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.

Vanuatu Background

Over the last decade, Vanuatu has managed to sustain notable economic growth in comparison to its Melanesian neighbors, however the domestic distribution of the benefits of this growth has been limited. The globalization of the Vanuatu economy, the financial opportunities associated with the exploitation of land and natural resources, the demand for infrastructure services, and rapid urbanization present particular challenges as such changes can quickly overwhelm the capacity of customary systems to mediate competing claims and interests. Managing these stresses is likely to remain a central development challenge for the country.

Vanuatu Program Areas

The first phase of J4P Vanuatu (known in the local language as Jastis Blong Evriwan) supported the Government of Vanuatu’s Priorities and Action Agenda (2006-2015) to promote equitable development and access to justice through constructive engagement and interaction between formal and customary systems of governance. Activities involved in-depth research into land leasing issues, the facilitation of policy dialogue and understanding community decision making and dispute resolution processes to contribute to the better understanding and improvement of justice and service delivery in Vanuatu. Building on initial work, current activities focus on three main areas of work:

Land Leasing

J4P research on land leasing in Vanuatu provided systematic evidence of problems in the lease formation and lease administration processes, including inequities emerging from the absence of recognition and enforcement of group landholding rights and poorly informed deal making processes. Current initiatives are working to (1) support the development of an operational model for the provision of advisory services to landholders, (2) foster innovation in relation to land and natural resource governance by land owning groups, and (3) support policy action on land leasing recommendations.

Land, Justice, and Infrastructure

J4P research on land leasing in Vanuatu indicates upfront payment of large premiums for leasing or acquiring land for public infrastructure has been a factor in increasing the number of land disputes and the number of custom landholder claimants involved in any one dispute. Protracted and/or failed negotiations with landholders around access to land for public infrastructure has also constrained and increased the cost of infrastructure development. The program is working with World Bank teams active in infrastructure to develop equitable and sustainable strategies for community engagement, consultation, group representation, resettlement, compensation, and dispute management.

Urban Land Governance

A dramatic increase in urban growth over the last decade has led to overcrowding, poor housing conditions, high rents, poor sanitation and rapid development of informal settlements on both Government land in urban centers and on customary land in peri-urban areas. Informal settlements are estimated to accommodate over 30% of the urban population. With Vanuatu’s urban population projected to double in the next 20 years, pressures on urban and peri-urban land are likely to further increase. The program is exploring the availability of and need for data to inform policies and programming in relation to urban and peri-urban land governance issues. Building an effective national coordinating agency for urban public land management is likely to be crucial to address constraints on the provision of services and access to affordable housing.