
INCULCATING THE CULTURE OF ADR AND CLIENT-CENTRED LAWYERING IN PRO BONO SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the options and potential outcomes for promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and client-centric lawyering within pro bono legal services in India. Additionally, Utilizing the legal mandate of Article 39A and statutory framework of Section 89 of the Code Civil Procedure and Mediation Act, 2023, the paper charts current institutional architectures (NALSA, SLSAs, or DLSA), evaluates current pro bono penetration and law school clinical practice, and highlights key barriers to effective ADR adoption, including institutional fragmentation, funding and capacity shortages; gaps in clinical pedagogy; and "The use of technology is not supported by any formal education system.". Based on institutional examples like university clinic models, certified ADR training, and civil-society networks, the study suggests that incorporating mediation, Lok Adalat referral pathways, client-centric interviewing within supervised pro bono clinics can lead to timely results for marginalized clients while also developing practical skills among law students and junior practitioners. According to the paper, there are several reforms that must be implemented to convert statutory potential into measurable gains in access to justice, including curricular integration of ADR, accredited mediator training, formal clinic-state MOUs, regulatory incentives, mixed public-private funding, and standardised intake/consent protocols.

Keywords: ADR, client-centred lawyering, pro bono, Legal Services Authorities Act, mediation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, established a three-tiered institutional framework called NALSA, SLSAs, and DLSAs to provide free legal services and organize court cases. As per the Act, Lok Adalats are recognized as a means of settling disputes in amiable terms and have become an essential element of India's access-to-justice architecture because their awards are binding and final. The pro bono idea, which involves private lawyers and law firms providing legal services outside state legal aid, has been designed to supplement the statutory infrastructure.¹ Law school legal assistance clinics, pro bono cells in National Law Universities, and civil-society networks have become significant players in filling supply gaps in legal support. In spite of this, ongoing budgetary challenges, varying implementation levels among States and limited incentives for private practitioners, and inadequate public understanding limit the effectiveness of both statutory legal aid and voluntary pro bono, necessitating institutional reforming and culture-building. This is required to fulfill Article 39A's obligation.²

1.1. ADR and Client-Centred Lawyering's value to Pro Bono Services

Pro bono delivery can benefit from Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and client-centred lawyering, which shift the focus to cost-effective accessible, participatory and adversarial dispute resolution tailored to clients' requirements. According to Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, it is the court's responsibility to explore settlement options other than the trial court. This includes arbitration fees and mediation attempts, which institutionalize ADR as a complementary approach to adjudication in easing backlogs in the judiciary. The Mediation Act, 2023 further solidifies the statutory framework for mediation by recognising the enforceability of mediated settlement agreements, promoting institutional and community mediation, authorizing online mediation (and providing mechanisms for users to register with the mediators); these changes make ADR more usable and more trustworthy for clients who cannot afford lengthy legal proceedings. For pro bono practitioners and student clinics, the use of ADR methods such as mediation and Lok Adalat referral are pragmatic tools that can lead to long-term, client-centric outcomes by empowering vulnerable parties to participate in

¹¹ Sneha Mahawar, "Legal Services Authority Act, 1987" iPleaders, 2022 *available at*: <https://blog.iplayers.in/legal-services-authority-act-1987/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

² "Article 39A: Equal justice and free legal aid," Constitution of India, 2022 *available at*: <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/articles/article-39a-equal-justice-and-free-legal-aid/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

solutions while maintaining healthy relationships. The principles of client-centred lawyering, which prioritize autonomy, informed consent, plain language communication, cultural sensitivity and empowerment through information and options, are essential in dealing with clients who may not have access to legal aid but rather seek practical solutions. Integrating pro bono programmes with ADR training, ethical standards for client-centred practice, and institutional connections (such as partnerships between law school clinics and NALSA/Lok Adalats) can enhance access to justice, improve the quality and dignity of legal assistance, and make probono an effective tool in India's justice delivery ecosystem.³

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To systematically trace and scrutinize the legal and institutional framework that governs pro bono practice, ADR, and legal aid in India, with emphasis on the Legal Services Authorities Act, NALSA's mandate, as well as contemporary ACR laws; Provide a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of this system;
2. Identify the structural, educational, and attitudinal barriers that hinder the effective use of ADR and client-centric lawyering in pro bono services;
3. Evaluating best-practice models such as law-school clinics, pro bono cells, Lok Adalat, and mediation links to develop feasible proposals for integrating ADR with client focused workflows in the context of probono; and developing pragmatic recommendations.
4. To suggest policy and curricular measures that enhance collaboration between NALSA, universities, bar associations, and civil society to expand pro bono services that prioritize ADR-driven objectives.

1.3 Research Methodology

The study is conducted using a black-letter methodology that incorporates primary legal materials, such as statutes, regulations, the Legal Services Authorities Act, and Section 89(1) of the Mediation Act. A systematic approach is taken to determine legal obligations, institutional mechanisms, and normative prescriptions relevant to ADR and pro bono work by

³ “Problems & benefits of using alternative dispute resolution,” Thomson Reuters *available at*: <https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/en/insights/articles/problems-and-benefits-using-alternative-dispute-resolution> (last visited August 30, 2025).

reviewing official NALSA documents, secondary sources like law-journal articles, government reports, policy notes, etc. (including CPC and related regulations). The legal method enables accurate explanation of the law's nature, synopsis of statutory changes, and critical analysis of regulatory instruments to generate normative guidelines for practice, instruction, or policy. Additionally, When it is practical to contextualize doctrinal findings, published reports and authoritative commentary are frequently used instead of empirical or field methods.

2. PRO BONO AND ADR INDIA - LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

India's legal and institutional framework for pro bono services and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) relies on both constitutional and statutory scaffolding, with the aim of converting these structures into tangible tools for providing free and effective justice. The State is obligated to ensure that the legal system promotes justice on equal basis and provides free or equivalent legal aid as per Article 39A of the Constitution. The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 was passed by Parliament to implement this requirement with the aim of providing free and competent legal services, promoting legal awareness, and organizing Lok Adalats and mediation schemes. Through the implementation of ADR-friendly procedural law, pro bono and non-litigious dispute resolution provisions, as well as Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure and the Mediation Act 2023, India has a constitutional obligation that combines statutory delivery apparatus with institutionalized mediation to make it genuinely legal.⁴

2.1. Constitutional and Statutory Foundations.

Article 39A restructures state and institutional pro bono actions by redesigning access to justice as a constitutional objective, necessitating more than just arbitrary charity. Article 39A mandate is given statutory form through the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, which establishes the National Legal services Authority (NALSA), State Legal Service Authorities (SLSAs), District Legal Structures Authorities (DLSA) and associated committees. The Act defines both the objectives of providing free legal services to all, the structure of pro-bono and monitoring programs. According to Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, courts are required to consider settlement options such as arbitration, mediation, and legal process when

⁴ “Government of India at forefront to promote Alternative Dispute Resolution Systems,” *available at*: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2003844> (last visited August 30, 2025).

feasible, with the Mediation Act 2023 recognizing the use of mediated settlement agreements and institutional/online mediation as integral components of ADR.⁵

2.1.1. Article 39A of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 is in place.

The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 establishes the normative imperative in Article 39A and sets forth its statutory responsibilities and institutions. By creating statutory machinery for outreach, such as awareness programmes, para-legal volunteers, and legal aid clinics, the Act grants explicit governmental imprimatur to Lok Adalats and Permanent Lok Adalats. When combined, these provisions make pro bono legal assistance a part of public law's response to inequality of access.⁶

2.2. Institutional Mechanisms.

Various institutional mechanisms are established under the Act, including NALSA as the central policy and monitoring authority, SLSAs and DLSA's for state/district delivery to ensure legal oversight, and specific committees (Supreme Court/High Court Legal Services Committees) to manage case referral and quality control. Lok Adalats, eligibility criteria (Section 12), legal aid clinics and volunteer law schools training, and expanding pro bono coverage are among the tasks assigned to these institutions. The implementation of institutional mandates has led to the development of a hybrid ecosystem where state authorities, university legal clinics, pro bono cells, and civil-society organizations work together to promote outreach efforts. However, these mechanisms' operations vary greatly across different States due to their focus on capacity-building and inter-agency coordination.⁷

Year (National)	Cases Taken Up (All Lok Adalats)	Cases Disposed (Settled)	Disposal Rate (%)	Source
2023–24	154,446,426	80,760,028	52%	NALSA statistics / press reporting (see sources)

⁵ Doon Law Mentor Best Judiciary & APO Online Courses, “Doon Law Mentor - Best Online Judiciary & Law Coaching in Uttarakhand” Doon Law Mentor - Best Online Judiciary & Law Coaching in Uttarakhand, 2025 available at: <https://doonlawmentor.com/article-39a-and-free-legal-aid-is-access-to-justice-a-reality-in-india/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Homepage,” India available at: <https://nalsa.gov.in/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

Source <https://nalsa.gov.in/statistics/> <https://www.businessworld.in/article/lok-adalats-resolved-over-80-million-pre-litigation-cases-in-2023-24-553949/>

2.2.1. NALSA, LDSs, and Legal Services Authorities.

The central body responsible for formulating policy, coordinating state action, and reviewing scheme implementation (Section 4) is NALSA. The statutory framework expects cooperation from law schools, bar associations, academic institutions, and non-legal organizations to actively seek their involvement through programs like firm pro bono partnerships.⁸

2.2.2. How does the Lok Adalats' system ensure that awards are enforced and enforceable?

According to Sections 19-21 and 22A-22E of the Act, Lok Adalats are recognized as an instrument for amicable resolution. Legal finality and the deeming of Lok Adalat awards as valid for execution provide an affordable and efficient means of obtaining legally enforceable settlements. This benefits pro bono clients with formal, enforcing outcomes, and thus referral pathways to Lok ADALAT cases are central to an institutional practice approach focused on ADR-based probono.⁹

3. WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF PRO WRESTLING AND ADR IN INDIA?.

3.1. The challenges and intrusions of Pro Bono Services.

Pro bono activity in India is growing, but it remains unevenly institutionalized, with many firms reporting ad-hoc outcomes instead of being uniformly available to marginalized communities. According to reports, India's justice sector is struggling with chronic under-resourcing, as evidenced by the low spending on legal aid per capita at a national level. Pro bono cannot replace well-funded legal assistance and must be integrated with state mechanisms to achieve scale. Additionally, For summary of penetration and institutionalisation summaries, see TrustLaw/Thomson Reuters and recent national analyses on legal aid funding and pro bono

⁸ "National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)," India *available at*: <https://doj.gov.in/access-to-justice-for-the-marginalized/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

⁹⁹ "Lok Adalat Act: National Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987," *available at*: <https://thelegalschool.in/blog/lok-adalat-act> (last visited August 30, 2025).

trends.¹⁰

3.2. Issues within the Legal Aid Program: Proposed flaws, lawyers' reluctance to act, and other issues.

The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and state laws have documented gaps in the implementation of legal-aid systems. Despite this, funding shortages, vacancies, capacity imbalance at district level, weak monitoring, or incentivized lawyers for empanelled services hinder delivery. While there are structural limitations, pro bono engagement is hindered by practical obstacles such as time constraints, limited remuneration under state schemes, and concerns about treating student probono as credentialism rather than clinical training. Examine the India Justice Report, Vidhi's commentary on young lawyers and pro bono, and Latham & Watkins' survey of Indian firm practices for further insights.¹¹

Indicator (National, 2023–24)	Number
Pre-litigation cases taken up by all Lok Adalats	154,446,426
Pre-litigation cases disposed (settled)	80,760,028
National disposal rate (taken up → disposed)	52%
Source	NALSA reports; national press summary.

Source: <https://nalsa.gov.in/statistics/> <https://www.businessworld.in/article/lok-adalats-resolved-over-80-million-pre-litigation-cases-in-2023-24-553949/>. (nalsa.gov.in, Businessworld)

3.3 Legal aid clinics' activities and the limitations placed on them are integral aspects of the role played by law schools and student clinic.

The pro bono/ADR ecosystem has a growing role for law schools, as NALSA regulations and

¹⁰ Shireen Yachu, “Pro Bono or Just Unpaid? – Balancing the Rights of Young Lawyers with the Pro Bono Mandate” Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, 2024 *available at*: <https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/blog/pro-bono-or-just-unpaid-balancing-the-rights-of-young-lawyers-with-the-pro-bono-mandate/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

¹¹ Mr. ShashiKant ShashiKant, “A Study Of Legal Aid In Current Scenario” Auricle Technologies Pvt., Ltd., 2024 *available at*: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385121489_A_Study_Of_Legal_Aid_In_Current_Scenario (last visited August 30, 2025).

the Legal Services Clinics framework promote legal literacy, front-office advice, drafting assistance, jail outreach, and Lok Adalat-linked settlement drives among students. The recent Supreme Court/CRP report and NALSA data highlight operational challenges, including inadequate funding for legal aid cells, uneven supervisory lawyer engagement, differing institutional documentation and monitoring practices, and difficulty reconciling curricular workload with practical learning. The NALSA's empirical report from 2023-24 showcases extensive outreach, with more than 1 million individuals providing assistance through over 11000 clinic locations. However, the report highlights gaps in consistent supervision and scaling beyond university towns, lending credence to formal partnerships between universities, NERSA, and state authorities. The NALSA Legal Service Clinics Report (2023-24) and the Supreme Court's "Legal Aid through Law Schools" study offer a comprehensive overview of clinic metrics and recommendations.¹²

Legal Services Clinics Number (Apr 2023–Mar 2024)		Percentage
Total Legal Services Clinics (existing)	11,384	—
Persons visited (all clinics)	1,537,053	—
Persons provided legal assistance	1,036,040	67.4% of visitors
Para-Legal Volunteers (PLVs) trained (total)	53,379	—
PLVs deployed (total)	14,691	27.5% of trained PLVs
Source	NALSA Legal Service Clinics Report; NALSA Para-Legal Volunteers Report (2023–24).	

Source:

<https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s32e45f93088c7db59767efef516b306aa/uploads/2025/06/202506121472512955.pdf>

¹² Manupatra, “Articles – Manupatra” available at: <https://articles.manupatra.com/article-details/Legal-Aid-in-India-current-scenario-and-future-challenges> (last visited August 30, 2025).

<https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s32e45f93088c7db59767efef516b306aa/uploads/2025/06/202506121075107637.pdf>. (CDN BBSR)

3.4 ADR and Pro Bono initiatives in institutions provide examples.

Pro bono and ADR can be implemented in various institutions, such as GNLU's Pro-Bono Legal Aid Programme, which involves the Legal Services Committee and an ADU cell. Institutional structures incorporate a range of elements such as compulsory school hours, supervised clinic practice and ADR training. These institutions can be expanded with state funding, and are supported by well-informed advocates under supervision. See GNLU's programme page, NLU Assam club reports, and Dehradun course announcements for model descriptions.¹³

4. UNDERSTANDING ARBITRATION AND CLIENT-CENTRIC LITIGATION IN PRO BONOM CONJECTURE

4.1. Explain ADR Types and Their Relevance in India.

In India, Alternative Dispute Resolution involves various methods such as arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and judicial settlement mechanisms. The Mediation Act, along with Section 89 (procedural court referral), provides pro bono practitioners and clinics with a legal means to create settlement-first workflow models that can deliver timely, enforceable, and inexpensive outcomes for indigent clients. For statutory texts and implementation guidance, see Section 89. The 2023 Mediation Act, CPC.¹⁴

4.2. Principles of Client-Centred Lawyering.

The practice of client-centered lawyering, which is often expressed in clinical pedagogy and practitioner guidance, transforms the lawyer's role from advocating for strict control to collaborating with clients who value autonomy, communication, cultural awareness, informed decision-making on practical goals. In pro bono contexts, these principles are conveyed through plain-language intake procedures that emphasize ADR options and likely outcomes,

¹³ "GNLU Pro Bono Legal Aid Programme," available at: <https://gnlu.ac.in/GNLU/GNLU-Pro-Bono-Legal-Aid-Programme> (last visited August 30, 2025).

¹⁴ "Government of India at forefront to promote Alternative Dispute Resolution Systems," available at: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2003844> (last visited August 30, 2025).

respect for client priorities, and empowerment through referral to non-legal services where necessary. Clinical and pedagogical literature on client-centred practice emphasizes the importance of empathic empathy, meeting clients in their circumstances, and engaging in iterative communication, which must be taught and evaluated by law-school clinics and pro bono advocates through supervision and reflective learning exercises. Refer to operational detail in clinical scholarship and practice guides for information on client-centred lawyering and mediation-skill integration.¹⁵

4.3. Benefits between ADR and Client-centred strategies.

The integration of ADR and client-centred lawyering into pro bono practice has several benefits related to access to justice, such as increased options for poor clients through mediation or Lok Adalat settlements, decreased court backlog and costs, and improved dignity among law students and young lawyers through participatory decision-making. Additionally, ACR practices can enhance the effectiveness of legal proceedings by enhancing procedural procedures that involve cross-disciplinary reviews. Empirical and clinic data from NALSA Lok Adalat demonstrate the magnitude and practicality of settlements, while policy analyses suggest that formal ADR training (throughout a 2-year pilot program), supervision, and recognition can serve as levers to convert goodwill into measurable access gains. Examine NALSA Lok Adalat statistics, Mediation Act regulations, and clinical studies on client-based issues.¹⁶

5. THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR IS TO FOSTER EMPATHY AND FOCUS ON THE CLIENT IN PROFESSIONAL-LEVEL CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

5.1. Structural and Institutional Constraints.

Section 89(1) of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, Article 39A provides for free legal services and ADR in India under an official framework. The Mediation Act, 2023 and the CPC provide for a framework that is effective but limited in practical implementation due to institutional fragmentation, funding shortages, and shortcomings. Although NALSA, SLSAs,

¹⁵ BoldThemes, “A Client-Centered Approach in the Legal Profession” H&J Legal Associates, 2018 *available at*: <https://hnjlegal.com.au/a-client-centered-approach-in-the-legal-profession/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

¹⁶ “Inculcating the Culture of ADR and Client Centered Lawyering in Pro Bono Services,” The Amikus Qriaie, 2023 *available at*: <https://theamikusqriaie.com/inculcating-the-culture-of-adr-and-client-centered-lawyering-in-pro-bono-services/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

and DLSA are formal means of outreach and settlement (such as Lok Adalats), governance flaws such as vacancies, uneven state capacity, or underutilization of allotted grants make the statutory promise ineffective.¹⁷

Private firms, bar associations, and university clinics are not bound by a uniform delivery network through pro bono. Instead, they rely on combining voluntary firm programs, university facilities, or state legal aid panels, with inconsistent connections to institutional ADR. The disorganization results in practical shortcomings where ADR-related issues are not referred from courts (despite Section 89). This is problematic. What happened? The integration of law-school clinics with state mediation lists is not always feasible, and pro bono ADR results necessitate a flexible monitoring/quality assurance mechanism.¹⁸

National ADR / Legal Aid Indicators (selected)	Number	Source
Pre-litigation cases taken up by Lok Adalats (2023–24)	154,446,426	NALSA statistics / national reporting.
Pre-litigation cases disposed (settled) by Lok Adalats (2023–24)	80,760,028 (52% disposal rate)	NALSA / BusinessWorld summary.

Source: nalsa.gov.in, Businessworld

5.2 Cultural and Mindset Challenges.

Beyond structural gaps, lawyer engagement in pro bono ADR is influenced by culture and professional incentives. Private practitioners and certain law firms consider ADR and pro bono as peripheral to billable litigation work: AER is sometimes seen as a lengthy negotiation process that lacks precedent or publicity as opposed to courtroom advocacy, while probono is considered supplementary charitable work rather than adherence to statutory duties. Additionally, Surveys and firm studies on pro bono practice in India and other jurisdictions indicate that lawyers, particularly junior associates, face real opportunity-cost issues when it comes to dedicating time to this practice.¹⁹

¹⁷ “Nishith Desai Associates Decoding the Mediation Act, 2023,” *available at*: <https://www.nishithdesai.com/NewsDetails/10748> (last visited August 30, 2025).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ James Swartz et al., “Fireworks Displays and the Hidden Dangers to Children” Swartz & Swartz, P.C, 3 September 2024.

The mindset that promotes ADR is reinforced when it is viewed as an instrumental box for court convenience, rather than a pragmatic approach to achieving sustainable outcomes. The cultural perception can only be changed through normative leadership, tangible incentives such as recognition programs and pro bono certificates linked to CLE projects and success stories from institutions that demonstrate how ADR-led probono yields verifiable client outcomes.²⁰

5.3. Educational and Resource Gaps.

Despite being natural incubators for client-centred ADR practice, law school clinics and legal aid cells are limited by resources. NALSA's Legal Services Clinics and Para-Legal Volunteer programs report significant outreach, including numerous clinic visits and PLV training. However, many clinics lack permanent advocates, adequate infrastructure, formal linkages with mediation rosters, and assessment systems to ensure pedagogical quality. In addition, the India Justice Report reports a worrying decline in local legal aid clinics and rising per-capita public spending on law enforcement, which together creates limiting capacity for scaling ADR.²¹

Efforts include student-staffed clinics that only facilitate front office intake and referral, as well as under-deployed trained para-legal volunteers who are not properly assigned due to lack of supervision or clear role definitions.

Legal Services Clinics & PLVs (Apr 2023– Mar 2024)	Number	Percentage / Note
Total Legal Services Clinics (national)	11,384	NALSA report
Persons who visited clinics	1,537,053	NALSA Clinics Report
Persons provided legal assistance	1,036,040	≈67.4% of visitors (assistance provided)
Para-Legal Volunteers (trained)	53,379	NALSA PLV Report
PLVs deployed	14,691	~27.5% of trained PLVs

Source:

<https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s32e45f93088c7db59767efef516b306aa/uploads/2025/06/2>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Atul Krishna, “60% of law school legal aid clinics have not assisted any lawyer in any case: Supreme Court report” Careers360, 28 November 2024.

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<https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s32e45f93088c7db59767efef516b306aa/uploads/2025/06/2>

02506121075107637.pdf. (CDN BBSR)

6. METHODS FOR FOSTERING A SUSTAINED CULTURE OF AGGRESSION AND CLIENT-FOCUSED COACHING IN THE WORKPLACE.

6.1. Revising Legal Education and Student Participation.

The fundamental aspect of curriculum reform is the inclusion of mandatory ADR modules (mediation, negotiation, client interviewing, ethics) in core courses and the expansion of clinic credit through supervised, assessed clinical placements that require demonstrable AHR competencies. The GNLU and other universities have implemented mandatory pro bono hours and ADR cells, which must be imitated with stricter supervision and accreditation to ensure that clinical hours are assessed as competence rather than irrelevant checklists. Also, accredited mediation institutions and certificate courses like short-term legal assistance programs and professional training can provide students with recognized credentials that make pro bono ADR work valuable in both academic and vocational contexts.²²

Practical steps include assembling joint supervision rosters (senior empanelled advocates paired with clinical faculty), formal mentoring for student mediators, portfolio reviews of results (clients' ethical decisions, anonymised communication logs), and exchange programmes with state legal services for hands-on Lok Adalat and mediation experience. Additionally, The reforms integrate doctrinal learning with practical experience and guarantee that student clinic facilities provide lasting outcomes that are client-focused.

6.2. Institutional Incentives and Regulatory Support.

Pro bono hours can be rewarded through regulatory measures and incentives, which could change professional culture. Bar Council guidelines such as recognition of ADR pro bonity by firms or individual lawyers may transform this into measurable commitment, while tax or CSR incentives for firm-supported probono clinics might translate to tangible commitment from the public purse. Through the creation of pro-bono mediator lists, subsidized training, and state-

²² "GNLU Pro Bono Legal Aid Programme," available at: <https://gnlu.ac.in/GNLU/GNLU-Pro-Bono-Legal-Aid-Programme> (last visited August 30, 2025).

funded travel grants for indigent clients, NALSA and the Mediation Act create statutory spaces for institutional mediation and registration of mediators to fill current implementation gaps.

To ensure that reputational incentives are implemented, regulatory design should incorporate monitoring and impact metrics, such as client satisfaction, enforceable outcomes (such as time-to-resolve), and public reporting through SLSAs/DLSA. Pro bono ADR is also considered a quality assurance measure.

6.3. Constructing sustainable and dependable pro bono systems.

Sustainability can be achieved through trust between clients, student volunteers, supervising advocates, and institutions. Pro bono approaches should prioritize client autonomy, informed consent procedures for ADR, representation continuity, and community collaboration. These methods can be paired with non-legal volunteers or community mediation centers. Pro bono should not be a gap-filling measure, but rather an integrated complement to state legal aid. Maintaining resilience and accountability through hybrid funding can be achieved by utilizing state grants to university clinics, CSR funding for mediation training, and mentor list sponsorship from the bar.²³

6.4. Encompassing ADR Workflow in Pro Bono Efforts.

Section 89 mandates the use of procedural protocols to enable ADR in pro bono work, which involves referring cases through court-clinic referral systems. Rules for CPC and NALSA, intake templates before mediation, checklists for case preparation that are suitable for mediation processes, and clear pathways to escalating cases to permanent Lok Adalats or legal aid panels where settlement is not feasible. The Mediation Act provides explicit guidance on the use of online mediation platforms, which can extend reach beyond city centers by utilizing local clinic nodes and trained PLVs for clients without digital access. Pro bono's integration of ADR workflows establishes settlement as the default option for appropriate cases and ensures that clients' choices remain at the forefront of legal aid.²⁴

²³ "Inculcating the Culture of ADR and Client Centered Lawyering in Pro Bono Services," The Amikus Qriaie, 2023 *available at*: <https://theamikusqriaie.com/inculcating-the-culture-of-adr-and-client-centered-lawyering-in-pro-bono-services/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

²⁴ Bhumika Indulia, "The Evolution of Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure: From Case Law to Reform" SCC Times, 2025 *available at*: <https://www.sconline.com/blog/post/2025/02/26/the-evolution-of-section-89-of-the-code-of-civil-procedure-from-case-law-to-reform/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

7. CASE ILLUSTRATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES.

7.1. Structured Pro Bono + ADR Model of GNLU

The Gujarat National Law University (GNLU) has established a pro bono culture by offering specialized curriculum and clinic structure, with upcoming courses. Mandatory hours are embedded, and GNLU ensures reliable student involvement, pairs students with supervising advocates, prepares matters to Lok Adalats, and facilitates mediation opportunities in collaboration with state legal services authorities.

7.2. NLUJ Assam is implementing Awareness and Outreach Projects.

A campus-led outreach model is the Pro Bono Club at NLUJAA, which was established in May 2022 under the Department of Justice. It consists of legal literacy programs, village outreach, campus intake clinics, and Lok Adalat preparation activities that combine front-line client intake with ADR referral pathways to district legal services and local officials. The club is an example of this approach. To ensure that client matters are addressed in ADR lists at an institution and that student efforts result in enforceable settlements or court-referred mediation, NLUJAA's model emphasizes the importance of working with DLSAs/SLSA.²⁵

Selected National Clinic & PLV Metrics (Apr 2023–Mar 2024)		Number	Percentage Note	/ Source	
Total Legal Services Clinics (national)	11,384	—		NALSA Service Report	Legal Clinics
Persons who visited clinics	1,537,053	—		NALSA Report	Clinics
Persons provided legal assistance	1,036,040	67.4% of visitors		NALSA Report	Clinics
Para-Legal Volunteers trained	53,379	—		NALSA PLV Report	
PLVs deployed	14,691	~27.5% of trained PLVs		NALSA PLV Report	

Source: <https://nalsa.gov.in/legal-service-clinics-report/> <https://nalsa.gov.in/para-legal-volunteers-report/>

²⁵ “NLUJAA,” available at: <https://www.nluassam.ac.in/lac.php> (last visited August 30, 2025).

7.3 CERTIFICATION INITIATIVES (E.G. DEHRADUN)

Short-duration certified courses that enhance student engagement and teach ADR skills can be arranged by the Pro Bono Club of Law College Dehradun in collaboration with the institution's Legal Aid Centre, which held an accredited course on "Nuanced Legal Assistance & ACR" (4255 words). In May 2024, students will receive training on intake, mediation ethics, settlement drafting, and case preparation from senior advocates and mediation practitioners. Compatibility with the Mediation Act's focus on accredited mediator training and online/institutional mediation allows for portable certification initiatives that enhance pro bono ADR work by promoting student engagement.²⁶

7.4. HRLN and SLIC are partners in the Pro Bono Human Rights Advocacy movement.

HRLN/SLIC is a project that showcases extensive pro bono human-rights work, which involves litigation and community paralegal training. They have partnered with lawyers from across the country to maintain ties between their organizations while also conducting outreach activities. By employing an organisational framework, they have demonstrated how a sustained pro bono advocacy can safeguard vulnerable groups while also strengthening the capacity of local ADR and paralegals.²⁷

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

8.1. Conclusion.

India's pro bono services are already backed by robust normative and procedural scaffolding, as demonstrated by the project's analysis: Article 39A provides for equal access to justice, while the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 establishes NALSA, SLSAs, and DLSA(s) and specifies eligibility under Section 12, Lok Adalat provisions, or "officially" provide for service. The structural potential of these tools is curtailed by fragmentation, limited resources, fluctuating implementation at the state/district level, and cultural barriers that prioritize ADR and pro bono as secondary. Access must not be improved by simply passing new laws, but rather by enhancing the alignment of current statutes with education and institutional design

²⁶ Uttaranchal University, "Pro Bono Club organized a Certification Course on the Nuances of Legal Aid & ADR in India 2.0" Uttaranchal University : News & Events, 4 May 2024.

²⁷ "SLIC," available at: <https://slic.org.in/> (last visited August 30, 2025).

while emphasizing the importance of ADR and client-focused practice as routine elements in pro bono services instead of exceptional projects.

8.2. Ideas for Law Students, Organizations and Government Officials.

Legal education should include experiential competency objectives, such as completed clinical placements that test client-centered interviewing, informed consent for mediation facilitation, certified mediator training in accordance with the Mediation Act, and reflective portfolio practices to maintain client engagement beyond student transient involvement. Additionally, Legal institutions like schools, NALSA partners and law firms can establish clinic-state linkages by creating memos with SLSAs/DLSA for Lok Adalat rosters and mediator empanelment; providing paid or voluntary hours to accredited ELISA assessors; investing in basic infrastructure (private intake space and secure digital platforms for online mediation allowed under the Mediation Act); and using quality measures such as client satisfaction, enforceable settlement rate, and time-to-resolution to shift from output reporting into impact assessment. Policy-makers and regulators can utilize the current statutory levers, such as NALSA under Section 3-4 of the Legal Services Authorities Act and Section 89-9, to make decisions. The CPC procedures include establishing a national pro bono registry and certified probono mediator rosters, encouraging firm and university involvement through Bar Council CLE credits, CSR matching grants, and tax signals, while also mandating SLSAs/DLSA reports to improve accountability. Establish sustainable voluntarism through the development of mixed-funding models that are accessible to all actors, such as state seed funding, CSR, and university budget lines, along with explicit supervision/mentorship protocols. Legal services authorities will ensure that the legal instruments already in place are compliant with the operational measures such as standardised intake forms, mediation consent templates, court-clinic referral protocols, and training for para-legal volunteers.

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