Justice for the Poor Overview

Justice for the Poor (J4P) is a World Bank program that engages with justice reform as a cross-cutting issue in the practice of development. Grounded in evidence-based approaches focused on the perspective of the poor and marginalized, the program aims to improve the delivery of justice services and to support sustainable and equitable development processes which manage grievance and conflict stresses effectively.

Legal Pluralism Thematic Activities

In most development contexts, justice is sought through multiple levels of authority including state, non-state and hybrid institutions. Normative elements of these systems are often at odds with each other, including at different levels of the state system and between different customary systems operating in a shared geographic space. Despite recognition of the importance of working within multiple legal regimes, institutional reform efforts continue to privilege formal structures. Localized systems are often regarded as being too complex and incompatible with the dominant notions of economic, social and cultural rights. Such a doctrinal approach misses important contests around rights and entitlements that occur across and within broader justice systems.

Under the Legal Pluralism Thematic Area, the J4P program aims to develop a body of empirically-based knowledge about the multiple layers of justice systems, their interactions with each other and the types of interventions that can help build effective linkages between them. Questions of how to engage in legally plural contexts are incorporated into each of the program’s operational areas of access to justice, land and natural resource governance, and service delivery. Country-level activities combine with cross-country learning and analysis to bring substantive knowledge on the implications of entrenched legal pluralism to each country activity.

Legal Pluralism and Development Policy

The program also works to bring justice sector reform practitioners together with socio-legal theorists, political economists and customary law leaders to discuss how development interventions can respond effectively to legal pluralism. In May 2010, for example, the program convened 13 academics and 6 practitioners for a discussion on legal pluralism and development. Cambridge University Press is publishing an edited volume of papers prepared for the event entitled, Legal Pluralism and the Future of Development: Dialogues for Success. The volume is edited by Caroline Sage, Michael Woolcock and Brian Z. Tamanaha, and includes chapters by J4P staff (Caroline Sage, Michael Woolcock, Daniel Adler, Douglas Porter, Nicholas Menzies, Deborah Isser, and Varun Gauri), as well as numerous academics including Lauren Benton, Brian Tamanaha, David Kinley, Sally Engle Merry, H. Patrick Glenn, William Twining, Gordon Woodman, Kanishka Jayasuria, Julio Faundez, and Christian Lund.