

Improving and Modernizing El Salvador's Judicial System



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Overview

A World Bank project aimed to help improve the efficiency and accessibility of El Salvador's judicial system, helping break a logjam of civil and small claims cases, enabling judges to focus on judicial rather than administrative duties, and improving the overall level of service for the people seeking to use the court system.

Challenge

At the time of project preparation, the judicial sector's organizational structures and strategic planning were weak, and policy makers lacked enough information for sound decision making. There were no integrated information and communication technology (ICT) systems in place where needed. Policies and practices (and even operational manuals) and administrative staff were disproportionately concentrated in the capital city. Approximately 2,400 cases in each non-criminal court were awaiting disposition, and typical civil cases were taking approximately three-to-four years from filing to disposition. There were 11,000 cases pending in the small claims courts and 922 in the family courts. Judges were spending 70 percent of their time on administrative tasks, diminishing their main work of case adjudication.

There was also lack of access to legal information and little room for citizen participation, especially by the poor. Around 50 percent of the population surveyed reported that they would not know how to obtain the services of a lawyer should they be able to afford one. Furthermore, corruption, weak judicial control, and lack of discipline and transparency also plagued the judicial sector.

Approach

The project's development objective was to improve El Salvador's judicial system by promoting measures aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, accessibility and credibility of its judicial branch, through a participatory process involving judges, technical and administrative staff and users of the judicial system. The project supported medium-term judicial reform efforts through technical assistance to the judicial branch to promote its institutional capacity building and

More Results



100%

of administrative units are now using institutional strategic planning

85%

of users are satisfied with the quality of service provision

32,000

citizens in target municipalities have been reached by a popular judicial education campaign

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knowledge sharing. Facilitating access to justice that would bring courts closer to the public and help the disadvantaged groups to access legal and judicial information would complement the government's poverty reduction efforts. The project was designed in accordance with good practices and lessons learned. It replicated and learned from similar information technology, citizen outreach, and access to justice efforts that were successfully implemented in other countries in the Latin American region.

Results

The project has succeeded in putting in place a new integrated judicial court organization model, including the instruments to support them. This model of a one-stop-shop justice center comprises the physical integration of the courts, the creation of shared support and service offices, and the separation of administrative from judicial tasks, which are now the priority for judges. It seeks to improve efficiency and trial processing, and to achieve a better distribution of work, and the promotion of a new culture of service. The project also aims to improve the systematization of judicial and administrative processes, user attention and legal assistance, and judicial information, learning, and community outreach for a group of courts (including criminal, civil, family, labor and other courts).

Accomplishments in terms of efficiency can be found in the reduced personnel costs; the deployment of 41 staff per 10,000 inhabitants compares favorably with the national level deployment of 138 staff per 10,000 inhabitants. It is also evident in the reduced time for processing civil, penal, commercial, and other cases; the pendency and backlog at the Soyapango center is much improved from 5,478 active processes at the end of the period in 2007 to 3,431 in 2010. Moreover, survey results indicate that people's perception of judicial services as introduced by the project's new court model has improved among more than 50 percent of current users. Approximately 85 percent of users are satisfied with the quality of service provision.

Results in terms of strategic planning, administrative systems, citizen information, and technical assistance outputs are also very positive: 100 percent of administrative units are now using institutional strategic planning; about 70 percent of staff have been trained on the new corporate services; the supreme court website and the *Centro de Documentacion Judicial* prepares a CD on laws and court decisions for judges; and a popular judicial education campaign has reached 32,000 citizens in target municipalities of Soyapango, Ilopango, and San Martin. In addition, the preparation of a new judicial map for El Salvador is a major step forward that, when implemented over the medium-term, is expected to bring not only system-wide improvements in the use of scarce resources, but also to bring services closer to the people

Bank Contribution

As part of project preparation and project design, the Bank studied the background to the judicial sector, analyzed the main sector issues in depth, and considered government strategies to deal with these issues. It also conducted a survey on access to justice by the poor, and problems and needs of the administration of justice. The Bank coordinated a pilot workshop in Washington D.C., facilitated by a local civil society organization, to assess views of Salvadorans living abroad on the performance of the judicial system in El Salvador. In addition, IBRD financing totaled US\$17.1 million.

Partners

There were strong partnerships with the judicial sectors of other countries. For example, the Bank arranged technical visits for Supreme Court policy makers to other Bank-supported judicial projects (e.g. Guatemala) and to other good practice reform locations (such as Singapore, Puerto Rico) to exchange views and acquire experience. The project also undertook technical learning visits to the judiciaries of Mexico and Puerto Rico.

Moving Forward

The new model of *Soyapango Integrated Judicial Center* (CJIS) is being replicated in other courts in the country, which is expected to yield savings in terms of human resource utilization. The new court organization model with common services, administrative systems, and ICT tools has been successfully replicated in San Salvador for a group of civil courts as well as criminal courts. A new judicial map for all the courts of El Salvador has been prepared. It is expected to result in cost savings and enhance service provision at large urban locations. Since most members of the Project Coordination Unit were seconded from the Supreme Court, they will continue to work in the judiciary and this would ensure continuity in staffing.

Beneficiaries

Over 70 percent of users of CJIS perceive the offices to be efficient, and 60 percent say they are very satisfied with the speed of service. Just over 90 percent of external users said they were satisfied with the friendliness of the care they have been offered with this service. As expressed by Julia, a citizen of Soyapango, *“the staff at the Judicial Center were very friendly. They helped me with my case and answered all my questions. This made it easier for me to go through the process”*.