Strengthening the Justice Sector in Honduras

Overview

A World Bank project in Honduras has helped make justice accessible to many people who previously struggled with an inefficient, outdated, opaque judicial system. Through a range of activities – from training judicial and administrative staff to modernizing financial systems and refurbishing facilities – the project has helped to open the judicial branch to more than 1.9 million Hondurans in the project areas.

Challenge

At the time the World Bank designed this project, the Honduran judicial system was hampered by a range of constraints that curbed its ability to operate effectively and with the necessary transparency and accountability. As a result, many Hondurans had inadequate access to justice. Specifically, the main challenges for the justice branch in Honduras that were identified as part of the project preparation included weak institutional capacities, reflected in poor budgeting and inadequate planning implementation, the courts’ inability to resolve cases in a timely manner, and dilapidated infrastructure and overall lack of information. Weak transparency and accountability gave rise to perceptions of corruption, and a lack of inter-institutional coordination, and Hondurans faced limited access to the justice of peace courts and to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, among many other barriers to justice.

Approach

An investment credit from the International Development Association (IDA) underpinned the Judicial Branch Modernization Plan 2004-2009 as well as the development of a five-year strategic plan for the judicial sector out to 2016. IDA pursued an integrated approach, encompassing both the demand and supply sides of the justice sector, and helped complement the work of other donors who were focusing on one or the other of these dimensions, but not on both. Selecting the Judicial Branch as the single target of the operation was also a strategic decision as well as to directly support the non-criminal jurisdictions (civil, commercial, labor and family).

More Results

The project has helped to open the judicial branch to more than 1.9 million Hondurans in the project areas.

US$16.7 million

was the IDA contribution for the project.

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Results

The IDA project led to a number of positive outcomes in all three target areas. On institutional strengthening:

- Average length-of-case resolution in non-criminal cases dropped to 612 days in 2011 from 1,251 days in 2004. Quality of service in targeted courts rated as satisfactory by 96 percent of users (comprising 70 percent very good and 26 percent good).

- New, integrated financial management systems and planning, monitoring and evaluation systems were developed and implemented. Six human resources management processes were redesigned for both judicial and administrative staff, including classification of positions, selection of personnel, performance evaluation, and personnel audit.

- Eighty-two Judges and 470 administrative staff were trained in new management models, strategic and operational planning filing systems, and total quality management (motivation, quality service to judicial users, etc.)

- Additionally, 535 out of 753 of judges (71 percent), and 1467 of 1765 of staff members (83 percent) were trained in the frontier judicial topics selected by the project. Training in the new Civil Procedures Code was also provided to 81 percent of public defenders. Altogether, the project provided 61,515 hours of training to 6,708 participants.

- Nine Unified Trial Courts in the Judicial Centers of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula were remodeled, and the Multi-purpose Justice Services Center in Tegucigalpa refurbished, including office equipment, hardware, and software for the remodeled or refurbished offices.

On transparency and accountability:

- Business and citizen users of the courts targeted by the project had better perceptions of the judicial branch as evidenced by a survey conducted in partnership with the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise, COHEP and the Tegucigalpa Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2010. Less than 50 percent considered the judicial branch to not be fair or did not trust the institution.

- Twenty-five percent of all judges were selected, retained, or promoted on the basis of transparent merit-based competition.

- Forty percent of administrative staff were evaluated and classified.

- Twelve information kiosks were established to provide information such as case status, how to access the judicial system, steps to present a claim, relevant laws, and court locations, providing services to approximately 200 users per day.

- Thirty-six procurement processes were published in newspapers and disseminated through the judicial branch’s information kiosks in a way that could be monitored by non-governmental organizations. No complaints were received.

- Twenty-one public meetings were undertaken in both urban and rural settings, with the participation of 4,911 civil society representatives

On access to justice:

- Access to the courts covered by the project increased, with 40 percent of the population having contact with justices of the peace courts in the so called Poverty Corridor (against a project target of 20 percent).

- Six justice of the peace courts tested a new management model in the provision of justice services located in the Honduras Poverty Corridor to improve access to rural
poor, and Afro-Honduran and indigenous communities. Additionally, 233,712 vulnerable individuals received justice services from the targeted courts, an average of 58,428 a year.

- Three mobile justices of peace courts were established and provided services to low-income neighborhoods in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, and Choluteca. Sixty percent of their users are women and 63 percent were illiterate or with only primary education.
- The Public Defense Directorate was strengthened to provide free legal aid to 59,354 low-income adults, including at-risk youth.
- Awareness-raising campaigns on domestic violence issues reached 3,938 community leaders, of whom 2,110 (54 percent) were women. Another 246 Afro-Honduran community leaders were trained in access to justice and gender awareness, and 149 indigenous peoples’ leaders received training in access to justice for indigenous women.

Bank Contribution
IDA contributed US$16.7 million to the project.

Partners
The project was financed by the World Bank and implemented by the Supreme Court of Justice of Honduras.

Moving Forward
While there will not be a direct follow-up operation financed by the World Bank, the priorities for continued judicial branch modernization are included in the government’s Judicial Sector Strategy for 2011-16. Suggestions for areas for future support are also included in the project’s Implementation Completion and Results Report.

Beneficiaries
The main beneficiaries of the institutional strengthening and access to justice components of the project were the population served by the courts in the project areas – approximately 1.94 million citizens. A total of 18 courts were targeted by the project. The beneficiaries of the transparency and accountability component were all Honduran citizens as the activities were designed to strengthen the capacity of the Supreme Court of Justice at the national level.

“The project helped to design a new Judicial Branch Strategic Plan 2011-2016, with a view to ensuring that, based on the progress made, the judicial branch will continue the process of innovation, and institutional modernization, as well as consolidating its efficiency, effectiveness and transparency, so as to deserve public confidence based on the ongoing pursuit of excellence,” said Jorge Rivera Aviles, the Chief of Justice of Honduras, at the closing of the project “The Supreme Court of Justice considers that the project laid the foundation of an internal change process of the judicial branch, aimed at increasing institutional capacity, improving the judicial management, and promoting equitable access of the public to justice services.”.