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# **TECHNOLOGY AND LEGAL AID IN INDIA: BUILDING BRIDGES TO JUSTICE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Access to justice is not just a constitutional promise in India, it is a right guaranteed under Article 39A of the Constitution. Yet, for millions of Indians, particularly those in rural areas, this promise remains distant and difficult to reach. Legal aid services, while established through the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, have historically been urban-centered, leaving vast rural populations without proper access to legal support.

This research examines how technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), mobile applications, and digital platforms like Tele-Law, can help bridge the gap between law and common citizens. More importantly, it explores how these technological solutions must work hand-in-hand with community institutions, Gram Sabhas, Panchayats, Anganwadi workers, and local education systems, to create a sustainable, human-centered model of legal aid delivery.

The paper argues that technology should complement, not replace, human empathy and grassroots engagement. It proposes a community-driven framework that involves education officials, NGOs, paralegal volunteers, and frontline workers to ensure continuous monitoring, impact assessment, and meaningful access to justice for all.

**Keywords:** Legal Aid, Technology, AI, Tele-Law, Panchayati Raj, Anganwadi workers, Access to Justice, Digital Inclusion, Paralegal Volunteers, Rural Legal Empowerment

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine being wronged but not knowing where to turn. Imagine having rights but not understanding what they mean or how to claim them. For millions of Indians, this is not imagination—it is everyday reality.

Legal aid is not charity. It is a right that ensures no citizen is denied justice simply because they cannot afford a lawyer or do not understand complex legal language. The Indian Constitution recognizes this through Article 39A<sup>2</sup>, which directs the State to ensure that justice is accessible to all, regardless of economic or social barriers.

Yet, the reality on the ground tells a different story. According to recent data, the Tele-Law initiative has provided legal advice to over 1.03 crore (10.3 million) beneficiaries<sup>3</sup>, showing both the massive need for legal services and the potential of technology to meet that need.

Despite having a structured legal aid system through the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and state-level authorities, several challenges persist. Firstly, the Awareness Gap, many people, especially in rural areas, simply do not know that free legal aid exists or how to access it. Second is the Distance Barrier, as legal aid centres are often located in district headquarters, requiring people to travel long distances. Third are Language and Literacy barriers; legal language is complex, and many people lack the literacy or confidence to navigate legal systems. Fourth is the Trust Deficit, where there is often a lack of trust in formal legal institutions among marginalized communities. Finally, there are Limited Resources, as legal aid authorities face chronic understaffing and underfunding.

This study aims to evaluate how technology and AI can improve access to legal aid in India. It examines the integration of digital legal services with local governance structures like Panchayats and Gram Sabhas and assesses the role of community workers, particularly Anganwadi workers, in spreading legal awareness.

Furthermore, the study seeks to identify challenges in digital inclusion and propose practical solutions, develop a framework for monitoring and evaluating technology-driven legal aid

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<sup>2</sup> India Const. art. 39A.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Law & Just., *Annual Reports and Tele-Law Statistics*, Govt. of India, <https://doj.gov.in/> (last visited Dec. 2, 2025).

programs, and highlight ethical considerations and precautions needed when deploying AI in the justice sector.

## UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Legal Aid scenario in India is governed by following:

### ***Constitutional Foundation***

The right to legal aid is rooted in Article 39A of the Constitution, which falls under the Directive Principles of State Policy. It mandates that *“the State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid.”*

This is further reinforced by Article 14<sup>4</sup> which reads as:

*“The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India”*

and Article 21<sup>5</sup> which reads as:

*“Protection of life and personal liberty: No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law”*

both of which have been interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the right to free legal services.

### ***The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987***<sup>6</sup>

The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)<sup>7</sup> was constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society and organize Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes. The Act establishes a nationwide network comprising the National Level (NALSA), headed by the Chief Justice of India as Patron-in-Chief; the State Level (State Legal Services Authorities - SLSA), headed by Chief Justices of High Courts; the District Level (District Legal Services Authorities - DLSA); and the Taluka Level (Taluka Legal Services Committees). Additionally, institutions such as legal aid clinics in law colleges, prisons, and courts are part of this network.

Under the Act, the following categories automatically qualify: women and children; members

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<sup>4</sup> India Const. art. 14.

<sup>5</sup> India Const. art. 21.

<sup>6</sup> The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, No. 39 of 1987

<sup>7</sup> National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), [nalsa.gov.in](http://nalsa.gov.in) (last visited Dec. 2, 2025).

of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; industrial workers; persons with disabilities; persons in custody; victims of mass disasters, violence, or trafficking; and anyone with an annual income below a specified limit, which varies by state.

### ***Lok Adalats: Alternative Dispute Resolution***

In the first National Lok Adalat of 2024, a total of 1,13,60,144 cases were settled across 34 states and Union territories, including 17,14,056 pending cases and 96,46,088 pre-litigation cases. This demonstrates the effectiveness of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in the Indian legal system.<sup>8</sup>

## **THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION IN LEGAL AID**

### ***Tele-Law: Connecting Villages to Lawyers***

The Tele-Law initiative, launched by the Ministry of Law and Justice in collaboration with NALSA and CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, represents a major breakthrough in legal aid delivery. The process works as follows: Citizens visit their nearest *Common Service Centre* (CSC)<sup>9</sup>, connect via video conferencing with panel lawyers who provide legal advice in real-time, and all consultations are documented for follow-up. Over 9 lakh beneficiaries have been served through Tele-Law, indicating substantial demand for legal services among marginalized communities. The service has been particularly successful in reaching rural areas where physical legal aid centres are absent or distant. Its success factors include the use of existing CSC infrastructure, provision of services in multiple languages, being free for eligible beneficiaries, and availability across most states and Union Territories.

### ***Mobile Legal Aid Applications***

Several mobile applications have been developed to make legal information more accessible. Government initiatives include *Nyaya Bandhu*<sup>10</sup>, which connects pro bono lawyers with those needing legal assistance; *E-Daakhil*<sup>11</sup>, which allows citizens to file consumer complaints online; and the *NALSA Mobile App*, which provides information about legal services, Lok Adalats, and legal aid schemes. However, challenges with mobile apps persist, as they require

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<sup>8</sup> Year-wise Total Number of Cases Disposed of in National Lok Adalats from 2021 to 2024, Open Government Data, data.gov.in (published May 30, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, About CSC, CSC.gov.in (last updated Oct. 20, 2024) (on file with the author).

<sup>10</sup> Nyaya Bandhu (mobile app), CSC e-Governance Services India Ltd. / Dept. of Justice (India)

<sup>11</sup> E-Daakhil Portal, Department of Consumer Affairs, India (edaakhil.nic.in) (last visited Dec. 2, 2025).

smartphones and internet connectivity, need digital literacy to navigate, face language barriers in some interfaces, and suffer from limited awareness about their availability.

### ***AI-Powered Legal Chatbots: Promise and Reality***

Artificial intelligence is increasingly being explored for legal aid delivery. Several multilingual chatbots using generative AI, such as *Jugalbandi*<sup>12</sup>, have been developed to help people access legal information in their native languages through platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. These AI chatbots work by having users ask questions in their local language (text or voice); the AI transcribes and translates the query, the system searches legal databases for relevant information, and the response is translated back to the user's language.<sup>13</sup>

The potential benefits include 24/7 availability, instant responses to common queries, multilingual support, the ability to handle multiple users simultaneously, and reducing the burden on human lawyers for routine questions. However, current limitations include the inability to provide nuanced legal advice for complex cases, struggles with regional dialects or colloquial language, the risk of providing outdated or inaccurate information, the inability to build the trust and empathy that human interaction provides, and the requirement for internet connectivity and digital literacy.

## **INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY WITH COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS**

Technology alone cannot solve the access to justice problem. It must be embedded within existing community structures that people already trust and understand.

### ***Panchayati Raj: The Foundation of Rural Governance***<sup>14</sup>

Panchayats are the closest government institution to ordinary citizens in rural India. They handle local disputes, implement welfare schemes, and maintain community infrastructure. Integrating legal aid with Panchayats creates a natural connection point. Practical integration strategies include setting up *Legal Aid Kiosks in Panchayat Bhavans* with computers and video conferencing facilities for Tele-Law consultations. Gram Sabha Involvement can be used to create awareness about legal rights and free legal aid, identify community members who need legal assistance, and nominate "*Legal Sakhis*" (legal friends) who can help others navigate the

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<sup>12</sup> Jugalbandi: Enabling transformational change for millions, Thoughtworks

<sup>13</sup> Singh, Usneek, Nisarg Vora, Punit Lohia, Yashvardhan Sharma, Ashutosh Bhatia & Kamlesh Tiwari, *Multilingual Chatbot for Indian Languages* (2023).

<sup>14</sup> The Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992 (India) (establishing Panchayati Raj Institutions).

system.

Furthermore, *Digital Grievance Registers* can maintain online records of complaints and their resolution status, ensuring transparency and accountability. *Panchayat Secretary Training* is essential to train secretaries to register beneficiaries for Tele-Law, schedule video consultations, follow up on pending cases, and maintain records. For example, in some progressive Panchayats in Kerala, local self-government institutions have established “Adalat Days” where legal aid lawyers visit monthly to provide free consultations; combining this with Tele-Law extends the reach further<sup>15</sup>.

### ***Anganwadi Workers: Trusted Voices in the Community***<sup>16</sup>

Anganwadi workers, as trusted local figures from the same communities they serve, have unique advantages: they know the local language, understand community ways, and are trusted by local people. Anganwadi centres, started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the *Integrated Child Development Services Program*, are rural childcare centres providing basic healthcare, nutrition education, and pre-school activities. Anganwadi workers matter for legal aid because they visit every household regularly, have the trust of women and families, identify vulnerable populations (pregnant women, children, families in distress), and understand local problems intimately.

Integration strategies involve *Basic Legal Awareness Training* to help them recognize signs of domestic violence, child abuse, or exploitation, understand basic rights related to women, children, and welfare schemes, and know how to connect people with Tele-Law or local legal aid centres. A Referral System should be created via a simple mobile app or helpline number where Anganwadi workers can refer cases to legal aid authorities.

*Information, Education, Communication* (IEC) Materials such as simple, visual posters and pamphlets about legal rights should be provided for display and distribution. Protection Protocols must ensure Anganwadi workers are protected when reporting sensitive cases.

However, challenges must be addressed, as Anganwadi workers already face overwhelming workloads and are under pressure from digital tasks, with many feeling they have become “*digital slaves*.” Their monthly honorarium is significantly lower than minimum wage in many states.

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<sup>15</sup> Kerala Becomes the First State to Introduce Online Permanent Lok Adalat Services (Apr. 15, 2025), Manupatra Updates.

<sup>16</sup> Azhagu Meena S. P., Palashi Vaghela & Joyojeet Pal, *Counting to be Counted: Anganwadi Workers and Digital Infrastructures of Ambivalent Care* (2022).

Therefore, any legal awareness program involving Anganwadi workers must not add significantly to their already heavy workload, must provide adequate compensation or incentives, offer proper training and ongoing support, and include them in program design to ensure feasibility.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Women and Child Development Department (Mahila Bal Kalyan Vibhag)***

This department operates *One Stop Centres*<sup>18</sup>, *Women Helplines (181)*, and protection homes across India. Integration with legal aid services is crucial because of overlapping areas such as domestic violence cases, child sexual abuse (POCSO Act cases), dowry harassment, sexual harassment at the workplace, and trafficking.

Integration mechanisms should include training counsellors at One Stop Centres in legal procedures, establishing direct linkages with District Legal Services Authorities for lawyer panels, providing fast-track legal aid for women in distress, coordinating for protection orders and safe shelter, and offering follow-up support throughout legal proceedings.

### ***Education System Integration College and University Level:***

At the College and University Level, every law college can establish legal aid clinics where senior students, under faculty supervision, provide basic legal counselling. Certificate courses in paralegal work can be offered to students of law, social work, political science, and other relevant disciplines. Structured internship programs with District Legal Services Authorities can provide students with practical experience, and community legal service can be included as part of mandatory community work for graduation.

At the School Level, basic legal literacy should be integrated into the school curriculum, teaching students about fundamental rights, laws against child marriage, child labour, and how to seek help. Teacher training is required to recognize signs of abuse or exploitation and connect families with legal aid. Parent-Teacher Meetings can be used as forums for legal awareness campaigns about child rights, education rights, and available legal protections.

The role of Education Officers (District and Block) is to coordinate with legal aid authorities for awareness programs, facilitate college legal aid clinics, monitor the integration of legal literacy in schools, connect schools with local lawyers for guest lectures, and organize legal

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<sup>17</sup> Rafik M. & C. Yadav, *The Impact of Workload on Anganwadi Workers: A Qualitative Study*, ShodhKosh, June 30, 2024.

<sup>18</sup> One Stop Centre (OSC) Scheme, *Ministry of Women & Child Development, One Stop Centre Scheme (Gov't of India)* (last visited Dec. 2, 2025).

awareness camps.

## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEGAL AID: A BALANCED VIEW**

AI is neither a magic solution nor a threat to be feared. It is a tool that, when used wisely, can significantly enhance access to justice.

### ***Where AI Can Help Document Processing:***

AI can assist in Document Processing by quickly analysing legal documents to extract key information, automating the translation of legal documents into regional languages, and generating standard legal templates like affidavits and applications. In Query Resolution, AI can answer frequently asked questions about laws and procedures, provide information about eligibility for various legal aid schemes, and guide users through step-by-step processes like filing RTI applications.

For Case Management, AI can track case statuses automatically, send reminders for hearing dates, maintain beneficiary databases, and generate reports for monitoring and evaluation. Predictive Analytics can help identify areas or communities with high legal needs, predict peak times for certain types of cases, and optimize resource allocation.

Finally, Multilingual Support is enhanced by AI-powered translation systems capable of translating between English and 10 Indian languages including Bangla, Punjabi, and Hindi, along with voice recognition in multiple languages and dialects, and text-to-speech for users who cannot read.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Where AI Cannot Replace Humans Complex Legal Analysis:***

AI cannot handle Complex Legal Analysis; understanding the nuances of individual cases requires human judgment, legal strategy cannot be automated, and ethical dimensions need human consideration.

Emotional Support is critical; victims of violence, trauma, or injustice need empathy, building trust requires human connection, and sensitive cases like sexual assault or family matters need compassionate handling.

Regarding Cultural Context, AI may not understand local customs, social dynamics, or power structures; community-specific solutions require human understanding, and caste, religion, and gender dynamics need human sensitivity. In Advocacy, representing clients in court requires

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<sup>19</sup> *Supra* 13.

human lawyers, negotiation and mediation need human skills, and strategic litigation for rights advancement needs human leadership.

### ***Risks and Ethical Concerns Algorithmic Bias:***

Algorithmic Bias poses a risk where AI systems trained on biased data will reproduce those biases, potentially leading to discrimination against certain communities or cases, necessitating continuous monitoring and correction. Data Privacy is a concern as legal cases involve highly sensitive personal information, creating a risk of data breaches and misuse that requires strong data protection protocols.

Over-Dependence is a risk if governments reduce human legal aid resources, viewing AI as a cost-cutting measure rather than a supplement, which may cause the quality of justice to suffer. The Digital Divide means AI-based systems favour those with digital access and literacy, risking the exclusion of the most marginalized who lack smartphones or internet, thereby widening the urban-rural gap.

Finally, Accountability remains an issue: determining who is responsible if AI provides wrong legal advice, ensuring AI systems are explainable and transparent, and establishing human oversight and liability frameworks are critical.

### ***Precautions and Safeguards***

Mandatory Human Oversight is essential; all AI-generated legal advice should be reviewed by qualified lawyers, critical cases should never rely solely on AI, and clear disclaimers must state that AI is providing information, not legal representation. Regular Audits should be conducted independently for bias and accuracy, along with testing with diverse user groups and continuous updating of legal databases.

Data Protection requires strong encryption of all data, consent mechanisms for collection, the right to deletion of personal information, and regular security audits. Inclusive Design means AI systems should be designed with input from rural communities, supporting multiple languages and dialects, providing voice-based interfaces for illiterate users, and ensuring offline functionality where possible.

An Ethics Framework should be developed as an AI Ethics Charter for Legal Aid, establishing clear principles on fairness, transparency, and accountability, a grievance redressal mechanism for AI-related issues, and regular ethical reviews of AI deployments.

## **PARALEGAL VOLUNTEERS: THE HUMAN BRIDGE**

Paralegal volunteers are the critical human link between technology and community. They make the system work at the grassroots level.

Paralegal volunteers are community members with basic legal training who help others navigate the legal system. They are not lawyers but know enough to provide basic legal information, help fill out forms and applications, connect people with lawyers and legal aid services, follow up on cases, and document human rights violations.

The Ideal Candidates include retired teachers or government employees, college graduates from the community, women's self-help group leaders, social activists and NGO workers, Anganwadi workers (with adequate compensation), and youth interested in social service.

Training Components should cover a basic understanding of the Indian legal system, knowledge of common laws (family, property, labour, criminal), how to access Tele-Law and other digital platforms, documentation and record-keeping, ethical boundaries (not practicing law without a license), and sensitivity training regarding gender, caste, and disability. Certification involves a standardized curriculum developed by NALSA, training delivered through District Legal Services Authorities, certificates issued upon completion, and annual refresher training.

As Digital Navigators, volunteers help people access Tele-Law and legal aid apps, assist with filling online forms, translate between legal and local languages, and schedule and facilitate video consultations. In Data Collection, they maintain records of cases in the community, use mobile apps to update case status, report on impact and outcomes, and identify gaps and challenges. For Community Mobilization, they organize legal awareness camps, connect with Panchayats and Gram Sabhas, build networks of support, and create trust in formal legal systems.

To function effectively, Paralegal Volunteers need a monthly honorarium or per-case payment, a mobile phone and data connection, insurance cover for safety risks, recognition and certificates, career progression opportunities (such as training to become lawyers' assistants), and regular mentoring from qualified lawyers.

## MONITORING, EVALUATION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Technology makes monitoring and evaluation easier, but it must be done with community participation. Quantitative Metrics include the number of beneficiaries served (monthly/annually), types of cases (family, property, labour, criminal, etc.), response time (from query to advice), case resolution rate, geographic distribution of services, languages used, follow-up rate, and satisfaction scores. Qualitative Metrics include stories of justice achieved, changes in community awareness, reduction in exploitation or abuse, increased trust in legal systems, empowerment of marginalized groups, and the quality of legal advice provided.

A Dashboard System should provide a real-time display of all key metrics, accessible to NALSA, state authorities, and district authorities, with color-coded alerts for underperforming areas and trend analysis over time. Community Monitoring involves Gram Sabha reports on legal aid services, beneficiary feedback through SMS or apps, public display of statistics at Panchayat Bhavans, and annual social audits by the community. Third-Party Evaluation should include independent research organizations conducting impact studies, academic institutions partnering for evaluation, and NGOs providing community perspectives and recommendations for improvement.

A suggested impact period analysis would include the following:

1. Short-Term Impact (3-6 months) should see an increase in legal aid registrations, the number of Tele-Law consultations, and legal literacy levels in targeted communities.
2. Medium-Term Impact (1-2 years) should result in improved case resolution rates, reduction in specific types of crimes or violations, increase in the uptake of welfare schemes due to legal clarity, and higher trust levels in legal institutions.
3. Long-Term Impact (3-5 years) aims for a reduction in the overall justice gap, changes in social indicators (women's empowerment, child protection), sustainability of community legal aid structures, and a positive cost-benefit analysis of technology interventions.

A suggested structure for *District Legal Technology Committee (DLTC)* is each district should establish a District Legal Technology Committee comprising the District Judge or Magistrate (Chair), Secretary of District Legal Services Authority, District Collector or representative, representatives from the Education Department and Women and Child Development, a

technology expert from CSC or IT department, an NGO representative, and a Paralegal volunteer representative. Its functions would include overseeing the implementation of technology-based legal aid, reviewing monthly reports and dashboards, addressing complaints and challenges, coordinating with various departments, planning and budgeting for expansion, and ensuring the ethical use of technology.

## CASE STUDIES AND GROUND REALITIES

Under the *Tele-Law in Aspirational Districts initiative*<sup>20</sup>, the Government of India identified 112 “aspirational districts” with poor development indicators. Tele-Law has been specifically targeted at these districts, connecting remote villages through Common Service Centres. In districts like Naxalite-affected areas of Chhattisgarh and remote tribal areas of Odisha, Tele-Law has become the primary mode of legal consultation.

Regarding the *Jugalbandi Chatbot for Government Schemes*<sup>21</sup>, in the farming village of Biwan, Haryana, villagers used the Jugalbandi chatbot to find information on government assistance programs, helping farmers apply for pensions and restart mysteriously stopped assistance payments. The chatbot works in local languages and retrieves information from English databases, making government information accessible.

In *Women’s Legal Awareness in Maharashtra*, a pilot program integrated Anganwadi workers in domestic violence awareness drives. When workers were trained to recognize signs of abuse and connect women with legal aid, there was an 18% increase in reporting of domestic violence cases, demonstrating both the need and the potential of community-based legal awareness.<sup>22</sup>

However, there are some challenges that has been evident. Infrastructure Gaps remain significant; many CSCs lack stable internet connectivity, power cuts disrupt video consultations, there is limited availability of private spaces for confidential consultations, and a shortage of computers and webcams in remote areas. Human Resource Issues include a shortage of panel lawyers willing to provide Tele-Law consultations, language barriers where

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<sup>20</sup> Aspirational Districts Programme, Gov’t of India, NITI Aayog (last visited Dec. 2, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Jugalbandi: Enabling Transformational Change for Millions, Thoughtworks (case study) (last visited Dec. 2, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Majlis Legal Centre, *A Comprehensive Guide to Women’s Legal Rights* (2019) (manual on women’s access to justice and legal rights in India).

lawyers are not fluent in all local languages, high turnover of CSC operators, and inadequate training of frontline workers.

Social and Cultural Barriers persist, such as women being uncomfortable consulting with male lawyers via video, stigma around seeking legal help in conservative communities, illiterate beneficiaries struggling even with assisted technology use, and mistrust of technology among elderly populations. Systemic Challenges include poor coordination between legal aid authorities and other departments, delays in disbursement of funds for legal aid programs, lack of follow-up mechanisms after initial consultations, and no clear pathway from Tele-Law advice to actual legal representation.

There are certain learnings from the case studies. First, *Technology Is an Enabler, Not a Solution*; it can facilitate access but cannot replace the need for human lawyers, community trust, and systemic reforms. Second, *Local Language Is Critical*; legal aid in English or even Hindi is useless to people who speak only Marathi, Konkani, or Ahirani. Third, *Women Prefer Women Counsellors*; for gender-sensitive cases, having women lawyers and counsellors significantly increases uptake. Fourth, *Follow-Up Matters*; one-time legal advice is often insufficient, and people need hand-holding through the entire process. Finally, *Community Involvement Is Essential*; programs imposed from above without community participation rarely succeed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

### ***Policy Recommendations at National, State and District Level:***

At the National Level, budget allocation must be increased; legal aid remains chronically underfunded, and at least 0.5% of the law and justice budget should be allocated to legal aid technology. An *AI Ethics and Accountability Framework* must be developed with comprehensive guidelines for ethical use of AI in legal services, including liability frameworks. Strict compliance with Data Protection Law Implementation is needed for all legal aid databases. NALSA should develop Standardized Training Modules for paralegal volunteers, frontline workers, and CSC operators. Interstate Coordination protocols should be developed for cooperation in legal aid delivery for cross-border issues.

At the State Level, *Infrastructure Development* should invest in reliable internet connectivity and power backup for all CSCs providing Tele-Law. Lawyer Panels must be expanded to

recruit more lawyers, especially women and those fluent in tribal languages. Legal aid services should integrate with Welfare Schemes like MGNREGA, pension schemes, and health insurance. Mobile Legal Aid Vans equipped with technology should be used to reach villages without CSCs or Panchayat Bhavans.

At the District Level, *District Legal Technology Committees* should be established for oversight. Regular Training and Sensitization should be conducted quarterly for all stakeholders. Community Legal Resource Centres should be created by upgrading Panchayat Bhavans with dedicated legal aid corners. A transparent Case Tracking System should be implemented so beneficiaries can check status anytime.

***Technology Recommendations:***

Recommendations include developing *Offline Functionality* for apps to sync when connectivity is available, prioritizing Voice-First Interfaces for illiterate populations, investing in Multilingual Chatbots that understand dialects, designing Simple User Interfaces for first-time users, providing SMS-Based Services for feature phone users, using *Open-Source Solutions* to reduce costs, and implementing Security First principles with end-to-end encryption.

***Community Integration Recommendations:***

Community workers like Anganwadi workers, paralegal volunteers, and Panchayat Secretaries must be Recognized and Compensated. Services must be Gender-Responsive, ensuring the availability of women lawyers and counsellors. Youth Involvement should engage students as digital volunteers. NGO Partnerships should be strengthened with grassroots organizations. Cultural Sensitivity Training is essential for all legal aid providers on caste, religion, gender, and disability.

***Monitoring and Accountability Recommendations:***

A Public Dashboard should show real-time statistics. A Grievance Redressal mechanism is needed for complaints. Annual Social Audits of legal aid programs by Gram Sabhas are mandated. Impact Studies should be commissioned to research actual impacts on lives. Feedback Loops must be created for beneficiaries to rate services.

## **PRECAUTIONS AND WARNINGS**

The biggest risk is Technology Replacing Human Support, where governments view technology as a way to reduce spending on legal aid rather than enhance it; AI chatbots should not become an excuse to reduce the number of legal aid lawyers. There is a risk of Exclusion of the Most Marginalized, as digital legal aid may inadvertently exclude those without smartphones or digital literacy. Data Misuse and Surveillance is a concern, as sensitive information could be exploited.

A focus on Quality Over Quantity is necessary, as numbers should not overshadow actual justice achieved. Overburdening Community Workers without support will lead to burnout. Finally, Corporate Capture must be avoided to prevent profit motives from overriding justice goals.

Essential safeguards include Human Oversight Always, ensuring users can escalate to human support. Regular Community Consultations are needed before deploying technology. Gradual Rollout with Pilots allows learning from failures. Multiple Channels must be maintained (not just digital). Continuous Evaluation should be built in from day one. A specific Legal Framework for AI in legal aid is required. Whistleblower Protection is needed for those who report system failures.

## **THE ROAD AHEAD: VISION FOR 2030**

By 2030, imagine an India where every village has access to legal information and advice within a 5-kilometer radius, legal queries in any Indian language get accurate responses within 24 hours, women facing domestic violence can access help immediately through their trusted Anganwadi worker, farmers know their land rights and can protect themselves from illegal acquisition, workers understand labour laws and can claim their rightful wages, children are protected from child marriage and child labour through vigilant community networks, technology serves as a bridge rather than a barrier to justice, and every legal aid consultation leads to meaningful follow-up and resolution.

The key pillars are *Universal Digital Legal Literacy* integrated into education; Hybrid Service Delivery combining technology and human interaction; Community Ownership where programs are driven by local groups; Sustainable Funding Models including CSR and pro bono

contributions; and Continuous Innovation in technology while keeping the user at the centre.

The Government provides policy, funding, and infrastructure. NALSA and Legal Services Authorities set standards and train. The Judiciary provides leadership and oversight. Technology Companies ensure ethical development and security. NGOs and Civil Society mobilize communities and advocate. Educational Institutions provide legal literacy and volunteers. Community Workers generate awareness and build trust. Citizens participate actively and provide feedback.

## CONCLUSION

Technology is transforming every aspect of our lives—from how we shop to how we learn to how we connect with others. It is only natural that it should also transform how we access justice. But justice is not just another service to be “*disrupted*” by technology. Justice is fundamentally about human dignity, fairness, and the protection of the vulnerable.

The integration of technology into legal aid delivery in India holds immense promise. AI can break down language barriers, Tele-Law can overcome distance barriers, mobile apps can simplify complex procedures, and data analytics can help target resources where they are most needed. These are powerful tools that can genuinely democratize access to justice.

But technology without humanity is cold and exclusionary. A legal aid chatbot cannot hold the hand of a widow whose property has been grabbed. A video consultation cannot provide the emotional support that a victim of sexual assault needs. A database cannot build the community trust necessary for people to come forward with their problems.

This is why the answer is not “*technology or human support*”—it is “*technology and human support*.” The future of legal aid in India lies in a hybrid model where AI handles routine queries so that lawyers can focus on complex cases; Tele-Law extends reach while paralegal volunteers provide local hand-holding; mobile apps simplify processes while Anganwadi workers explain them in local contexts; data systems track cases while Gram Sabhas hold authorities accountable; and digital platforms connect while human empathy heals and empowers.

The framework proposed in this research—integrating technology with Panchayati Raj institutions, Anganwadi workers, educational systems, and paralegal volunteers—is built on this understanding. It recognizes that technology is a powerful enabler but not a substitute for the human relationships and community structures that have always been at the heart of grassroots justice.

As India moves toward becoming a digital nation, we must ensure that digitalization does not leave behind those who need support the most. Every technological intervention in legal aid must pass three tests: The Accessibility Test (can the most marginalized use it?), The Dignity Test (does it treat users with respect?), and The Justice Test (does it lead to better outcomes?). If we keep these tests in mind, if we centre the voices of communities in our design, if we maintain robust human oversight, and if we invest as much in community workers as we do in AI algorithms, then technology can truly become a bridge to justice.

The promise of Article 39A—that justice should be accessible to all—can finally become a reality. Not through technology alone, not through human effort alone, but through the thoughtful, ethical, and community-centered integration of both. The journey has begun. With over 10 million beneficiaries already served through Tele-Law, with legal aid apps reaching smartphones across India, with paralegal volunteers being trained in thousands of villages, we are witnessing the dawn of a new era in access to justice. But we must proceed carefully, learn continuously, and never forget that behind every legal query is a human being with hopes, fears, and dreams. Technology should serve them, not the other way around. Justice, ultimately, is not about laws and lawyers, courts and codes. It is about ensuring that every person, regardless of their station in life, can live with dignity, security, and hope. Technology is a powerful tool to help us reach this goal—but only if we use it wisely, ethically, and with deep humanity.