



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Country/Organisation: Liberia - Liberian United Youth for Community Safety and Development (LUYCSD)

What are the primary challenges your country faces in ensuring equal access to justice within your criminal justice system? How do these challenges impact groups in vulnerable situation in your society? Please provide a thorough and detailed response.

On behalf of LUYCSD, I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the preparations for the upcoming meeting of experts, as outlined in Resolution 78/227 entitled “Equal Access to Justice for All.

Since 2011, Liberia has grappled with significant challenges that continue to impede its development and compromise the well-being of its citizens. Among these challenges are issues related to commercial trust, substance abuse, lack of access to justice, and economic instability. Despite ongoing efforts, these problems persist, exacerbating the social and economic hardships faced by Liberians. This statement aims to provide a comprehensive overview of these challenges, share the lessons we have learned through our community engagement and research, and outline the best practices and enabling factors needed to enhance the functioning of Liberia’s criminal justice system to ensure equal access to justice for all.

From June 10 2023 to June 30, 2024, LUYCSD conducted extensive research across 150 communities within the 15 counties, district and police stations in Liberia. Our objective was to engage with local leaders, community members, and law enforcement officers to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced within the criminal justice system. This research was not merely academic but was deeply rooted in the lived experiences of Liberians, reflecting their voices, concerns, and aspirations.

Through this research, we identified several critical areas that require urgent attention: systemic corruption, inefficiency, resource inadequacies, and the pervasive impact of substance abuse on social stability. Our engagement with communities revealed the profound mistrust that exists between citizens and the justice system, fuelled by perceptions of bias, corruption, and inefficiency. These findings have been instrumental in shaping our approach to addressing these issues, with a focus on sustainable and community-driven solutions in this report from the 15 counties of Liberia.

1. Lack of Justice and Transparency

According to the communities people the justice system in Liberia is plagued by corruption and inefficiency, leading to a pervasive lack of public confidence. Many citizens, particularly those from marginalized communities, struggle to access fair justice. The system is often perceived as being skewed in favour of the powerful, with ordinary citizens feeling powerless in the face of legal challenges. This lack of trust undermines the rule of law and hampers efforts to combat corruption and promote transparency.

One of the most significant challenges we identified from many people that we interview is that the systemic corruption within the judicial process. From 2011 to 2024, there have been numerous reports of bribery, favouritism, and undue influence exerted by powerful individuals and groups, leading to unjust outcomes. This corruption is not limited to the courts but extends to law enforcement and correctional facilities, where the lack of oversight and accountability exacerbates the problem.

The commercial sector in Liberia has also suffered due to mismanagement and corruption. These issues have diminished both local and international investment, further weakening the economy and contributing to the country's instability. The justice system's inefficiencies, particularly in case processing and delays, have only exacerbated these issues. From 2011 to 2024, there was a marked increase in the backlog of cases, with many citizens waiting years for their cases to be heard, leading to frustration and further erosion of trust in the system.

Can you provide examples of initiatives or policies that have been successful in addressing access to justice issues in your country? What key lessons have been learned from these initiatives or policies? Please provide a thorough and detailed response.

Lessons Learned

Our engagement with communities and stakeholders across Liberia has provided valuable lessons that are essential for informing future interventions and reforms within the criminal justice system.

1. The Importance of Community Involvement

One of the key lessons we have learned is the importance of involving communities in the design and implementation of justice-related initiatives. Community engagement is critical for building trust and ensuring that interventions are responsive to the needs of those most affected by the

criminal justice system. Programs that involve community members in policing, legal aid, and restorative justice processes have shown promise in improving access to justice and restoring public confidence.

2. The Need for Legal and Judicial Reforms

Legal and judicial reforms are essential for addressing the systemic issues within Liberia's criminal justice system. These reforms must be comprehensive and include measures to combat corruption, improve efficiency, and ensure that the rights of all citizens are protected. The establishment of independent oversight bodies to monitor the performance of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies is crucial for promoting transparency and accountability.

3. Investment in Capacity Building

Investing in the training and capacity-building of legal professionals is critical for enhancing the effectiveness of the justice system. This includes providing ongoing training for judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officers on issues such as human rights, anti-corruption practices, and the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Capacity-building initiatives should also focus on improving the management and administration of justice institutions to reduce inefficiencies and delays.

What are the best practices currently being implemented in your criminal justice system to enhance access to legal aid and fair trials? How do these best practices improve outcomes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system? Please provide a thorough and detailed response.

Based on our research and experience, we have identified several best practices that can contribute to the improvement of Liberia's criminal justice system.

1. Legal Aid Clinics and Community Policing

Legal aid clinics and community policing initiatives have proven effective in improving access to justice, particularly for marginalized communities. Legal aid clinics provide free or low-cost legal services to individuals who cannot afford representation, ensuring that they have the opportunity to seek legal redress. Community policing initiatives, where police officers work closely with community members to address local issues, have also been successful in building trust and improving public safety.

2. Restorative Justice Programs

Restorative justice programs, which focus on repairing the harm caused by criminal behaviour through reconciliation and rehabilitation, offer a promising alternative to traditional punitive approaches. These programs have been shown to reduce recidivism rates and promote healing within communities. Implementing restorative justice programs in Liberia could help address the underlying causes of crime and reduce the burden on the formal justice system.

3. Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations

Collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs, NGOs) is essential for the success of justice reform initiatives. CSOs, NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of marginalized communities, providing legal assistance, and holding the government accountable. Partnerships between the government, CSOs, and international organizations can enhance the effectiveness of justice interventions and ensure that they are aligned with the needs of the population.

What factors have been crucial in enabling successful reforms or improvements in your criminal justice system? How can these enabling factors be replicated or adapted in other contexts or regions to ensure equal access to justice for all? Please provide a thorough and detailed response.

Enabling Factors for Success

To ensure the success of justice reform initiatives in Liberia, several enabling factors must be in place.

1. International Support and Partnership

Adequate international support, including funding and technical assistance, is crucial for implementing reforms and enhancing the capacity of Liberia's criminal justice system. Partnerships with international organizations, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), can provide the necessary resources and expertise to drive meaningful change. We seek to establish a partnership with the UNODC and other relevant UN bodies to leverage resources, share expertise, and collaborate on initiatives aimed at improving the criminal justice system and addressing the broader issues affecting Liberia.

2. Political Will and Commitment

The success of justice reforms in Liberia depends on the political will and commitment of the government to address corruption, inefficiency, and human rights violations. This includes enacting and enforcing legal reforms, ensuring that justice institutions are adequately funded and resourced, and promoting transparency and accountability at all levels of government.

3. Community Participation and Ownership

Community participation and ownership are essential for the sustainability of justice reforms. Engaging communities in the design, implementation, and monitoring of justice initiatives ensures that they are responsive to local needs and have the support of the population. Building strong relationships between justice institutions and communities can help restore trust and promote social cohesion.

Conclusion

Liberia's criminal justice system faces significant challenges that require urgent and sustained attention. These challenges, including corruption, inefficiency, resource constraints, and the impact of substance abuse, have profound implications for the country's development and the well-being of its citizens. However, with the right support, commitment, and collaboration, it is possible to overcome these challenges and build a justice system that is fair, transparent, and accessible to all.

LUYCSD is committed to working with the international community, including the United Nations, to address these challenges and implement the reforms needed to ensure equal access to justice for all Liberians. We believe that with adequate support, we can make significant progress in improving the functioning of Liberia's criminal justice system and contributing to the successful implementation of Resolution 78/227.

We sincerely appreciate the ongoing efforts of the United Nations and other international partners and request further support to help Liberia build a more stable, prosperous, and just future. We are open to further discussions and look forward to collaborating on this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Liberians United Youth for Community Safety and Development (LUYCSD)

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