

Timor-Leste: Justice Sector Information Management Reform



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QUICK FACTS

Country Background

After a hard fought independence was achieved in 2002, Timor-Leste - with the assistance of the international community - committed to rebuilding infrastructure, growing the economy and building civil society. Increasing access to justice by improving justice sector information systems was a priority.

Challenges

- Reduce court backlogs
- Transform paper-based system to electronic
- Enhance access to justice sector information
- Enable cross-agency information sharing

Solution

 xFact developed a custom solution that is:

- Open source & standards-based
- Sustainable
- Based upon local practices and requirements
- Able to be integrated across agencies

Results

- Reduced backlog
- Ability to make data-driven decisions
- Sector integration
- Good governance

BACKGROUND

Inefficiency and Backlogs Eroding Trust in the System

As Timor Leste emerged from its struggle for independence, among the government's primary goals were to strengthen the operations of public institutions, rebuild critical infrastructure and foster civil society. The justice sector, in particular, was the focus of targeted reform efforts. Studies by the Judicial System Monitoring Programme in Timor-Leste and the U.S. State Department showed that the lack of systems to track, monitor, and organize information resulted in operational management issues and a backlog of thousands of criminal cases. The government of Timor-Leste was concerned that justice was not being served, while the delays and lack of accountability led to low public confidence in the justice system among Timorese citizens and a feeling of impunity among Timorese public sector employees.

CHALLENGES

Create Systems for Access to Justice

The Timor-Leste Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) sought a solution to the challenges facing the institution; including an inability to gather key performance indicators and a historical backlog of several thousand cases. While the size of the backlog was estimated at over 5,000 cases, there was difficulty even determining the extent of the problem due to a lack of effective case management systems that tracked, organized, or even collected information about court activity and outcomes.

Paper-based and inefficient legacy systems affected not only the operations of the OPG, but also the justice sector in general, as the inability to store and manage information meant that information sharing between agencies was virtually non-existent.

SOLUTION

Custom Case Management Systems & Integrated Justice Model

Under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), and working with partners from the Institute for Justice Sector Development, xFact developed a custom case management solution for the OPG that became a model replicated throughout the Timor-Leste justice sector (i.e. National Police, Public Defender's Office, Prison System, Courts). Together, the case management systems support an integrated justice model, allowing each agency to share information across the sector. Now, district prosecutors, judicial clerks and others have instantaneous access to the same case information across Timor-Leste; and soon police officers, prosecutors, public defenders, judges and corrections officials will have the ability to record, manage, and track cases throughout the judicial process.

Systems that Reflect the Local Way of Doing Business

xFact and its partners gathered input from users and experts on the ground to ensure that each system reflects not only of the laws of Timor-Leste, but also the way each agency's internal processes work. The result is a highly localized system that is easy to train, intuitive to use, and has been adopted rapidly by its intended users.

Sustainable, Open Source, and Standards-Based

Sustainability and local ownership were critical aspects of the project. Each system was developed according to the following overarching guidelines:

- Build systems using open source, standards-based software
- Provide full ownership of the system to Timor-Leste
- Work closely with users to ensure an intuitive and accurate system
- Build capacity in system owners to use and adapt the system
- Construct systems with the ability for complete integration to support integrated justice model

RESULTS

Increased Accountability, Access, and Operational Efficiency

Once implemented, the OPG saw a rapid decline in the number of backlogged cases, increasing Timor-Leste citizens' participation and confidence in the justice system. Also, automatic assignment of cases supported equal justice by removing any question of favorable assignments of prosecutors or judges. In addition, flexible tools built into the system increase operational efficiency by giving users the ability to generate custom forms and reports detailing activity, performance and outcomes within the court system.

Successful Adoption & Growth

The system had been greeted with enthusiasm by users and political decision-makers alike. Intuitive systems with detailed and accurate fields reflect the

type of information police and prosecutors gather about criminal cases and the way cases are prepared. Also, users have expressed appreciation that the systems reflect their existing processes and workflows, encouraging efficiency and making it easier to track progress on a case. While police and prosecutors have received various trainings in conducting investigations and cases, this was the first time they were given tangible tools to accomplish the duties of their profession.

After the success of the initial OPG installation, the Timor-Leste government decided to extend the OPG approach to all sector institutions. The expansion of the projects establishes the integrated justice approach and when the projects are completed, all agencies in Timor-Leste will be able to share information across the justice sector to facilitate processes, reduce errors, and manage business more efficiently and effectively.

Civil Society

Soon after implementation, the OPG case management system was demonstrated to local NGOs and civil society groups. The reception was extremely positive as the system made it possible for victims and accused persons to obtain information about case status, timetables, judgments, and other relevant information – which was previously difficult to obtain. Civil society organizations are now active proponents of the integrated justice solution, in addition to the proponents from within the system who have seen the case management systems make their jobs easier.

CONCLUSION

Timor-Leste was the first new sovereign state of the 21st century, and is quickly assuming a position as a leader in 21st century integrated justice solutions. With help from the solution provider xFact and funding from the UNDP and AusAID, Timor-Leste has managed a case backload that was growing out of control, instituted new systems to efficiently and fairly administer justice functions, and created an environment in which all of its justice agencies can seamlessly share information.