negotiations.

4. Party Autonomy

Parties themselves identify issues, generate options, negotiate solutions, and voluntarily decide whether to settle; the mediator merely facilitates the process.

5. Community Participation

Active participation of Gram Panchayats, Community Leaders, Women's Groups, Self Help Groups, Para Legal Volunteers, and educational institutions enhances acceptance of settlements.

Community Mediation is a complementary mechanism that allows courts to focus on matters requiring judicial adjudication while suitable disputes are resolved through voluntary settlement.

6. Accessibility

Community Mediation seeks accessible mediation centres, simple procedures, and minimal procedural barriers.

7. Inclusiveness

Community Mediation should reflect the diversity of society across genders, age groups, and social backgrounds.

8. Respect and Dignity

Every participant should be treated with courtesy and respect irrespective of social status, gender, religion, caste, or economic background.

9. Accountability

Proper documentation, monitoring, reporting, and periodic review ensure transparency and accountability under the supervision of Legal Services Authorities.

10. Peaceful Resolution

The ultimate objective is not merely settlement of disputes but the promotion of lasting peace within the community.

Objectives of Community Mediation

A. To Promote Early Resolution of Disputes

Encouraging parties to resolve disputes before they escalate into litigation.

B. To Reduce Unnecessary Litigation

Minimising avoidable cases entering the formal judicial system.

C. To Strengthen Access to Justice

Making dispute resolution affordable, accessible, and people-centric.

D. To Preserve Relationships

Protecting family, neighbourhood, and community relationships through consensual settlement.

E. To Promote Social Harmony

Reducing social tension and encouraging peaceful coexistence.

F. To Empower Communities

Building local capacity for resolving conflicts through trained Community Mediators.

G. To Strengthen Legal Services Institutions

Expanding the outreach of NALSA, SLSAs, DLSAs, and TLSCs through community-based initiatives.

H. To Support the Vision of Litigation-Free Rural India

Creating an environment where appropriate disputes are resolved locally before reaching the courts.

Vision

01 Justice at the Grassroots

02 Dialogue Before Litigation

03 Community Ownership

04 Social Harmony

05 Litigation-Free Rural India

Guiding Principles

01 Voluntary Participation

02 Neutrality

03 Confidentiality

04 Accessibility

05 Inclusiveness

06 Party Autonomy

07 Accountability

08 Community Participation

CHAPTER 5

From Vision to Implementation

The Institutional Architecture of Community Mediation

"A vision becomes meaningful only when it is translated into institutions, responsibilities and action".

"When institutions empower communities and communities trust the process, mediation becomes a way of life."

Introduction

The success of Community Mediation depends upon much more than the willingness of individuals to settle their disputes amicably. A sustainable community-based dispute resolution system requires an institutional structure capable of providing direction, training, supervision, referral, monitoring and continuous support.

NALSA's Standard Operating Procedure therefore places Community Mediation within the existing legal services framework, combining the strength and institutional credibility of Legal Services Institutions with the accessibility and community ownership of grassroots dispute resolution. The resulting institutional model may be understood as a three-level framework — National, State and District — descending finally to the Community Mediation Centre, the Mediator Panel and the local community itself.

Community Mediation seeks to make justice more accessible by bringing the process of dispute resolution closer to the people. It recognises that many disputes arise from everyday interactions within families, neighbourhoods and local communities, and can often be resolved effectively through communication, mutual understanding and dialogue.

The institutional framework provides the necessary support to transform this community-led approach into a structured and sustainable mechanism. Legal Services Institutions play a vital role in providing training, coordination, guidance and supervision, while the Community Mediation Centre and trained mediators ensure that the process remains accessible, impartial and responsive to local needs.



THE THREE-LEVEL INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

NALSA — Policy, Guidance, Review

SLSA — State Coordination, Monitoring

DLSA — Implementation, Supervision

Community Mediation Centres

Community Mediator Panel

Local Community



Field interaction with village residents and police near the community pavilion

NALSA — The National Guiding Institution



At the apex of the institutional framework is the National Legal Services Authority. NALSA provides overall policy guidance for implementation of community Mediation, facilitates coordination with

State Legal Services Authorities, issues necessary advisories or guidelines, and undertakes periodic monitoring and review — including course correction on the basis of practical, ground-level experience.

State Legal Services Authorities — The State-Level Bridge



The SLSA functions as the connecting institution between national policy and district-level implementation — a role of particular importance given India's enormous geographical, linguistic, cultural and administrative diversity.

SLSAs undertake State-wide coordination, review DLSA performance, consolidate data, identify best practices, support capacity-building, and communicate with NALSA on quarterly basis.

District Legal Services Authorities — The Engine of Implementation



If NALSA provides the vision and the SLSA provides coordination, the District Legal Services Authority is the principal operational institution at the district level, owing to its proximity to the communities in which disputes originate. The DLSA

Identifies suitable areas and disputes, receives and examines referrals, assesses suitability, refers accepted disputes to the appropriate Community Mediation Panel, monitors Centres and mediators, maintains documentation, and facilitates escalation of unresolved matters.

The Role of Gram Panchayats and Community Institutions



The institutional framework does not end with Legal Services Authorities. The SOP specifically seeks to strengthen Gram Panchayats and other community institutions by enabling them to create awareness, identify disputes early, encourage voluntary

mediation facilitate community participation, connect citizens with Legal Services Institutions, and support peaceful implementation of settlements — always without any power to compel parties to settle.

Community Mediation Centres — The Local Gateway to Justice



The Community Mediation Centre is the physical and operational focal point of the initiative — the point at which the institutional justice system meets the local community. A CMC should be accessible, neutral, safe, dignified, reasonably private, and suitable for confidential discussion.

The significance of the CMC extends beyond its physical structure. It symbolises a new approach: justice need not always begin in a courtroom. It can begin with a conversation in the community.

Community Mediator Panels and the Three-Mediator Model



The mediator is the human face of Community Mediation, functioning in a voluntary capacity, consistent with the community-centric, non-formal and service-oriented character of the initiative. A mediator is not a judge, an arbitrator, an advocate for either party, or an authority imposing a settlement.

The SOP provides for constitution of a panel of three mediators for each identified village, preferably including one woman mediator, after checking for conflict of interest. This offers collective neutrality, greater community confidence, gender sensitivity in disputes involving women and family relationships, and shared responsibility for ethical standards.

The Institutional Referral Network



One of the most innovative features of the SOP is its broad referral mechanism. Suitable disputes may reach the DLSA or TLSC through the parties themselves, District Magistrates, Sub-Divisional Magistrates, Tehsildars, development authorities, Gram Panchayats, Nyaya Panchayats, Gram Nyayalayas, Police Authorities, Para Legal Volunteers, Lok Adalats, Legal Aid Clinics, and other appropriate authorities — creating a genuine multi-doorreferral system.

The existence of multiple referral channels does not, however, mean that parties can be forced into mediation. The SOP expressly requires prior mutual consent for referral, and parties may voluntarily withdraw their consent at any time before signing the Settlement Agreement. Referral may be facilitated institutionally; settlement can only be achieved voluntarily.

Suitability Assessment and Limits of Community Mediation



Not every dispute is appropriate for Community Mediation. The DLSA examines the nature of the dispute, the consent of the parties, whether the dispute is amenable to mediation, and whether it falls within

statutory exclusions — the final authority to determine suitability vesting with the DLSA.

The SOP limits Community Mediation to disputes that are amenable to mediation, based on prior mutual consent, and not excluded by the First Schedule of the

Mediation Act, 2023 — specifically keeping heinous offences and non-compoundable matters outside its scope. Community Mediation is a complementary mechanism, not a substitute

for the criminal justice system or formal adjudication in matters requiring judicial intervention.

Pilot Phase — Learning Before Scaling



The SOP adopts a phased approach rather than attempting immediate nationwide implementation, generating practical experience regarding the identification of suitable villages, the functioning of

mediation centres, mediator training, referral patterns, community participation, settlement rates, operational difficulties, and best practices — because community dynamics differ significantly across States and districts.

Monitoring, Accountability and the Litigation-Free Village



A community- based mechanism cannot remain effective without systematic monitoring. DLSAs maintain records of cases received, referred, settled, unresolved and escalated; SLSAs undertake quarterly review and consolidate district reports; and NALSA periodically evaluates outcomes, best practices and challenges — creating a continuous feedback loop from implementation to improved implementation.

This structure ultimately leads towards the larger vision of a Litigation-Free Village — one where either no new litigation has originated for a continuous period of twelve months, or where there is evidence of sustained high settlement rates through Community Mediation. Success is measured not merely by the number of sessions conducted, but by long-term impact on the culture of dispute resolution.

"A citizen need not necessarily wait for a dispute to become a court case. A suitable dispute may enter the Community Mediation system through a Party, a Panchayat, a PLV, a Legal Aid Clinic, the Police, an Administrative Authority, a Lok Adalat, or any other appropriate referral source. The DLSA then examines suitability and, where appropriate, refers the dispute to the Community Mediation Panel — one dispute, many doors, one peaceful solution".

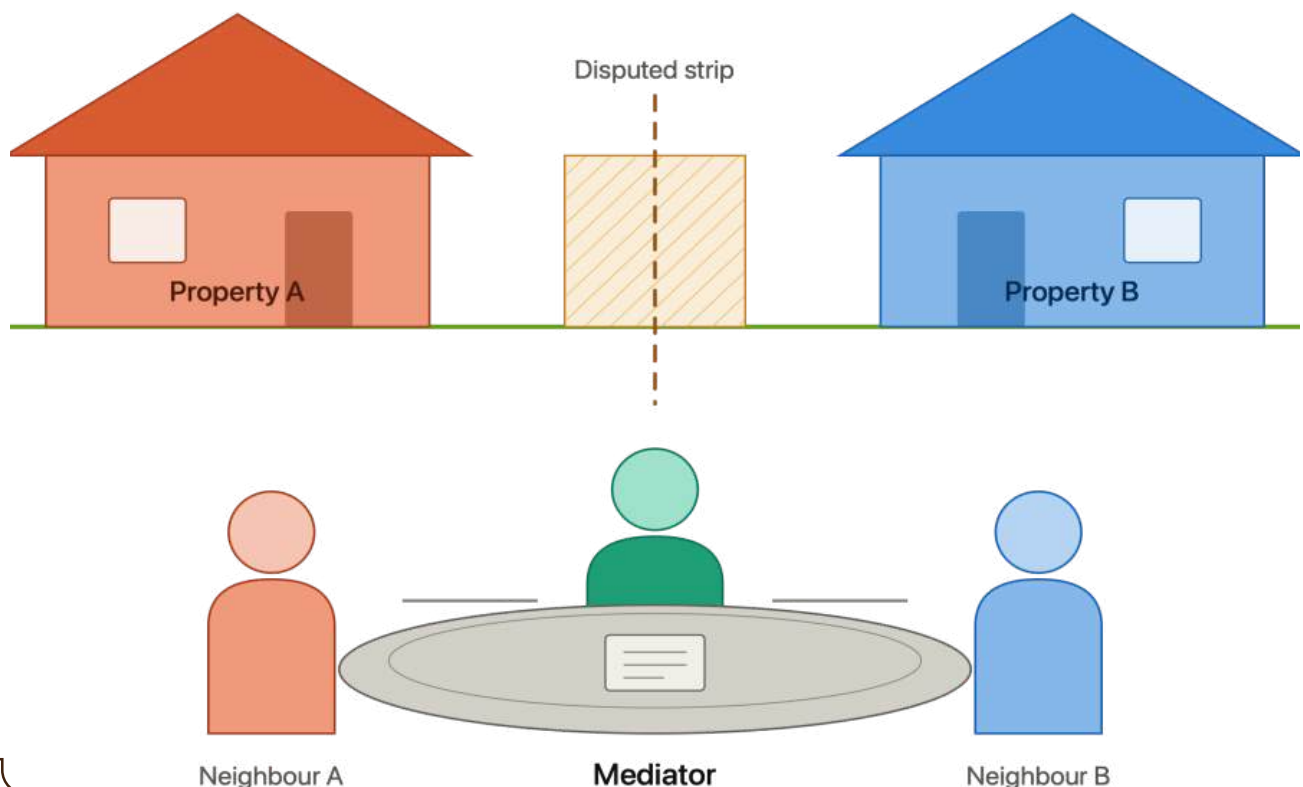
Case Illustration — A Boundary Dispute Between Neighbours

Two neighbouring families have cultivated adjoining agricultural lands for several years. A disagreement arises regarding the location of the boundary and use of a narrow pathway. Initially the dispute appears minor; however, repeated arguments can lead from disagreement to a police complaint, to social hostility, and eventually to the threat of civil litigation.

Under the Community Mediation framework, if the dispute is suitable and both parties voluntarily consent, it may be referred to the appropriate mechanism. The mediator does not decide who owns the land; instead, the mediator facilitates discussion concerning existing boundaries, practical use of the pathway, mutual access, future maintenance, and acceptable arrangements. If the parties reach a voluntary agreement, the settlement is documented.

The result is not merely the resolution of a boundary disagreement it is the preservation of a neighbourly relationship.

"Every successful mediation preserves relationships, strengthens communities and brings justice closer to people. A mediator builds bridges where conflict has created walls".



CHAPTER 6

Culture and Community Mediation

From Custom To Institution - The Cultural Roots Of A Modern Reform

Long before the vocabulary of 'Alternative Dispute Resolution' entered the Indian legal lexicon, Indian villages already possessed a living culture of resolving conflict through conversation. Community Mediation, as conceived under the NALSA SOP, is not an import from elsewhere it is, in a very real sense, the modification and revival of a cultural

instinct that Indian society has practised for centuries. This chapter examines the cultural roots of community-based dispute resolution in India, and explains why Community Mediation is best understood not merely as a legal procedure, but as the deliberate rebuilding of a culture — a culture of dialogue, patience, restraint and collective responsibility for peace.

The cultural roots of community dispute resolution

The Panchayat literally an assembly of five respected persons has for centuries been the first port of call for villagers seeking to resolve disagreements. Long before codified civil procedure, the Panchayat drew its authority not from statute but from the trust of the community: its members were chosen because they were known, respected, and believed to be fair.

Similar institutions have existed in different forms across the country village councils, caste and community panchayats, religious and temple-linked adjudicatory bodies, tribal customary courts in the hill and forest regions, and family or clan councils that settled disputes over land, marriage and inheritance.

What united these institutions, despite their diversity, was a shared cultural understanding: that a dispute between two members of a community was, in some measure, the concern of the whole community, and that its resolution should restore relationships rather than merely allocate blame.

This cultural memory has not disappeared. It survives in the instinct of a village elder who is called upon to 'sit both sides down and talk it out'; in the customary practice of inviting relatives and neighbours to witness a settlement; and in the deep-seated preference, even today, for a compromise arrived at collectively over a decision imposed from outside.

Community Life, Festivals and the Social Fabric of Consensus

India's rural social fabric is woven together by shared festivals, harvests, weddings, religious observances and community labour. Neighbours who share a well, a threshing floor, a temple courtyard or a marriage pandal cannot easily afford to remain permanently estranged. This interdependence has historically created a strong cultural pressure towards reconciliation — not because law required it, but because community life demanded it.

It is this same interdependence that the SOP seeks to draw upon. When the SOP speaks of 'Preservation of Social Harmony' as a guiding principle, and of villages sharing a threshing floor or a temple courtyard settling their disputes through dialogue, it is describing a cultural reality that has always existed in rural India — it is simply proposing to support that reality with training, structure, ethics and institutional backing.

Oral Tradition, Storytelling and the Language of Compromise



Indian culture has always valued the wisdom carried through proverbs, folk tales, panchatantra stories and everyday sayings that counsel patience, listening and compromise. Such oral traditions have shaped the way villagers instinctively approach conflict — often reaching for a shared saying or a story before reaching for a complaint. Community Mediators trained under the SOP step in same tradition. When a mediator asks disputing

parties to 'sit together and talk', explains that 'a house divided cannot stand', or reminds parties that they will continue to be neighbours long after the dispute is forgotten, the mediator is speaking in a cultural idiom that villagers already understand and trust — which is precisely why community mediation tends to be more readily accepted at the grassroots than an unfamiliar, formal legal process.

Cultural Inclusiveness — Women, Elders and Diverse Voices



One of the most significant cultural contributions of the modern Community Mediation framework is its deliberate correction of a historical imbalance. Traditional Panchayats were not always inclusive of women, marginalised castes, or minority voices. The SOP consciously departs from this history by requiring 'due consideration' to representation of women and other classes or categories of persons on every mediator panel, and by preferring at least one woman mediator in the three-member panel.

This is itself a cultural intervention: it retains what was valuable in the traditional model — community ownership, respected local facilitators, restorative outcomes — while reforming what was exclusionary, so that the culture of community justice becomes genuinely representative of the whole community it serves.

Local Language, Local Idiom



Culture lives in language. The SOP recognises this by requiring that Settlement Agreements be drafted in simple and clear language, preferably in the local language, and by requiring that training of Community Mediators be conducted, wherever possible, within or near the concerned villages, in a manner that is basic, practical and community-oriented.

This insistence on local language and local idiom is not a mere administrative convenience — it reflects an understanding that a settlement is more likely to be honoured, and a process more likely to be trusted, when it speaks in the voice of the community rather than in the borrowed language of the courtroom.

Culture in Practice — Lessons from the Durg Training Programme

The Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme conducted by the District Legal Services Authority, Durg, offers a living illustration of this cultural continuity. The role-play exercises conducted during the training — disputes over the use of a traditional village pathway, sharing of water from a privately constructed well, compensation for damage caused by stray cattle, and even a dispute between two families over the booking of a community hall for wedding ceremonies on the same date — were not abstract legal hypotheticals. They were the everyday, culturally specific disputes of rural and small-town Chhattisgarh.

Equally significant was the participation of Shri Govardhan Barle and Smt. Lalita Barle, a husband-

wife duo from Gram Panchayat Ghughsidih, who together chose to train as Community Mediators. Their joint participation — reported with evident pride in the local press — was itself a small but powerful cultural statement: that peace-making in the community begins at home, and that when a family moves with a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, it becomes, in the words of one newspaper report, 'a catalyst for social change.'

The Durg initiative went further still, developing motivational songs and awareness videos in the local language and playing them during village outreach programmes — a deliberate use of music and oral culture, in the same spirit as the folk traditions that have long carried messages of peace and patience through rural Chhattisgarh.



Community outreach meeting held at the Gram Panchayat office, Kuthrel

Community Mediators from selected Gram Panchayats at the Durg training programme

From Custom to Institution

Community Mediation, therefore, should not be understood merely as a new legal procedure superimposed upon Indian villages. It is better understood as the institutionalisation of a culture that already exists — the culture of the Panchayat, the culture of shared festivals and shared resources, the culture of oral wisdom and proverb, and the culture of restoring, rather than severing, relationships. What the SOP adds to this inherited culture is structure:

trained mediators instead of self-appointed arbiters, a code of ethics instead of informal pressure, inclusion of women and marginalised groups instead of a narrow elite, confidentiality instead of public shaming, and institutional accountability instead of unchecked local authority. In doing so, the NALSA initiative does not replace India's culture of community dispute resolution — it refines it, and makes it worthy of the constitutional promise of justice for all.



The DLSA Durg team with residents of Gram Panchayat Arsanara during the awareness outreach

CHAPTER 7

The SOP Framework in Detail

Having examined the vision, the philosophy and the institutional architecture of Community Mediation, this chapter turns to the operative provisions of the Standard Operating Procedure itself — the practical rules that govern how a community Mediation centre

Is established, how mediators are selected and trained, which disputes may be taken up, how referrals are processed, how settlements are documented, and how the entire system is monitored.

Statutory Basis

The SOP is framed in furtherance of the constitutional mandate under Article 39A of the Constitution of India, which obligates the State to ensure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity and provides free legal aid so that no citizen is denied access to justice by reason of economic or other disabilities.

The SOP derives statutory authority from the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, which empowers Legal

Services Institutions to provide legal aid, promote alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and facilitate amicable settlement of disputes. It is further aligned with the Mediation Act, 2023 — particularly Sections 4, 43 and 44 — which recognise mediation as a preferred mode of dispute resolution and provide for community mediation for disputes affecting peace, harmony, and tranquillity within a locality, subject to mutual consent of the parties.

Community Mediation Centres — Location and Infrastructure

Community Mediation Centres (CMCs) may be located in accessible and neutral public spaces, including offices, government schools (after regular school hours), community-owned or Panchayat-owned buildings, or any other suitable public facility identified by the DLSA. The location must ensure convenience, neutrality, safety, and confidentiality for all parties.

Infrastructure

- Seating arrangements for approximately 10–20 persons

- Notice board for display of information related to

- Case registers and settlement registers for record-keeping.
- Basic stationery and writing materials
- Digital case logging facilities, wherever feasible

Community Mediation Centres shall function as non-formal, neutral, and approachable spaces, and shall not operate as quasi-judicial or adjudicatory forums.



A Community Mediator explaining the mediation process to disputing parties

Selection of Community Mediators

DLSA shall constitute a panel of three (3) Community Mediators for each identified village, drawn from residents of the concerned village or cluster, and may include persons of standing, integrity and respect within the community; local persons whose contribution to society has been recognised; representatives of area or resident welfare associations; persons having experience in mediation or dispute resolution; retired teachers, panchayat members, retired government servants and religious leaders serving as

other person deemed appropriate by the DLSA.

Due consideration shall preferably be given to ensuring representation of women and other classes or categories of persons. Persons having any conflict of interest, likelihood of bias in village disputes, or criminal antecedents shall not be appointed. Selection shall be guided throughout by the principles of impartiality, fairness, integrity and inclusivity.

Role of Community Mediators

Community Mediators shall facilitate dialogue between parties and assist them in arriving at mutually acceptable and voluntary settlements. They shall not adjudicate disputes, impose decisions, or offer legal opinions to the parties, and shall ensure that participation in mediation is voluntary, informed, and consensual at all stages,

conducted in a manner that preserves dignity, equality, and mutual respect among the parties. Mediators shall prepare and authenticate settlement agreements or non-settlement reports, as applicable, and submit the same to the DLSA.

When to mediate and when to Refer

Not every dispute can or should be mediated. A mediator's first ethical responsibility is to assess

whether mediation is appropriate to the dispute at hand, or whether some other process is more efficacious.

(a) When to Mediate

- The dispute involves issues that can be negotiated (family, land, water, neighbourhood, small commercial disputes)
- Both parties are willing to talk and try for a solution

The matter involves relationships that need to be preserved (family, neighbours, workplace, community)

- The conflict is not about a serious crime but about civil or community issues

(b) When to Refer

- The dispute involves serious crimes (murder, rape, assault, theft)
- There are issues of domestic violence where safety is at risk
- One party is clearly incapable of giving free consent (due to intimidation, mental incapacity, or severe power imbalance)
- There is a clear violation of law that requires judicial intervention
- The dispute is already pending before a court and cannot be withdrawn for mediation

Code of Ethics for Community Mediators



- Adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, confidentiality, and fairness
- Maintain strict confidentiality of all mediation communications, in accordance with the Mediation Act, 2023
- Avoid any conduct that may create an appearance of bias, coercion, or impropriety
- Recuse themselves from proceedings involving personal interest, close relationships, or conflict of interest
- Respect the self-determination of the parties and ensure outcomes are based solely on their free will

Training and Capacity Building



- All selected Community Mediators shall undergo a basic training for mediation
- Training programmes shall be organised under the aegis of SLISA, in coordination with DLSA
- Training shall be basic, practical, and community oriented, conducted preferably within or near the concerned villages
- It shall cover core mediation skills, dispute resolution techniques, legal awareness, local laws, communication skills, and ethical conduct
- Certification shall be granted by the DLSA on successful completion
- Periodic refresher trainings shall be organised to strengthen skills and ensure adherence to standards
- PLVs associated with Community Mediation Centres may also be included in appropriate capacity-building programmes
- The NALSA Community Mediation Training Manual, 2025 serves as a ready reference for training programmes

Scope of Disputes for Community Mediation

Community Mediation under the SOP is confined to disputes of a local or community nature that are likely to affect peace, harmony, and tranquillity amongst residents or families of any area or locality — provided such disputes are amenable to mediation, based on prior mutual consent of the parties, and not excluded under the First Schedule of the Mediation Act, 2023.

Family disputes : Quarrels between spouses, disagreements between parents and children or siblings, inheritance conflicts, or disputes over dowry. **Neighbourhood Disputes:** Arguments about boundaries both in houses and farmlands; noise, waste disposal, shared walls or common facilities like water pumps.

Property Disputes: Ownership of land, tenancy issues.

Workplace Disputes: Disagreements between employers and workers, wage issues, unfair treatment, or disputes among co-workers.

Community Resource Disputes: Access to water, grazing land, forests or common property used by multiple families.

Social and Cultural Disputes: Conflicts arising out of customs, traditions, caste, or religious practices.

Money Recovery Disputes: Small debt recovery and money claims between villagers.

Other Disputes: Any other dispute not specifically covered above, or residual disputes.

Referral Process

Suitable disputes may be referred to the DLSA/TLSC by any of the parties to the dispute, District Magistrates, Sub-Divisional Magistrates, Tehsildars, Chief/District/Block Development Officers, Village Development Officers, Gram Panchayats, Nyaya Panchayats, Gram Nyayalayas (under Section 89 CPC, 1908), Police Authorities (including pre-FIR referrals), Para Legal Volunteers, Lok Adalats, Legal Aid Clinics, or any other authority deemed appropriate.

Applications may be submitted orally or in writing, and referral shall be made only with prior mutual consent of the parties, who may withdraw such consent at any time before signing the Settlement Agreement. DLSA shall examine the suitability of the dispute, having regard to its nature, consent, and statutory exclusions, with the final authority to determine suitability vesting in the DLSA. Where mediation is found unsuitable or is declined, parties shall be informed of alternative remedies available under law.

Timeline

- Registration and acknowledgement of a request: Within 24 hours
- Assignment of the dispute to the appropriate Community Mediator Panel: within 48 hours by the DLSA
- Conclusion of the mediation process: ordinarily 30 days
- Where mediation does not result in settlement within the stipulated period, the matter is treated as unresolved and may be referred or escalated to Lok Adalats, Permanent Lok Adalats, Courts or other competent forums, without prejudice to the rights and remedies of the parties under law.

Settlement and Documentation



Where a settlement is arrived at, it shall be reduced into writing as a Settlement Agreement, signed by both parties and authenticated by the Community Mediators. A copy shall be provided to each party, with one copy retained by the DLSA/TLSC and the CMC. The Agreement shall be drafted in simple and clear language, preferably in the local language, to ensure understanding by all parties.

Where no settlement is arrived at, a Non-Settlement Report shall be prepared and submitted to the DLSA/TLSC, with a copy provided to each party. All settlement and non-settlement records shall be maintained confidentially, in accordance with the Mediation Act, 2023.

Recognition of Community Mediators



- Community Mediators function in a voluntary capacity, in keeping with the community-centric, non-formal, and service-oriented nature of Community Mediation
- In recognition of their contribution, Community Mediators are awarded Certificates of Appreciation or Recognition by the DLSA or SLSCA

- Recognition is conferred in a manner that upholds neutrality, ethical standards, and the voluntary character of Community Mediation
- Awards are based on participation, integrity, and adherence to the principles of Community Mediation

Monitoring, Reporting and Declaration of Litigation-Free Villages



DLSAs are responsible for regular monitoring of Community Mediation Centres and Panels within their jurisdictions, maintaining periodic records and data on cases received, referred, settled, unresolved and escalated. SLSCAs review implementation quarterly and consolidate district-level reports for submission to NALSA, which undertakes periodic evaluation of outcomes, best practices and challenges for policy guidance and course correction.

Villages or clusters of villages may be declared “Litigation-Free Village” where either no new litigation has originated from such village or cluster for a continuous period of twelve months, or where there is evidence of sustained high settlement rates through Community Mediation.

Awareness



Legal Services Institutions shall undertake systematic awareness and outreach activities through Legal Literacy and Legal Awareness Camps, Gram Sabha meetings and Panchayat-level programmes, Legal Aid Clinics and Community Mediation Centres, digital

platforms, and engagement of PLVs and community leaders. Awareness materials shall be prepared and disseminated in local languages, with special efforts made to ensure outreach to women, senior citizens, and disadvantaged communities.

Wards and Urban Community Mediation Centres

The provisions of the SOP shall, mutatis mutandis, apply to urban areas, including municipal wards, for the

establishment and functioning of Urban Community Mediation Centres.

Scaling Up, Sustainability and Expenditure

The Community Mediation initiative shall be scaled up gradually through district-wise and State-wise expansion, based on assessment of outcomes, capacity, and best practices from the pilot phase, and integrated with existing legal services mechanisms such as Legal Literacy and Legal Awareness Camps, Lok Adalats, and Legal Aid Clinics. A phased expansion plan may target coverage of at least one village in

each district, subject to feasibility, availability of trained mediators, and administrative capacity.

All expenditure for implementing the SOP shall be borne from grants-in-aid funds after approval of the Hon'ble Executive Chairperson of the concerned SLSA.



Community mediation awareness banners installed at Gram Panchayat Arsanara

CHAPTER 8

The Chhattisgarh Model — The Durg Training Programme

05 Days Community Mediation Training, District & Sessions Court, Durg (25–29 July 2026)

If the SOP represents the vision on paper, the Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme conducted by the District Legal Services Authority, Durg, represents that vision brought to life. Conducted from 25 to 29 July 2026 in pursuance of the directions of the Chhattisgarh State Legal Services Authority, the

programme equipped Community Mediators nominated from five selected Gram Panchayats — Ghughsidih, Nankatti, Arasnara, Nikum and Kuthrel — with the practical skills required to serve as ambassadors of peace in their own villages.

This chapter documents that journey, day by day, and introduces the institutions and individuals who made it possible.



Training session — Day 1

District & Sessions Court, Durg, C.G. — venue of the training programme

Laying the Foundation — The Inaugural Address

The Community Mediation Training Programme commenced with an inspiring address by Shri K. Vinod Kujur, Chairman, District Legal Services Authority and Principal District Judge, Durg, before a distinguished gathering comprising Judicial Officers, Potential Trainers, members of the Bar, representatives of educational institutions, Community Mediators, Para Legal Volunteers, and media personnel.

In his address, Shri Kujur emphasised that the true strength of the justice delivery system lies not only in deciding cases but also in preventing disputes from reaching the courts, and that community mediation promotes dialogue, mutual respect, understanding, and reconciliation. He observed that community mediators

play a vital role in restoring communication, rebuilding trust, and preserving relationships within society, and urged participants to uphold the values of neutrality, patience, confidentiality, integrity, and compassion as future ambassadors of peace.

The training programme was conducted by Potential Trainers Ms. Hamida Siddiqui and Ms. Akanksha Jain, appointed by the Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee (MCPC), Supreme Court of India. The inaugural session was also attended by Smt. Suman Ekka, Principal Judge, Family Court, Durg, and all other Judicial Officers of District Durg, along with District Bar Association members, Advocate mediators, and Principals of various law colleges in Durg.



Lighting of the ceremonial lamp, Inaugural Day



Chairman, DLSA Durg, delivering the inaugural address



A Step Towards Grassroots Justice — Day by Day

Day 1 — Inauguration and Introduction to Community Mediation

The programme commenced with an inaugural session highlighting the vision of NALSA to promote “Litigation Free Rural India 2026” through Community Mediation. Participants were introduced to the philosophy, objectives, and legal framework of community mediation, and the sessions explored the evolution of

mediation in India, the role of Legal Services Institutions, and the qualities and ethical responsibilities expected of a Community Mediator.

A notable highlight was the participation of community members from diverse backgrounds, including a husband-wife duo, Govardhan Barle and Lalita Barle from Gram Panchayat Ghughsidih, whose joint involvement reflected the spirit of family support and community service.



Training session — Day 1

Day 2 — Resolution of Common Conflicts through Community Mediation

This day focused on core competencies for effective conflict analysis, empathy, and trust-building. Participants learned to identify the underlying interests of disputing parties, manage emotions, and facilitate constructive and dialogue while maintaining neutrality confidentiality.

Special attention was given to interest-based negotiation and collaborative problem-solving, and to strategies for handling anger, frustration, and mistrust in a calm and constructive manner.

Day 3 — Mediation Process and Practical Application

The trainers provided an in-depth understanding of the structured stages of mediation, from pre-mediation preparations to the conclusion of settlement proceedings — conducting joint and private meetings, framing issues, generating settlement options, and drafting mediation settlement agreements.

Practical demonstrations and case-based discussions, neighbourhood disagreements, and property-related issues, enabled participants to apply theoretical concepts in simulated environments.



Training session — Day 3

Day 4 — Cultural Sensitivity, Ethics and Legal Framework in Community Mediation

The fourth day strengthened participants' understanding of culturally sensitive, ethical, and legally informed mediation practices — recognising social and cultural

diversity, including differences based on caste, religion, gender, and age, while ensuring fairness and inclusivity.

The programme covered the ethical responsibilities of Community Mediators, the circumstances warranting referral to an appropriate authority instead of mediation, and the legal framework governing mediation in India, reinforced through interactive discussions and role play.



Day 5 — Concluding Day: From Mediation to Meaningful Settlement

The concluding day focused on the Settlement Agreement — its purpose, essential elements, drafting process, and mediation-related legal considerations — giving participants practical insight into preparing clear, balanced, and enforceable settlement agreements reflecting voluntary consensus.

The eighth role-play exercise simulated a dispute between two families over the booking of a community hall for wedding ceremonies on the same date — a booking error that had escalated into a matter of family honour and social prestige — reinforcing active listening, empathy, interest-based negotiation, and consensus-building. The programme concluded with a Valedictory and Certificate Distribution Ceremony.



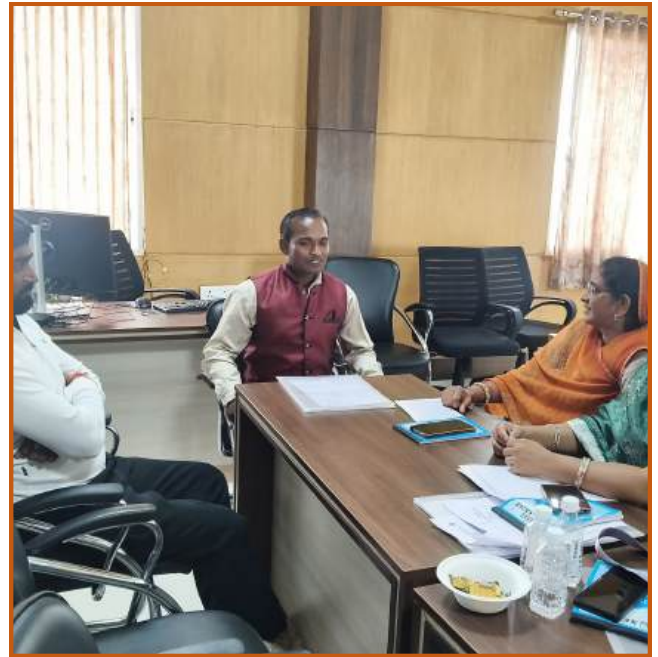
Training session — Day 5

Role-Play Sessions — Mediation Meets the Village



The role-play sessions formed an integral part of the training, enabling participants to apply mediation principles to realistic village dispute scenarios: access to village pathways, balancing educational needs with religious practices, compensation for damages caused by stray cattle, land boundary disputes between neighbouring farmers, conflicts over sharing water from a privately constructed well, neighbourhood disputes arising from storm damage to property, and disagreements over the use of a traditional village pathway.

Each scenario highlighted the importance of resolving conflicts through communication, empathy, and consensus rather than confrontation or litigation, while preserving relationships and strengthening community harmony. Through guided simulations and structured debriefings, participants enhanced their ability to restore communication, rebuild trust, and promote sustainable, interest-based settlements.



Role-play exercise in progress

Songs, Videos and Village Outreach



To strengthen awareness and encourage public participation, DLSA Durg developed a series of motivational songs and awareness videos, specially prepared to inspire both trainers and community members and played during village outreach programmes throughout the training. The engaging content generated enthusiasm among community members, increased awareness about the benefits of mediation, and encouraged people to actively express their willingness to participate in the Community Mediation Programme building greater public confidence in mediation as a people-centric mechanism for justice.

"The essence of justice does not always lie in decrees or judgments — it often begins in a conversation".

CHAPTER 9

Voices from the Ground & Media Coverage

Voices from the Ground

A particularly inspiring highlight of the Durg training programme was the participation of Shri Govardhan Barle and his wife, Smt. Lalita Barle, from Gram Panchayat Ghughsidih. Balancing their domestic and familiar responsibilities, both embraced the significance of social service through community mediation, participating side by side with mutual support and care.

Their joint presence set a strong example of family harmony and mutual respect, conveying a powerful message that when a family moves with a spirit of

dialogue and cooperation, it becomes a catalyst for social change.

Among the thirteen active participants from various village panchayats were Madhav Prasad Deshmukh, Bhagwat Ram Patel and Manjusha Meshram from Gram Panchayat Nikum; Mohan Soni and Govardhan and Lalita Barle from Gram Panchayat Ghughsidih; and other dedicated Community Mediators from Nankatti, Arasnara and Kuthrel villages — each bringing their own local knowledge and standing in the community to the training hall.



A settlement discussion in progress, guided by a trained Community Mediator

Govardhan Barle and Lalita Barle, Community Mediators, Gram Panchayat Ghughsidih

Justice on Wheels — Hareli in the Villages



On Hareli — the first festival of the Chhattisgarhi calendar, when the farming community offers thanks for a sown field and worships the plough and the bullock — the District Legal Services Authority, Durg, chose to send the message of community mediation into the villages on the most familiar vehicle of all: a bullock cart.

Conducted under the guidance of Shri K. Vinod Kujur, Principal District & Sessions Judge and Chairman, DLSA Durg, the five-day campaign was carried out under the banner “Five Villages, Five Days, One Resolve — Resolution Through Dialogue, Not Dispute”. Its object was to carry legal awareness and access to justice directly into the village chaupal, rather than waiting for the village to find its way to the courthouse.

The centrepiece of the campaign was at Gram Nikum, where a traditional bullock cart was decorated as “Justice on Wheels” and taken through the village lanes on the day of Hareli, accompanied by law students, faculty members and Para Legal Volunteers. The outreach team comprised Smt. Sushma Lakra, President, Permanent Lok Adalat; Shri Bhupesh Kumar Basant, Chief Judicial Magistrate; and Shri Umesh Kumar Bhagwatkar, Secretary, DLSA Durg. Saplings were planted in the course of the visit, linking environmental sustainability with the larger idea of social justice.

Over the five days the campaign covered Ghughsidih, Nankatti, Arasnara, Nikum and Kuthrel — the same five panchayats from which the district’s Community Mediators had been drawn. Students and faculty from law colleges in Durg, including Kalyan Law College, Legal Volunteers and trained Community Mediators. Street rallies and interactive sessions were held on free legal aid, Lok Adalats, digital safety and community mediation, and villagers were encouraged to take

family, neighbourhood and property disputes to pre-litigation mediation before a small disagreement hardened into a long case.

*"Justice need not always
wait to be approached.
On Hareli, it went
to the village — on a
bullock cart"*

At Nankatti, the sessions turned to legal rights, career opportunities and digital safety, with students cautioned never to share an OTP, to avoid suspicious links, and to guard their banking and personal information. At Kuthrel, Chhattisgarhi folk songs carried the message — awareness against Tonhi Pratadna, de-addiction, child protection through Good Touch and Bad Touch, and the goal of a crime-free village. At Arasnara and Ghughsidih, the team returned to the theme that runs through this entire initiative: that a minor dispute settled early preserves the trust on which a family and a village depend.

Throughout, the emphasis remained on alternative dispute resolution and pre-litigation mediation under the Mediation Act — on resolving disputes at level at which they arise and on reducing litigation that need never have begun. Taken together, the five days demonstrated a simple proposition on which this magazine has been built; that justice need not remain confined to the court room and that it can travel— if necessary, at the pace of a bullock cart to the people it belongs to.

In the Media

The Durg training programme drew attention from the legal and general press, a reflection of the genuine public interest in community-based dispute resolution.

The Hitavada, Raipur City Line (28 July 2026)
Grassroots mediation training empowering community mediators

Reported the five-day training as progressing “in an atmosphere filled with immense enthusiasm,” with 13 active participants from various village panchayats, guided by the vision of ‘Not litigation, but the power of dialogue.’

Covered the training conducted across five selected villages of Durg district Ghughsidih, Nankatti, Arasnara, Nikum and Kuthrel under the guidance of trainers appointed by the Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee, Supreme Court.

DLSA Durg Concludes Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme To Promote Litigation-Free Rural India
<https://www.livelaw.in/events/dlsa-durg-concludes-five-day-community-mediation-training-programme-to-promote-litigation-free-rural-india-543740>

www.livelaw.in

DLSA Durg Concludes Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme To Promote Litigation-Free Rural India

The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Durg, has concluded a five-day Community Mediation Training Programme aimed at strengthening village-level dispute resolution and advancing the vision...



Durg DLSA Takes ‘Justice on Wheels’ Via Bullock Cart On Hareli, Covers 5 Villages In 5 Days For Community Mediation

Reported the Hareli outreach at Gram Nikum, where a decorated bullock cart carried the community mediation message through the village, and recorded the five-day campaign across Ghughsidih, Nankatti, Arasnara, Nikum and Kuthrel — street rallies, sessions on free legal aid, Lok Adalats and digital safety, folk-song awareness on Tonhi Pratadna and child protection, and an emphasis on pre-litigation mediation under the Mediation Act.



वाद-मुक्त ग्रामीण भारत की दिशा में ऐतिहासिक उपलब्धि : सामुदायिक मध्यस्थता प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम का सफलतापूर्वक समापन

प्रमोद / दुर्ग

ग्रामीण विधिक सेवा प्राधिकरण, नई दिल्ली द्वारा जारी "Community Mediation Towards a Litigation-Free Rural India" स्टैंडर्ड ऑपरेशन प्रोसीजर, 2026 के प्रभावी क्रियान्वयन हेतु जिला विधिक सेवा प्राधिकरण, दुर्ग द्वारा दिनांक 25 जुलाई 2026 से 29 जुलाई 2026 तक आयोजित पाँच दिवसीय सामुदायिक मध्यस्थता प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम का दिनांक 29/07/2026 को प्रधान विक्ता एवं सत्र न्यायालय, दुर्ग (उत्तीर्ण) के चतुर्थ तल स्थित नवीन मभागाय में गरिमायुय एवं उत्साहपूर्ण वातावरण में सफ़लतापूर्वक समापन हुआ।

यह प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम माननीय सतीश न्यायालय, माननीय उत्तीर्ण उच्च न्यायालय, विनायपुर तथा माननीय न्यायमूर्ति श्री रमेश सिन्हा, मुख्य न्यायाधीश,



जुनीसगुठ उच्च न्यायालय एवं मुख्य संरक्षक, छत्तीसगढ़ राज्य विधिक सेवा प्राधिकरण, विनायपुर की परंपरावादी संकल्पना के फलस्वरूप अत्यंत सफ़लतापूर्वक संजल ले सका। उनके मार्गदर्शन में यह प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम केवल एक सैद्धांतिक पहल तक सीमित न रहकर सामाजिक परिवर्तन एवं वास्तविक ग्रामीण भारत के निर्माण की दिशा में एक सकारात्मक अभियान के रूप में स्थापित हुआ है। पाँच दिनों तक चले इस प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम में प्रतिभागियों द्वारा आयोजित उद्घाटन, अनुसमन एवं समन्वय के साथ सहभागिता

सहभागिता सुनिश्चित करती हुए समूह चर्चाओं, भूमिका निर्वहन एवं व्यवहारिक अभ्यासों के माध्यम से मध्यस्थता की क्षमताओं को अभ्यस्त किया। जिला विधिक सेवा प्राधिकरण, दुर्ग के सचिव उमेश कुमार भास्कराकर ने बताया कि वाद-मुक्त ग्रामीण भारत के निर्माण के संकल्प के साथ किले के पाँच घात पृथ्वीसीढ़ी, लकड़ो, अरसनारा, निकुम एवं कुथरल से चारपाई कर्मचारी मोडिफिकेशन को इस प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम के माध्यम से समाज में प्रतिष्ठित सद्भाव एवं संवाद को संस्कृति को सुदृढ़ करने हेतु वैश्व किया जा रहा है। प्रशिक्षण प्राप्त करने के पश्चात् वे कम्प्यूटरी मोडिफिकेशन अपने-अपने ग्रामों में सामाजिक, पारिवारिक एवं सामुदायिक स्तर पर उत्पन्न होने वाले छोटे-छोटे विवादों का समाधान एवं प्रभावी निराकरण सुनिश्चित करने में सक्षम एवं भूमिका का निर्वहन करेंगे।

PHOTO GALLERY

A visual record of the Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme, District Legal Services Authority, Durg (25–29 July 2026).



Judicial officers, lawyers and dignitaries at the inaugural session of the training programme



Members of the District Bar and the legal fraternity attending the inaugural programme



A Potential Trainer conducting an interactive session on mediation and negotiation skills



Resource person addressing participants during a classroom training session



Training in progress — participants engaging in discussion during the programme



Community outreach meeting held at the Gram Panchayat office, Kuthrel



Group photograph with women and children of the village outside Gram Panchayat, Kuthrel



A Community Mediator explaining the mediation process to disputing parties



A settlement discussion in progress, guided by a trained Community Mediator



The DLSA Durg team conducting a door-to-door awareness visit in the village



Awareness outreach at the local market, engaging residents on Community Mediation



Officials and police personnel before the community mediation awareness rally



A decorated rally cart with a public address system spreading awareness through village lanes



Officials and community members on a field visit walk through the village



Field interaction with village residents and police near the community pavilion



Trainers, officials and participants at the conclusion of the Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme



The community mediation awareness rath moving through the village, drawing residents into the street



DLSA Durg officials with the community mediation awareness banner, listing the villages covered under the initiative



The DLSA Durg team with residents of Gram Panchayat Arsanara during the awareness outreach

Community mediation awareness banners installed at Gram Panchayat Arsanara



सामुदायिक मध्यस्थता



बातचीत से समाधान, न्याय की ओर एक कदम

सामुदायिक मध्यस्थता एक ऐसी स्वेच्छिक, सरल एवं सौहार्दपूर्ण प्रक्रिया है, जिसमें प्रशिक्षित मध्यस्थों की सहायता से आपसी विवादों का समाधान बातचीत और आपसी सहमति से किया जाता है।

किन विवादों का समाधान किया जा सकता है?

- पड़ोसियों के बीच विवाद
- परिवार एवं रिश्तेदारी से जुड़े छोटे-मोटे विवाद
- पानी, रास्ता एवं सीमांकन संबंधी विवाद
- आपसी लेन-देन के छोटे विवाद
- सामुदायिक एवं सामाजिक विवाद
- एक्सीडेंट, मारपीट जैसे सामान्य प्रकृति के अपराध
- अन्य ऐसे विवाद जिन्हें आपसी सहमति से सुलझाया जा सकता हो

संवाद से बनेगा समाधान, साथ मिलकर बनाएँगे बेहतर समाज।



सामुदायिक मध्यस्थता की विशेषताएँ

- पूर्णतः स्वेच्छिक प्रक्रिया
- निःशुल्क एवं सरल
- गोपनीय प्रक्रिया
- समय एवं धन की बचत
- आपसी संबंधों को बनाए रखने में सहायक
- न्यायालय जाने की आवश्यकता कम होती है

सामुदायिक मध्यस्थता के लाभ



सौहार्दपूर्ण समाधान



आपसी विश्वास में वृद्धि



खर्च में कमी



समय की बचत



समाज में शांति एवं भाईचारा

❖ **वाद-विवाद नहीं, संवाद से समाधान** ❖

बातचीत और सहयोग से विवादों का शांतिपूर्ण समाधान कर समाज में सौहार्द एवं भाईचारा बनाए रखें।

अधिक जानकारी हेतु संपर्क करें



जिला विधिक सेवा प्राधिकरण (DLSA) Durg
आपके जिले में स्थित कार्यालय
या टोल फ्री नं. : 15100



स्थायी लोक अदालत
(जनोपयोगी सेवाएँ)

राष्ट्रीय विधिक सेवा प्राधिकरण (NALSA) ➔ सबके लिए न्याय ⬅

Community Mediator's Checklist

Stage	What to check
<i>Before Session</i>	✓ Confirm dispute is community-related (peace/harmony issue)
	✓ Obtain mutual consent of all parties
	✓ Constitute a panel of 3 mediators (preferably one woman)
	✓ Ensure no conflict of interest among mediators
	✓ Arrange a neutral and accessible venue
	✓ Prepare ground rules (confidentiality, respect, voluntary participation)
<i>During Session</i>	✓ Explain the process and ground rules
	✓ Allow uninterrupted opening statements
	✓ Identify and summarise key issues
	✓ Facilitate respectful dialogue
	✓ Encourage generation of options
	✓ Ensure fairness and balance between parties
<i>Settlement & After</i>	✓ Draft agreement in clear, simple language
	✓ Read aloud and confirm voluntariness
	✓ Obtain signatures of all parties and mediators

	✓ Provide copies of the agreement to parties
	✓ Record outcome (settled / not-settled / referred)
	✓ Refer unresolved cases to DLSA / Lok Adalat / court if needed
	✓ Community follow-up for compliance

Sample Settlement Agreement



COMMUNITY MEDIATION CENTRE, DISTRICT, DURG

Mediation Case No.: 12/2026

Date: 02.08.2026

SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

This Settlement Agreement is entered into pursuant to the Mediation Act, 2023, between Mr. X (First Party) and Mr. Y (Second Party).

WHEREAS a dispute arose between the Parties regarding repayment of a loan of ₹ 20,000/- (Rupees Twenty Thousand Only) advanced by the Second Party to the First Party on 01.07.2024, and the Parties voluntarily approached the Community Mediation Centre and, with the assistance of the Mediator, have amicably resolved their dispute,

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

- (a) The First Party agrees to pay a total sum of ₹ 20,000/- to the Second Party in full and final settlement of the dispute.
- (b) The payment shall be made in two instalments of ₹ 10,000/- each, on or before 15.10.2025 and 15.11.2025 respectively.
- (c) Upon receipt of the full amount, the Second Party shall have no further claim against the First Party in respect of the loan.
- (d) This Agreement has been arrived at voluntarily, without force, pressure, coercion, or undue influence.
- (e) The Parties undertake to faithfully comply with the terms of this Agreement, which is executed for the purpose of maintaining peace, harmony and tranquility, but shall not be enforceable as a judgment or decree of a civil court.
- (f) In the event of future differences, the Parties will first make sincere efforts to resolve the same through dialogue and mediation before approaching any court or authority.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All statements, discussions, and proposals made during the mediation sessions shall remain confidential in terms of Section 22 of the Mediation Act, 2023. Only this Settlement Agreement shall form the record of the outcome.

Signatures: First Party _____ Second Party _____ Mediator _____

CHAPTER 10

The Road Ahead: Best Practices and the Future of Community Mediation

Community Mediation in India stands today at the beginning of what may become one of the most consequential grassroots justice reforms of this decade.

Emerging Best Practices

- Selecting mediators who genuinely enjoy the trust of the community, rather than those who merely hold formal positions of authority.
- Constituting mixed-gender panels as a matter of course, not exceptio, so that disputes involving women receive the sensitivity they require.
- Using local language, local idiom, and, as demonstrated at Durg, even local music and song to

As the pilot clusters across Chhattisgarh and other States generate their first outcomes, a number of themes are already emerging as pointers to the future.

build awareness rather than relying solely on formal notices.

- Grounding role-play training in genuinely local dispute scenarios — wells, pathways, cattle, wedding halls — rather than generic hypotheticals.
- Treating the pilot phase as a genuine learning exercise, with structured feedback flowing from DLSA to SLSA to NALSA.

Towards Digital Mediation

As digital case-logging facilities become more widely available at Community Mediation Centres, the possibility of hybrid mediation — combining in-person dialogue with digital documentation, video-linked sessions for parties unable to travel, and centralised

digital monitoring dashboards for DLSAs and SLSAs — offers a natural next step, provided such tools remain firmly in support of, and never a substitute for, face-to-face dialogue in the community.

The Role of Technology and Artificial Intelligence

Technology, including emerging AI-based tools, may in the future assist Legal Services Institutions in case triage, scheduling, translation of settlement agreements into local languages, and analysis of settlement trends to identify best practices and recurring dispute categories.

Any such use must, however, remain strictly administrative and analytical in character — the act of mediation itself, being a deeply human exercise in empathy, trust and dialogue, must remain the province of trained human mediators.

Litigation-Free Village — 2030 and Beyond

The declaration of the first Litigation-Free Villages will mark an important milestone, but the deeper measure of success will be cultural rather than statistical: a generation of villagers who, when disagreement arises, instinctively reach first for dialogue rather than for a police station or a court complex. Achieving this at scale by the turn of the

decade will require sustained capacity- building, continuous mentoring of Community Mediators, proactive coordination with district administration, and above all sustained community engagement, exactly as the Member Secretary, NALSA, has urged in his message to this SOP.



CHAPTER 11

Conclusion

This magazine has traced Community Mediation from institutional architecture, from the text of the NALSA Standard Operating Procedure to the lived experience of a five- day training hall in Durg. Across every chapter, one thread recurs: that justice, at its most powerful, does not always require a verdict — it sometimes requires only a conversation, conducted with patience, neutrality and respect.

The vision of a Litigation-Free Rural India is ambitious, and it will not be achieved by policy alone. It will be achieved village by village, dispute by dispute, and conversation by conversation — by Community Mediators like Govardhan and Lalita Barle who choose, side by side, to serve their neighbours; by District Legal Services Authorities that train, monitor and support them; and by State and National Legal Services Authorities that provide the framework within which this quiet, patient work can flourish.

As this SOP and this training programme demonstrate, the courts of this country need not always be the places where the resolution of disputes begins. Increasingly, in villages and wards across Chhattisgarh and across India, that resolution can begin instead at a Community Mediation Centre around a table, with neighbours, and with dialogue. This magazine closes, therefore, not with an ending but with an invitation:

to every Legal Services Institution, every Panchayat, every Para Legal Volunteer, and every citizen, to take up the work of building, one conversation at a time, a truly litigation-free rural India.

The training of fifteen mediators from five villages is, by design, a first step rather than a finished programme. NALSA's own strategy for the community mediation scheme is a phased one — beginning with pilot clusters such as this one, learning from how the first mediators fare in real disputes, and using those lessons to refine the training and the support structure before the scheme expands to more villages and more districts.

For that expansion to succeed, the fifteen mediators trained in Durg will need continued support — refresher sessions, a clear process for referring difficult cases back to the DLSA, and recognition within their own villages as a genuine, trusted resource rather than a one- time certificate. The early enthusiasm documented in this issue is an encouraging start; sustaining it will be the real work of the years ahead.

If it succeeds, the vision printed on the training certificates — resolution through dialogue, dignity through mediation, an empowered society through harmony — will be more than a slogan. It will simply describe how a growing number of Indian villages have chosen to settle their disputes.



Acknowledgements

Standard Operating Procedure for Community Mediation (NALSA)

Conceptualized and Created By: Ms. Richa Upadhyay, Officer on Special Duty

In Consultation With

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- Ms. Shikha Srivastava, Officer on Special Duty
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Five-Day Community Mediation Training Programme, DLSA Durg

Guide:

Shri K. Vinod Kujur, Principal District & Sessions Judge, Durg & Chairman, DLSA Durg

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- Smt. Sushma Lakra, Chairperson, Permanent Lok Adalat, Durg
- Shri Bhupesh Kumar Basant, Chief Judicial Magistrate, Durg
- Shri Umesh Kumar Bhagwatkar, Secretary, DLSA, Durg
- Ku. Muskan Sharma, Civil Judge Junior Division, Durg
- Shri Pankaj Sharma, Civil Judge Junior Division, Durg
- Ku. Mahima Sharma, Civil Judge Junior Division, Durg

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Technical Assistance: Shri Vimal Tiwari, Stenographer, District Court, Durg

A NALSA Initiative

Towards a Litigation Free Rural India – 2026

Community Mediation: Building Peaceful, Self-Reliant Villages



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Strengthening communities to resolve their own disputes with dignity and understanding.



EARLY RESOLUTION

Identifying and resolving disputes early before they escalate into prolonged litigation.



FAIR & VOLUNTARY PROCESS

Upholding fairness, neutrality, confidentiality and respect for law at every step.



INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Engaging Panchayats, Women, Youth, Para Legal Volunteers and Community Mediators.



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Creating harmonious, self-reliant and litigation-free villages for a stronger, peaceful India.

“

Justice is not merely the final decision delivered by a court. Justice is also the opportunity to be heard, the possibility of being understood, and the ability to resolve a dispute with dignity.

”

Community Mediation seeks to bring people together before conflicts become entrenched. It recognises that communities themselves possess knowledge, relationships and informal mechanisms capable of contributing to peaceful dispute resolution, while remaining rooted in fairness, voluntariness, neutrality, confidentiality and respect for law.



From Courts
to Communities



From Confrontation
to Reconciliation



From Litigation
to Peaceful Resolution



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Community Mediation – 2026