

insaaf

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'The website insaaf.org.pk is a landmark civil society initiative aimed at improving citizens' access to justice services'

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Technology for Justice

Automation plans under government-led Access to Justice Program aim to harness the power of information technology to radically improve delivery of service in courts, ombudsman offices, and police. These efforts coincide with the information revolution afoot in Pakistan and worldwide. Though justice sector has lagged far behind other sectors in modernizing their operating practices, automation projects provide a unique opportunity to build credibility of the justice system through marked improvement in quality and scope of judicial services - as exemplified by the office of Ombudsman Sindh.

Welcome to insaaf.org.pk

The website insaaf.org.pk is a landmark civil society initiative aimed at improving citizens' access to justice services. This bilingual site with English and Urdu content became functional this month. The site presently features information on laws and citizens' rights vis-à-vis government organizations. It would enhance citizens' access by providing alternate platform to access appropriate grievance redress forums. This interactive site seeks to empower the fellow Pakistanis by providing critical information and enabling their engagement with the justice reform process.

The website is intended to ultimately develop into a central gateway to all justice services - federal, provincial and local - in the country. Different government and non-government organizations may then also choose to employ this platform for promoting their jus-

justice related projects or services. They could link up with insaaf.org.pk. As a major source of access to justice services, insaaf.org.pk would be aggressively marketed to make it known and accessible to citizens through various communication channels, including the traditional ones. Hopefully, all that a citizen would need to know to access information and lodge complaints is to log on to insaaf.org.pk and then take on from there.

This central justice gateway will help with branding and awareness. It will help with easing access and compilation of existing services. But how will it benefit lower middle-classes and the poor? These critically important stakeholders do not have access to internet.

Social marketing of the site may be one solution. By linking it up with, for example, internet cafes and training café assistants in use of the site, access of the common man to the internet may be facilitated. Net cafes are everywhere and within everybody's immediate reach. According to one count, there are approximately 10,000 net cafes in the country. The trained internet café assistants can not only help the aggrieved persons, they can educate many others too. This would lead to legal empowerment of substantial numbers of the lower income groups.

Cafes could benefit by being associated with the insaaf.org.pk project. They could get to have more customers who may use the facilities for accessing these justice services. These services will become especially significant once

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Readers' Column:

We wish to thank our esteemed readers for their valuable feedback on the first issue of monthly insaaf received from all over Pakistan.

Requests for sending monthly insaaf to new addresses have been complied with. Various comments and suggestions are under study and will be appropriately utilized and shared with wider readership in due course. Please do keep us posted. Thank you.

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these websites and materials are available in local languages. With monetary incentives (more customers, for example) to these cafes, the social marketing plan is likely to create important allies who will keep pushing justice sector services.

We should, however, be cautious about the possible national impact of such grand - and perhaps utopian - ideas. The present govern-

Your insaaf.org.pk

The website insaaf.org.pk is a civil society initiative aimed at improving access to justice for the citizens of Pakistan. This bilingual site with English and Urdu options became functional this month, although uploading of content is still underway and some features of the site are under construction.

First phase of the site will feature information on laws and citizens' rights vis-à-vis government organizations and any maladministration on their part. Second phase of insaaf.org.pk aims to enhance citizens' access to the appropriate forums for redressal of their grievances. The website provides a platform for enabling citizens to register their comments on info@insaaf.org.pk and to demand their rights.

Access to justice remains a major concern for all citizens in Pakistan. In 2002, the Government initiated Access to Justice Program (AJP) to strengthen justice sector and the rule of law by upgrading weak judicial infrastructure, reforming the police and civil services, building requisite capacity and improving governance.

Without an active follow-up by the citizens, however, the fruits of these institutional reforms may not be fully realized. Here two things are necessary. Citizen should become more aware of their rights. And they should organize and mobilize to exercise these rights. This website seeks to facilitate this empowerment by providing information to citizens and enabling their engagement with the reform process.

Two main features of insaaf.org.pk (divided into two phases of development) are:

ment working is not ready to be completely transformed through web-based justice. Well, not yet. We know that the goal of creating a responsible and responsive government in Pakistan is an ongoing process for all citizens, media, civil service, civil society, businesses, and political parties. Providing justice services through internet can, however, speed up things. Welcome to insaaf.org.pk!

- ▶ Critical information enabling citizens' access to justice, including simplified procedures, critical views and comments on the ongoing justice reforms in Pakistan, and other related information. The website also features soft copies of monthly insaaf newsletter, besides useful links to access to justice resources on the Internet.
- ▶ An alternate and independent grievance redress channel that will help citizens enter their complaints online which will, in turn, activate the appropriate online official grievance redress site. This feature is under construction.

To sum up, insaaf.org.pk will achieve the following objectives:

1. Communicate essential information to citizens regarding their rights and responsibilities in a simple and clear manner. (section under construction)
2. Communicate essential information to citizens regarding institutions and systems of dispensation of justice in the country.
3. Provide an alternate channel for lodging of complaints by citizens against maladministration. (section under construction)
4. Share with public the responsiveness of the government agencies and other public sector organizations on the redress provided.

This website is part of a project called insaaf, an initiative of Pakistani civil society engaged in advocacy for access to justice, with the support of the Asian Development Bank.

