

# Improving Access to Justice in Guatemala

Judicial Reform Project

## Background

The signing of the December 1996 Peace Accords ended an era of 36 years of civil war in Guatemala. With these accords, a new consensus emerged among civil society, the Government, the Supreme Court of Justice, and other justice institutions that judicial reform is essential to post-conflict reconstruction, social stability, and economic growth.

The World Bank's Judicial Reform Project supports these aims. Before the project was implemented, about 30 percent of the country had no judicial branch presence. Today each municipality has at least one justice of the peace.

Drawing lessons from Guatemala's experience, the Bank is now also implementing judicial reform projects in El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico.

## Project objective

To create an effective, accessible, and credible justice system that applies laws consistently and fairly, and inspires public confidence.

## Project design

The project aims to:

- Strengthen access to justice.
- Strengthen the institutional capacity of the Judicial Branch.
- Provide support to anti-corruption efforts.
- Promote communication with the public on justice sector reform.

## Project activities

*Access to Justice:*

- 177 Justice of the Peace courts have been created and implemented.
- One regional and one departmental justice center have been inaugurated, and a second regional center is in progress.
- Two mobile courts have been in operation since 2003. These specially equipped buses provide free mediation, dispute resolution, and information services to people in remote areas. The service benefited over 6,000 people in its first year of operation, of which 63 percent were women.
- Twenty-five mediation centers have opened and are providing mediation services in indigenous languages. Since 2001, more than 22,000 disputants have sought mediation, of which almost half reached

**President Wolfowitz visits the mobile court** - Apr. 28, 2006

[Photos](#) | [Video](#)

**President Wolfowitz visits Guatemala**

[Full coverage](#)



**Video:** [Access to Justice - Mobile Court in Guatemala](#) (4MB Windows Player)

## Financing

**Total cost:** US\$49.7 million

**IBRD loan amount:** US\$33 million

**Implementation period:** Expected April 1999 - December 2006

**Geographical area:** the whole country

**Implementing agency:** Supreme Court of Justice

## More details

» [Full project information & documents](#)



agreement.

- Justice sector workers are benefiting from cultural sensitivity training.
- Alternative dispute resolution centers have been annexed to the courts.

#### *Organizational Effectiveness:*

- Creation of new departments and training of personnel to perform four critical tasks: planning, human resources, administrative services, and financial management.

#### *Ethics, Professionalism and Gender Focus:*

- The Judicial School is now equipped to provide training to judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and justice staff across the country.
- Anti-corruption training seminars are provided nationwide and are supported by a newly created Code of Ethics.
- Judges are now hired solely on the basis of competitive examinations.
- About 17 percent of judges are now women (and more than 50 percent of justices of the peace are women), compared with only 3 percent at project initiation.
- For the first time in Guatemala's history the President of the Supreme Court is a woman.

#### *Social Communications and Citizen Outreach:*

- The Supreme Court is informing the public about the judicial reform process through educational materials and radio programs in Spanish and Mayan languages.

#### *Modernization of Criminal Records Offices:*

- 24 automated criminal record offices have been opened across the country, all of them connected via server to the database, permitting the same quality of service in all areas. The process, which previously took an average of seven days to complete, now takes three minutes.
- The General Archive of Protocols office (Archivo General de Protocolos) has been automated and decentralized to two locations. This has reduced registration time and increased revenues for the Judicial Branch.

#### **Next steps:**

Judicial reform is a long-term process in a post-conflict society. The project has succeeded in showing incremental and sustainable improvements that promote peace and advance access to justice. However, continued efforts are needed to scale up pilot programs, further promote civil society



partnerships with formal institutions, and address criminal justice challenges that fall outside the scope of this project.

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