

Peace, Justice and Inclusion in the Pandemic

Sharing country experiences

PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

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Legal Empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and deepened inequalities and injustices, impacted the work of justice providers and given rise to new justice problems for people around the world. It widens the justice gap, which was estimated before the pandemic to amount to [5.1 billion](#) people without meaningful access to justice globally. Informal and grassroots justice providers play a critical role in solving common justice problems people face and the case for legal empowerment is stronger than ever. Many justice actors are now facing the triple crunch of rising COVID-related injustices, restrictions on their day-to-day operations and decreased funding for essential programs.

At this juncture, justice actors must consider what they want their justice system to look like, now and in the future, and then work in concert to ensure they reach the most vulnerable. There is an urgent need for more partnership and collaboration within the justice sector. Grassroots legal empowerment groups are central to improving access to justice for communities that are often marginalized. Community-based justice [services](#) bring knowledge and skills to resolve conflicts and with this, they empower people to stand up for themselves. By putting people at the center of justice and making justice for all foundational to reconstruction efforts, justice actors can play a critical role in the creation of a more just society and an economy that provides a fair chance for all.

“The establishment of robust, accessible judicial institutions can spell the difference between vulnerability and security, desperation and dignity, oppression and empowerment for hundreds of millions of people.”

-Mary Robinson, Elder, Former President of Ireland

The power of grassroots organizations

Despite the mammoth challenges that legal empowerment organizations face during the COVID-19 health crisis, Namati’s [Justice Challenge](#) and [survey](#) conducted among legal empowerment groups indicated that:

- 91% of grassroots organizations are still finding ways to serve their communities and clients through remote client follow up, training, legal assistance, awareness raising and humanitarian & emergency response.
- 76% of respondents are participating in discussions at the local or national level about rebuilding their societies.
- Over 60% of respondents would need less than \$10,000 USD to implement their ideas and initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emerging country responses

Educating people about COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Accountability Lab is creating opportunities for young activists in East Africa to catalyze government accountability projects and create a network to share best practices during the pandemic. One innovative solution from Liberia includes using music to denounce myths around the virus.In Uganda, a grassroots organization is making use of the popularity of public radio, educating people about discrimination during the pandemic (Legal Aid Survey).In order to bridge the digital divide, in Bangladesh, UNICEF & BRAC have trained over 500,000 religious leaders who travel to Rohingya refugee camps to deliver messages via megaphones and posters about preventing COVID-19 and debunking myths surrounding the virus.
Empowering individuals remotely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In India, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, worked with prisons to provide adequate video equipment to ensure spaces in compliance with social distancing norms, so that lawyers and families could communicate with prisoners and prevent fair trial violations.NYU School of Law's Justice Power highlights legal empowerment strategies that immigrant rights organizations use to advance remote access to justice, and has proved instrumental to self-represented individuals (which account for 63% of immigration cases) and legal advocates during the challenges of COVID-19.Asociación Paz y Esperanza in Peru is seeking funding from the COVID-19 Justice Fund to acquire monitoring equipment, like drones, to help indigenous communities monitor illegal mining and deforestation safely and remotely.
Reaching vulnerable populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In Argentina, ACIJ, the Civil Association for Equality and Justice, created a public campaign aimed at disseminating legal information regarding the pandemic for vulnerable groups such as women, children, people living in slums, and people with disabilities.The Municipality of Lima, Peru, has been conducting frequent legal and health outreach via telephone to elderly and disabled people in the city. The program offers medical, psychological, and legal support and helps them access the government's coronavirus subsidy for poor households.Amid the pandemic, AdvocAid, a grassroots legal organization in Sierra Leone, is continuing their legal services and providing essential resources to new mothers who are detained and other imprisoned women.Legal aid hotlines have expanded services to target those in remote areas during COVID. One in Kyrgyzstan has helped over 40,000 including women facing domestic violence and problems around alimony, or land rights in rural areas during the pandemic.

Other Resources:

- [Grassroots Justice in a Pandemic: Ensuring a Just Response and Recovery](#), Namati & Pathfinders
- [COVID-19 Justice Fund](#), aiming to support both immediate response and long-term rebuilding efforts led by grassroots justice organizations; The Elders, The Fund for Global Human Rights, Justice for All, Legal Empowerment Network, Namati, and the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies.
- [Community Justice Help: Advancing Community-Based Access to Justice](#), Community Legal Action Ontario
- [Justice in a Pandemic](#): Justice for All and [The Public Health Emergency](#) & [The Economic Crisis](#), Pathfinders
- [A Guide to Open Government and the Coronavirus: Justice](#), Open Government Partnership