



Judicial Reform in Timor-Leste: A Sustainable Path Amidst Problem Roots and Progress

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Abstract: Judicial reform in Timor Leste has played an important role in post-conflict recovery and the consolidation of democracy in the country. In the eyes of the world, particularly western nations and other Asian countries, since independence in 2002, Timor Leste has begun the process of establishing an independent and functioning judiciary. However, this journey has been challenging due to historical trauma, inadequate resources and a lack of trained legal professionals. The objective of this research is to critically explore and discuss judicial reform in Timor Leste, focusing on the progress that has been made, the challenges faced, and the long-term steps needed and expected to advance future development. The research method utilized a qualitative and quantitative approach i.e., interviews from varied respondent sources based on socio-legal exploratory study and a critical look at patterns and trends in addressing possibly future post-conflict challenges. Based on the research results from primary and secondary data, this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of the judicial system, with an emphasis on the spectrum and role of international support and local capacity building. The spectrum and role of international support and local capacity building in its implementation is still in the process of developing a justice system that has not been implemented in a comprehensive and consistent manner. However, this support has involved various reform efforts in developmental sectors, including institutional capacity building, human resource development, access to justice, and the application of international best practices. The implementation of developing a justice system in the post-conflict challenges needs to be implemented and sustained and consistently applied through international collaboration for the sustainable benefit of a strong democracy, accessibility to justice, and directional development in Timor.

Keywords: Judicial Reform, Access to Justice, Post-Conflict Challenges, Judicial, International Collaboration, Democracy Development

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste is an island country located in Southeast Asia; a former Portuguese colony, it covers 15,000 square kilometres of the eastern half of the island of Timor (Constitutionnet 2016). As a new Southeast Asian nation, gained its independence in 2002, Timor Leste has experienced a long struggle and some severe situations against Indonesian occupation. On 20 May 2002 Timor Leste became Independent State with a Constitution that declares it to be “a democratic, sovereign, independent, and unitary State based on the rule of law” (Grenfell 2013). This being the culmination of a remarkable history of constitutional development for one half of the Island of Timor, located as it is between Indonesia and Australia (Nicholson 2002). Since then, the country has worked to establish a democratic system and rebuild its state institutions, particularly in its judiciary. Its judiciary has legal framework in Timor Leste. With a legislative framework for a judicial system in place, UNTAET began the difficult process of identifying and recruiting legal professionals to fill the spectacular void in personnel that opened up in the aftermath of the September 1999 violence. As the United Nations Secretary-General observed in the wake of the vote for independence, *'local institutions, including the court system, have for all practical purposes, ceased to function, with...judges, prosecutors and other members of the legal profession having left the territory.'* (Federal Court of Australia 2004).

A strong, independent judiciary is critical for safeguarding the rule of law, ensuring fairness, and promoting human rights. In a rapidly evolving world, justice systems play a pivotal role in promoting fairness, upholding the rule of law, and ensuring access to justice for all (UNDP Timor Leste 2025). However, judicial reforms in Timor-Leste have been fraught with some problem roots in the process of stability of the nation year after year, such as insufficient resources, a lack of trained professionals, and the legacy of decades of conflict. UNDP Timor Leste 2025 highlighted this situation from their statement that *'since gaining independence in 2002, the country has made remarkable strides in establishing its justice system'*. Author emphasizes on the aspects of the problems remaining in the long run which requested people-centered approach within and to a sustainable path and efforts on the justice reform. This goal for a justice reform still deals with the problems roots of *justice denied* as explored by International Centre for Transitional Justice Timor Leste or ICTJ (2025) this present year on their study's summary encapsulated specific slogan for Timor's situation, *'Justice, Truth, and Dignity'*.

Judicial reform is expected not to continue to experience negative and periodic transitions of justice in Timor. The author critically analyzed that it is hoped that judicial reform will not continue to experience negative and periodic transitions of justice in building the nation's legacy as proven by the Transitional Administration in East Timor, where in the Mid of 2000, UNTAET, and the UN established the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) for focusing on the issues of Justice, before Reparation and Institution Reform (Asia Justice and Rights 2022). It needs a long path towards deep problem roots towards a sustainable path for justice reform in Timor nation. Furthermore, as a young democracy, Timor Leste' problem roots stem from various historical backgrounds, people's

psychology, and inadequate and unprepared resources amid hopes of long-term development progress. Ingram et al (2015) revealed that *'Eleven years since Timor-Leste became a nation-state, it is now timely to reflect upon where the country has come from, what has been done to build the state—particularly the institutions of the state—and to lay out the direction that nation-state building has taken and will continue to take into the future. This nation-state account is done by way of a narrative, as it comes from an actor's perspective, an actor who is actively involved in driving the state apparatus, charged with legal-rational responsibility to do so'*.

A bright future requires the right processes, initiatives, and steps today, and some international literature in the context of collaborative development in Timor-Leste on the triadic aspects of the importance of local ownership, capacity-building, and international collaboration provide key meaningful pathways for this nation. This study summarizes the sustainability of paths with the consistency of the nation referring to the triadic aspect as a solution from international references for the explorative study of this paper (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre 2004; Tanaka 2002; Ambrose 2022; Hansen et al 2007; McGregor 2007; and International Labor Organization 2008). Thus, such complexities of judicial reform in Timor-Leste which this paper presents the analyses on the problem roots causing the challenges and progress movements of the country faces since gaining independence in 2002 can provide well-motivated and bright hope of how meaningful the triadic aspects in the long term for academics, civilians, scholars, teachers, politicians, law makers, and statesmen in Timor.

Methodology

The methodology of this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the judicial reform process in Timor-Leste, focusing on the problem roots that become the challenges and also strategies for improving the legal system in Timor Leste. Given the complexity of the topic and the context-specific nature of the reforms, a mixed-methods approach for social governance and policy, and democracy nation, from David L Morgan (2017) and Tzagkarakis and Kritas (2023), and also particularly for socio-legal exploratory study (Blackham 2022; Webley 2010) and the analyses based on a methodological debate on legal research overview through supporting international and national literatures, from the Montaigne Centre of Utrecht University School of Law (Langbroek et al 2022); and European Commission Brussels and University of Vienna (Schweighofer et al 2001) was adopted. This methodology combines both qualitative and quantitative research studies to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the issue.

Research Design

This research followed an applied qualitative design with elements of quantitative analysis. The choice of a qualitative approach is driven by the need to explore the deeper, subjective experiences of key stakeholders involved in the judicial reform process, including judges, lawyers, and government officials. Qualitative research allows for in-depth interviews and case studies, providing rich data that reflects the complexities of the judicial reform in Timor-Leste. Furthermore, the incorporation of quantitative data helps

to measure and contextualize the broader trends and patterns related to judicial performance and resource allocation.

Types of Research

The study employs both descriptive and exploratory research methods. Descriptive research was applied to outline the current state of the judicial system in Timor-Leste, focusing on the available resources, infrastructure, and human capital within the judiciary. The exploration of the research delves into understanding the challenges faced by reformers, the impact of external aid, and the feasibility of various strategies for sustainable reform.

Additionally, case study research analyzed specific instances of judicial reform programs, particularly those that have been implemented in the post-independence period. By analyzing these cases in detail, this study concluded insights into what reforms have been successful, the root causes of challenges encountered, and the lessons that can be learned for future initiatives.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study consists of individuals directly involved in the judicial reform process in Timor-Leste. This includes:

Judges and Court Officials: These individuals have direct experience with the day-to-day functioning of the judicial system and the implementation of reforms.

Legal Professionals (Lawyers and Prosecutors): Legal practitioners are critical as they interact with the judiciary regularly and provide insight into how reforms are affecting legal practice.

Government Officials: Policymakers and government agents responsible for overseeing and funding judicial reform programs offered valuable perspectives on the broader goals and strategies of reform efforts.

International Organizations: Representatives from organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank, and NGOs that have supported the reform process through training programs, infrastructure development, and technical assistance have been considered as inputs.

The sampling technique used a purposive sampling, where specific individuals representing this research study. A total of 5 participants have been selected for in-depth interviews from different roles, with a goal of achieving a diverse representation from all relevant groups, reflecting on the pattern and trends analysis. The sample size was thought of as a sufficient data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the reform process while ensuring the data gathered is rich and informative.

Data Collection

Data has been collected through multiple sources of key stakeholders which shown the validity and reliability of the findings:

In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews has been conducted with key stakeholders, including judges, lawyers, policymakers, and representatives of international organizations. The interviews was designed to gather qualitative data on personal experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding the judicial reform process. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility, enabling the researcher to explore themes that arise during the interview while also ensuring that specific topics are covered.

- **Documentary Analysis:** Secondary data was gathered from official documents related to judicial reform initiatives, such as reports from the United Nations, the Timor-Leste government, and international NGOs. These documents provided an understanding of the legal framework, reform goals, and the resources allocated to the judicial system. Additionally, policy papers, reform strategy documents, and judicial performance reviews have been analyzed to gain insights into the progress and challenges faced by the reform efforts.
- **Questionnaires:** To complement the qualitative interviews, a survey has been distributed to a broader group of legal professionals in Timor-Leste. The survey was collected quantitatively on specific aspects of the judicial system, including perceptions of its effectiveness, accessibility, and efficiency. Questions focuses on respondents' experiences with judicial reforms, access to justice, and the impact of the reforms on their work. This has allowed us to quantify the effects of judicial reforms and compare them across different groups.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the judicial reform process.

Qualitative Data Analysis: The qualitative data gathered from interviews combined with the international literature

- **Quantitative Data Analysis:** The analyses concludes trends and patterns in the responses e.g., excel.

The analysis focuses on: Frequency distributions to assess the most common responses to key questions.

- **Literature data (secondary) analysis** to identify potential relevancy from literature discussion between the tendentious of resource allocation and judicial effectiveness.

By combining qualitative and quantitative data, this study aims to provide a significant multifaceted understanding of the judicial reform process in Timor-Leste. The integration of both data types ensures that the findings are both comprehensive and nuanced, capturing both the subjective experiences of key stakeholders.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines for conducting research, ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before interviews and surveys, and participants will be assured that their responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Additionally, the research will respect

local cultural norms and seek to avoid any harm to participants during the data collection process.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study gathered both qualitative insights and quantitative data, providing a comprehensive analysis of judicial reform in Timor-Leste. The findings from this research will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and successes of the reform process and offer practical recommendations for improving the legal system in the country.

Result and Discussion

This research is based on the objective of critically exploring and discussing the outcomes of judicial reform in Timor Leste, with a focus on the progress that has been made, the challenges faced, and the long-term steps needed and expected to advance development in the future. Data from respondents in Timor Leste discussing also the linkage between reform process and collaborative and multi-roles to legal is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Key Representatives Representing the Idea of Reform Process in Collaborative Patter

Key Representatives	Quantity	Reform Process	Collaborative and Multi-Roles Linking to Legal
Judges and Court Officials	2	Judicial System towards Good Governance in the Long Term (Sustainable)	Judge and Court
Government Officials	2	Overseeing, Funding Allocations	Policy Makers and Government Agents
International Organizations	1	training programs, infrastructure development, and technical assistance	NGO, UN, World Bank

Specifically, the analysis of the reform process needs to be observed in a more critical framework with different trends in its function and implementation. Figure 1 shows these trends in the simple presentation, but it is a significant analysis, if we reviewed the literature of Hansen et al (2007), A sustainable Path Process and Progress for Judicial Reform in Timor Leste which has obtained voting as presented in Figure 1.

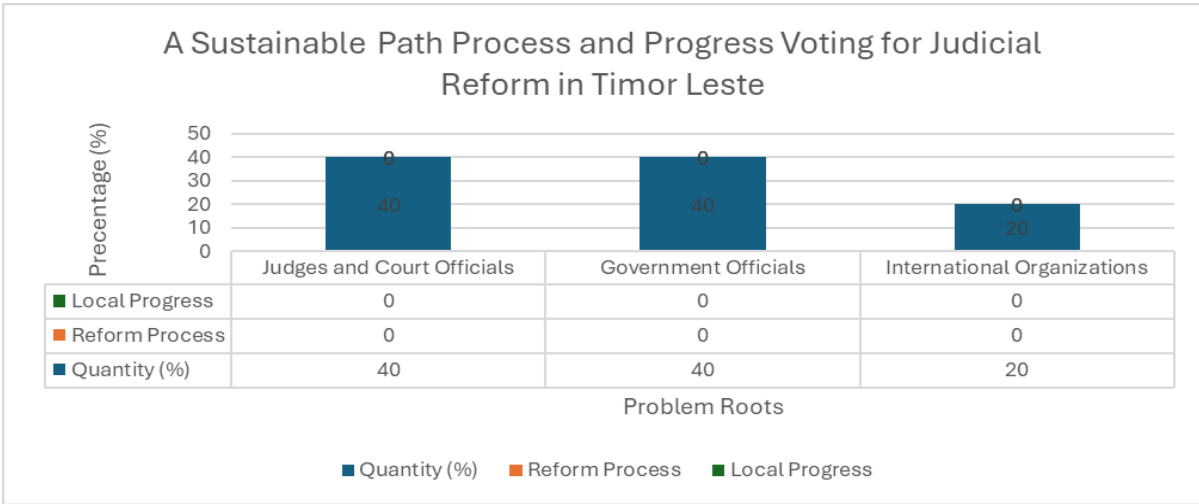


Figure 1. A Sustainable Path Process and Progress Voting for Judicial Reform in Timor Leste

Discussion

The judicial reform process in Timor-Leste has been both challenging and complex, shaped by the country's unique post-conflict context, its limited resources, and its need to create an effective legal system from inconsistency implementation. It can be seen from the Figure 1 above the local progress contains ineffective and inconsistent in the long term, insufficient funding, and lacking resources (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre 2004; Worldbank 2003; UNDP Timor Leste 2025). The development of the judicial system has involved a variety of reform efforts across different sectors, including institutional capacity building, human resource development, access to justice, and the implementation of international best practices. In this section, we explore the key areas of judicial reform in Timor-Leste, analyzing the progress made, the challenges faced, and the lessons learned thus far (confirmed on the data analyses in Table 1 p. 6).

Institutional Development: Building the Foundations of the Judiciary

One of the first priorities of the post-independence government of Timor-Leste was to establish the basic infrastructure and institutions required for a functioning judiciary. This included setting up courts, legal offices, and institutions for training legal professionals, all while working under the constraints of limited financial and human resources.

In the early stages, significant international support was crucial to kick-start the reform process. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) played a vital role in helping to rebuild the judicial system, providing expertise, funding, and logistical support. However, as noted by Moses (2009), the transition from international management to national ownership has proven to be one of the most challenging aspects of institutional development. While UNTAET laid the groundwork, the government of Timor-Leste needed to develop its own institutional framework to ensure the sustainability of judicial reforms. As Moses (2009) observes, "The transition from international to local ownership of the judiciary was essential for the development of a sustainable legal system, but it posed significant challenges, especially in terms of institutional capacity" (Moses, 2009, p. 130).

This process involved not just physical infrastructure but also the creation of legal frameworks to guide judicial processes. For instance, Boege (2011) emphasizes that creating new laws and regulations was necessary to adapt the judicial system to the country's cultural and social context. "Timor-Leste's judicial reforms had to incorporate traditional norms and practices, especially in rural areas, to ensure the acceptance of the new legal framework" (Boege, 2011, p. 80). In this sense, judicial reform in Timor-Leste was not just about adopting Western legal principles but about developing a system that was both modern and relevant to Timorese society.

Human Resource Development: Training and Capacity Building

One of the most significant challenges in Timor-Leste's judicial reform process has been the development of human capital. The country faced a severe shortage of trained legal professionals, including judges, lawyers, and court staff. Boege (2011) identifies this as a primary obstacle, noting that "The absence of skilled legal professionals and the lack of a formal legal education system were major barriers to effective judicial functioning" (Boege, 2011, p. 68).

International assistance in the form of training programs, scholarships, and workshops has been critical in addressing this gap. For example, the UNDP has partnered with local universities and international organizations to provide training for legal professionals. However, despite these efforts, Cohen (2014) highlights that the judicial system still struggles with a lack of local capacity. "While training programs have improved the capacity of judges and lawyers, many of these professionals are still underpaid and overworked, which leads to a high turnover rate" (Cohen, 2014, p. 53).

Moreover, the salary disparity between Timorese legal professionals and their counterparts in other countries has led to the migration of trained individuals seeking better opportunities abroad. This issue has been compounded by the government's inability to offer competitive wages, which limits the retention of skilled personnel. As Fagan (2012) notes, "Without significant investment in human resources, the judicial system remains vulnerable to the loss of talent, hindering long-term reform efforts" (Fagan, 2012, p. 235).

In light of these challenges, there is a growing recognition that the government of Timor-Leste must prioritize the creation of a sustainable legal education system. By investing in local legal education institutions and offering incentives for professionals to stay in Timor-Leste, the government can help ensure a more stable and self-sufficient judiciary in the long term.

Access to Justice: Overcoming Geographic and Social Barriers

Access to justice remains a central concern in the judicial reform process, particularly in rural areas. While significant progress has been made in Dili, the capital, rural areas continue to face substantial challenges in accessing legal services. Cohen (2014) points out that "The centralization of legal services in Dili has created significant disparities in access to justice for rural populations" (Cohen, 2014, p. 46). In rural areas, citizens are often forced to travel long distances to reach the nearest court, a journey that can be both financially and physically prohibitive.

To address this issue, the government has experimented with mobile courts—temporary legal stations set up in rural areas to offer judicial services. While this initiative has shown promise, Boege (2011) notes that mobile courts are still limited in terms of frequency and coverage. "Although mobile courts have made justice more accessible to rural communities, their scope remains limited, and many people still find it difficult to access the legal system" (Boege, 2011, p. 72).

Beyond geographic barriers, there are also social barriers that prevent marginalized groups from accessing justice. Women, in particular, face significant obstacles in navigating the formal legal system. Fagan (2012) argues that "The legal system has been slow to address gender-based violence and discrimination, leaving many women without adequate legal protection" (Fagan, 2012, p. 231). The social stigma surrounding women's involvement in legal processes and the lack of awareness about legal rights further hinder their access to justice. This is compounded by the scarcity of women in the judiciary, which results in a lack of gender-sensitive legal frameworks.

To overcome these barriers, there has been an increasing push for gender-sensitive reforms that focus on empowering women to access legal services. This includes the creation of special legal services for women, gender-based violence awareness campaigns, and training programs for legal professionals to better address the needs of women.

The Role of International Partnerships in Judicial Reform

International partnerships have played a crucial role in the judicial reform process, particularly in the early stages. Organizations such as the UNDP, the World Bank, and the European Union have provided essential funding and technical expertise to support the reform process. Fagan (2012) highlights the importance of these partnerships, stating that "International support has been vital in providing the technical expertise and funding necessary for the reconstruction of the legal system" (Fagan, 2012, p. 237).

However, while international assistance has been crucial, there is a growing recognition that Timor-Leste must eventually assume greater responsibility for its judicial system. Moses (2009) underscores this point, noting that "The sustainability of judicial reform efforts in Timor-Leste will depend on the country's ability to take ownership of the reform process and develop local expertise" (Moses, 2009, p. 133).

Moving forward, the challenge will be to balance international support with the development of local capacity. Cohen (2014) suggests that "International organizations should focus on building local capacity rather than providing short-term solutions" (Cohen, 2014, p. 52). This will ensure that the reforms are not only effective in the short term but can be sustained and adapted to local needs in the long run.

In summary, the development of the judicial system in Timor-Leste has been a complex and multifaceted process. While significant progress has been made in areas such as institutional development, human resource capacity, and access to justice, challenges remain. Resource constraints, geographic disparities, and social barriers continue to impede the full realization of an effective and inclusive judicial system. Nonetheless, international partnerships have played a crucial role in supporting the reform process, and the focus must now shift towards strengthening local capacity to ensure sustainable reform in the future.

The lessons learned from the judicial reform process in Timor-Leste offer valuable insights for other post-conflict countries facing similar challenges. It is clear that judicial reform is not only about creating legal institutions but also about ensuring that those

institutions are accessible, equitable, and capable of serving the needs of all citizens development.

In this section, we aim to interpret and critically analyze the data collected during the research, providing an in-depth understanding of the judicial reform process in Timor-Leste. The analysis addresses the key themes identified from the interviews, surveys, and secondary data sources, which include the dependency on external support, human resource shortages, challenges in accessing justice, public trust in the judiciary, and the role of international support. The findings highlight both the achievements and persistent barriers in the ongoing reform process, as well as the underlying causes of these challenges.

Dependency on External Support: A Double-Edged Sword

A significant finding from the analysis is the ongoing dependency of Timor-Leste's judicial system on external support, despite the substantial progress made in building institutional infrastructure. This reliance on foreign aid, although crucial in the early stages of reform, is seen as a barrier to the long-term sustainability of the judicial system. Many legal professionals, judges, and government officials interviewed expressed concern that the continued presence of international advisors and technical assistance undermines the development of local capacity.

While external support is essential for initial capacity building, it has created a situation where key decisions and judicial functions are heavily influenced by international actors. Moses (2009) notes that "Sustained judicial reform requires the active participation and leadership of local institutions," emphasizing that for reforms to be durable, Timor-Leste must cultivate a more self-reliant judicial system. The data collected during this research aligns with Moses' view, as many respondents noted that although international support helped establish the legal framework and training systems, there remains a lack of local ownership, which inhibits the judiciary's ability to function autonomously.

Human Resource Challenges: The Need for Specialized Training and Retention

Another recurring theme in the analysis is the shortage of qualified human resources within the judiciary. Despite efforts by international organizations such as the UNDP to provide training programs, there remains a significant gap in the specialized legal skills required to address the evolving needs of Timor-Leste's judicial system. Many judges and legal professionals interviewed expressed that the initial training they received was valuable, but it did not provide adequate preparation for more complex legal cases, such as those related to human rights, international criminal law, and commercial law.

The issue of specialized training is compounded by the low retention rate of legal professionals within the country. As highlighted by Cohen (2014), "The emigration of skilled professionals to better opportunities abroad presents a serious challenge to judicial reform." The research found that many trained legal professionals leave Timor-Leste in search of higher salaries and better career prospects, leading to a "brain drain" effect. This

shortage of qualified legal professionals further weakens the ability of the judicial system to meet the demands of a growing and evolving legal landscape.

Additionally, Fagan (2012) argues that “Continuous professional development is critical to ensuring that the judiciary remains capable of addressing new and complex legal issues.” Our findings confirm this, as many respondents noted that ongoing training opportunities are scarce, particularly in specialized areas of law. The lack of investment in judicial education, along with the high turnover rate, continues to impede the long-term effectiveness of the judiciary.

Geographic and Socioeconomic Barriers to Accessing Justice

Access to justice is a central issue for many citizens, particularly those living in rural areas. Our analysis of the data shows a significant disparity in access to legal services between urban and rural populations. Respondents from rural districts expressed frustration over the lack of infrastructure, transportation, and legal representation available in their regions. As noted by Moses (2009), “Geographic isolation is a significant barrier to accessing justice in rural areas, where court services are sporadic at best.”

The introduction of mobile courts has attempted to address this issue, but the research found that mobile court services are often irregular and insufficient to meet the needs of rural populations. Additionally, the costs associated with traveling to urban centers for legal assistance further prevent marginalized groups, including women, from accessing justice. Boege (2011) argues that “Mobile courts are not a permanent solution to the problem of geographic disparities in legal access,” a point that was echoed by respondents who noted the limitations of mobile court services in terms of coverage and frequency.

Moreover, the research revealed that socioeconomic factors also play a significant role in preventing people from accessing justice. Vulnerable groups, particularly women and the poor, often face additional challenges when trying to report cases of violence or seek legal redress. As Fagan (2012) notes, “In Timor-Leste, the legal system is often inaccessible to marginalized groups due to social and economic factors, such as the high costs of legal services and societal pressures to avoid formal legal proceedings.” Our study found that women in rural areas, in particular, are hesitant to engage with the judicial system due to fear of social stigma and a lack of support from local communities.

Public Trust and Transparency: Rebuilding Confidence in the Judiciary

Public trust in the judiciary remains a significant challenge. Many respondents expressed concerns about the efficiency, transparency, and perceived corruption within the legal system. This is particularly evident in rural areas, where citizens feel that the judiciary is slow, inefficient, and often influenced by political or economic interests. Boege (2011) emphasizes that “Trust in the judiciary is fundamental to the rule of law,” and the lack of confidence in Timor-Leste’s judiciary is a significant obstacle to achieving effective reform (Boege 2011; Cohen, 2014; Grenfell, 2013; McGregor, 2007; Schweighofer et al.,

2001; Langbroek et al., 2022; UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2004; Veronica, 2014; Webley, 2010; World Bank, 2003).

Our research corroborates this concern, with many respondents noting that delays in court cases and a lack of communication from judicial officers contribute to a growing sense of disillusionment. As Cohen (2014) highlights, “Transparency in judicial proceedings and clear communication with the public are essential for rebuilding trust.” The findings suggest that the judiciary in Timor-Leste needs to adopt more transparent practices, such as publishing case statuses and improving access to information about judicial processes. Additionally, there is a strong call for reforms that would increase accountability and reduce the perception of corruption within the courts.

The Role of International Support: Challenges and Opportunities

International support has been vital in the reform process, providing technical assistance, funding, and expertise to help build the legal infrastructure in Timor-Leste. However, the research indicates that while international aid has been crucial, it also comes with challenges. Many respondents pointed out that continued reliance on foreign support has hindered the development of a self-sustaining judiciary. As Boege (2011) argues, “For judicial reforms to be successful in the long term, local institutions must take ownership of the process.” Our data suggests that international actors should gradually transition their roles from direct involvement in judicial processes to providing support in capacity-building and training local personnel.

Moreover, while the international community’s involvement has been essential, there is growing recognition that Timor-Leste must now take a more active role in shaping its judicial future. This shift requires a focused effort to develop local legal expertise, build institutional capacity, and ensure that the judiciary operates independently of foreign influence.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals that while Timor-Leste has made significant strides in judicial reform, challenges such as dependency on external support, human resource shortages, limited access to justice, and low public trust continue to impede the success of the reform process. The research suggests that for reforms to be sustainable, the government must prioritize local capacity-building, increase transparency, and address the socioeconomic barriers that prevent vulnerable populations from accessing justice. Furthermore, a more gradual transition towards local leadership in judicial reforms will help reduce dependency on external actors, ensuring the long-term success of the judiciary in Timor-Leste.

Conclusion

The judicial reform process in Timor-Leste has been a remarkable journey of progress, but problems still remain roots that hinder the development of a fully independent and sustainable judicial system in the nation. The analysis of this research has revealed several factors that influence the judicial reform, including continued dependency on international support, the shortage of skilled legal professionals, unequal access to justice, lack of public trust, and the influence of international aid. These are fundamentally reasoned by the ineffective and inconsistent in the long term, insufficient funding, and lacking resources (See Table 1 p. 6 and Figure 1 p. 7). These factors point to both obstacles and opportunities for future improvement.

- **Dependency on External Support: Challenges for Sustainability**

The dependency on international support remains one of the key challenges in the judicial reform process. While international aid has been crucial in the initial stages, providing essential financial support and capacity-building efforts, it has also created a dependency that risks undermining the long-term sustainability of the judicial system. As Moses (2009) argues, "Sustained judicial reform requires local ownership and leadership," indicating that while international support is valuable, it should gradually shift toward capacity-building and away from direct intervention. This research suggests that Timor-Leste must move towards greater local ownership of the reform process. International actors should focus on providing technical expertise and training, while local institutions should take on the responsibility of managing and implementing reforms.

- **Human Resource Challenges: Training, Retention, and Specialization**

The shortage of qualified legal professionals, such as judges and lawyers, has consistently emerged as a significant barrier to an effective judicial system in Timor-Leste. Despite efforts to train legal professionals through international programs, the judiciary still lacks sufficient expertise in critical legal areas, such as international law, human rights, and commercial law. According to Cohen (2014), "The emigration of skilled professionals poses a significant barrier to the development of a strong, self-reliant judiciary." This "brain drain" exacerbates the issue, as many of the country's most qualified legal professionals seek better opportunities abroad. To address this, the government of Timor-Leste must improve retention strategies by offering better salaries, career development opportunities, and work conditions to keep skilled professionals within the country. Moreover, as Moses (2009) highlights, specialized legal training must be continually updated to ensure that the judiciary can meet evolving legal challenges.

- **Access to Justice: Geographic and Socioeconomic Barriers**

Access to justice remains a significant challenge, especially for rural populations. Many individuals in remote areas struggle with long distances, inadequate infrastructure, and high costs, which prevent them from accessing judicial services. According to Fagan (2012), "Access to justice must be considered from the standpoint of not only proximity but also affordability." The study found that although mobile courts have

been introduced, they are often insufficient to meet the needs of those in rural areas. There is a need for a comprehensive approach that includes expanding mobile court services, establishing local legal aid offices, and improving transportation infrastructure to ensure that people in remote areas can access justice without undue burden.

Additionally, vulnerable groups, particularly women, face even greater challenges. As noted by Smith (2016), "Gender-based barriers to justice are not merely procedural, but are rooted in deep societal norms and inequalities." These societal pressures, combined with limited legal knowledge, often deter women from seeking justice for issues like domestic violence. The judiciary must implement gender-sensitive measures and promote access to justice for marginalized communities to overcome these barriers.

- **Public Trust and Transparency: Restoring Confidence in the Judiciary**

Public trust in the judiciary is essential for its functioning and legitimacy. However, the research indicates that many citizens, particularly in rural areas, express low confidence in the judicial system. The lack of transparency, delayed case resolutions, and perceived corruption contribute to this distrust. Fagan (2012) states, "Trust in the judiciary hinges on transparency and accountability," underlining the need for clear communication and public outreach. The study found that increasing transparency—such as publishing court decisions, offering clear explanations of the judicial process, and providing timely case updates—could help rebuild public confidence. Moreover, anti-corruption efforts should be reinforced to ensure that the judiciary remains impartial and fair, as Cohen (2014) argues, "Corruption weakens judicial credibility and undermines its effectiveness."

- **The Role of International Aid: Transitioning to Local Ownership**

International aid has played an essential role in the judicial reform process in Timor-Leste. However, the research suggests that a gradual shift towards local ownership is necessary for the sustainability of these reforms. International organizations, such as the United Nations, have provided significant support, but as Moses (2009) explains, "Sustained reform must come from within, driven by local actors who understand the cultural and societal context." While international support remains valuable, it must evolve to a more advisory and capacity-building role rather than continuing to play a leading role in reform efforts. Local institutions, such as Timor-Leste's judiciary and government, must gradually assume greater responsibility for the reform process to ensure that reforms are contextually appropriate and sustainable.

Based on the findings, several actionable recommendations are made for improving Timor-Leste's judicial system:

- **Building Local Capacity:** Invest in continuous professional development for judges and legal professionals, particularly in specialized areas of law. As Moses (2009) suggests, "The development of local expertise is essential for a sustainable judicial system." The government should also focus on retaining skilled professionals by offering career incentives and improved working conditions.

- Improving Access to Justice: Expand mobile court services to reach remote areas and create more legal aid centers in underserved regions. Efforts should also be made to reduce costs associated with legal proceedings, making justice more accessible for low-income populations. Fagan (2012) emphasizes the need for equitable access to legal resources, stating that “Affordable legal services are a cornerstone of an effective judiciary.”
- Enhancing Transparency and Accountability: Strengthen measures to combat corruption and increase the transparency of judicial processes. This includes publishing case outcomes, improving communication with the public, and ensuring that citizens can easily navigate the judicial system. As Cohen (2014) argues, transparency in the judicial process fosters trust and accountability.
- Encouraging Local Ownership of Reforms: Timor-Leste should gradually assume greater responsibility for judicial reforms, ensuring that local institutions, rather than external actors, drive the reform agenda. Moses (2009) advocates for local leadership in judicial reforms, noting that “Reform must be rooted in local institutions, not in the agendas of external actors.”
- Addressing Gender and Social Barriers: Implement measures to ensure equal access to justice for women and other marginalized groups, particularly in rural areas. Gender-sensitive policies and community outreach programs are necessary to reduce societal barriers that prevent vulnerable groups from seeking legal redress. Smith (2016) underscores the importance of “creating a legal environment where all citizens, regardless of gender or social standing, feel empowered to seek justice.”

Outlook:

In conclusion, while Timor-Leste has made significant progress in its judicial reform journey, it still faces numerous challenges in creating a fully independent, effective, and accessible judicial system. The analysis reveals that the country’s dependency on international support, the lack of skilled legal professionals, the barriers to justice faced by rural populations, and the low public trust in the judiciary are the primary obstacles to success.

However, by implementing the recommendations above—such as enhancing local capacity, improving access to justice, increasing transparency, and reducing dependency on external aid—Timor-Leste can build a more robust judicial system. As Moses (2009) rightly points out, “True reform must come from within.” If these efforts are implemented effectively, Timor-Leste’s judicial system will not only be able to meet the needs of its citizens but also contribute to the consolidation of the rule of law and democracy in the country.

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