



Justice Action Coalition Catalytic Fund

Highlights of the Catalytic Fund Projects

Introduction

People Centred Justice Catalytic Fund is strategic workstream on the Justice Action Coalition established in line with in the JAC Declaration that was adopted at the Ministerial-Level Meeting in June 2023 with a focus of translating the high-level ambitions into concrete country level support.

Anchored in the JAC vision to close the justice gap and leave no one behind, UNDP leads the JAC workstream on ‘Strategy, Programming and Innovation’ and implements the JAC Catalytic Fund on People-Centred Justice, supporting countries in the co-creation and implementation of demand-driven strategies for people-centred justice reforms and initiatives at the national level and broker access to international expertise, partnerships, and financial support

In 2024, UNDP’s efforts focused on establishing the foundations for implementation and building momentum for people-centred initiatives in six countries: *Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe and Sierra Leone*. In each context, the interventions were designed to improve access to justice through formal and informal mechanisms, with a focus on civil, family, land and small claims disputes that

disproportionately affect women, youth and other marginalized groups. In 2025, the interventions expanded from six to nine country engagements, with new projects in *Ethiopia, Malawi and Saint Kitts and Nevis*. Project implementation is accompanied by a peer-to-peer learning and exchange platform that has matured into a practical engine to build and strengthen evidence, safeguards, and partnerships.

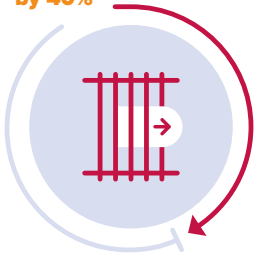
This document presents a compilation of justice reform initiatives, pilots, and people-centered solutions supported by the JAC Catalytic Fund. Through legal empowerment, digitization, community-based models, and data-driven reform, these initiatives illustrate how inclusive justice systems can advance equality, human rights, and sustainable development. They also demonstrate how catalytic, small-scale interventions can generate outsized impact and transferable learning. Together, they provide policymakers, practitioners, and partners with tested approaches to reimagine justice delivery with a people centred lens, promote institutional transformation, and replicate successful reforms in other countries pursuing equitable and accessible justice for all.

Sierra Leone

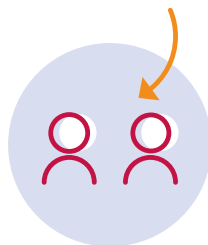
The *Enhancing Access to Justice for Vulnerable Groups* project in Sierra Leone aims to **strengthen the capacity of the Legal Aid Board and civil society organizations to provide people-centred, gender-responsive justice services**. It focuses on women, girls, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized populations affected by sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary detention, and human rights violations. Through mobile legal clinics, prison court sittings, community legal education, and advocacy platforms, the project supports legal empowerment, promotes human rights, and ensures accessible, timely justice for those often excluded from the formal system.

In Sierra Leone, systemic barriers such as lengthy judicial processes, limited legal literacy, and social stigma continue to **deny vulnerable people fair access to justice**. Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, in particular, face financial, procedural, and cultural obstacles in pursuing justice. By addressing these root causes and promoting a people-centred approach, this project strengthens accountability, restores trust in justice institutions, and advances gender equality and human rights.

Reduced prison overcrowding by 40%



Raising awareness among 2,050 citizens



So far, the catalytic support in Sierra Leone has **reduced prison overcrowding by 40%** across ten correctional centers and **secured freedom for over 1,287 inmates**. Through prison court sittings, **2,538 cases were reviewed**, many involving arbitrary or prolonged detention, ensuring that justice reached those forgotten by the system. Mobile legal aid clinics extended protection to remote communities, raising awareness among **2,050 citizens** (1,093 men and 957 women) on women's rights, child marriage, SGBV, and land ownership. These sessions revealed the high demand for justice services, with **61 SGBV cases reported** in a single community dialogue.

Behind the numbers are stories of transformation: Hawa, a 17-year-old survivor of rape, received legal aid that led to the **first-ever conviction** in her chiefdom. Today, she **mentors over 800 peers** on SGBV prevention, showing how survivors can drive community-wide change when justice works for and with them.



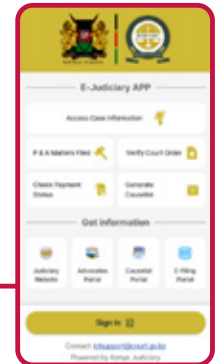
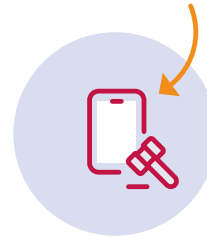
This initiative offers a **scalable model for community-driven, people-centred justice** reform. Its combination of mobile legal clinics, paralegal networks, prison court reviews, and survivor-focused support demonstrates how justice systems can become more accessible, inclusive, and effective. Lessons from Sierra Leone's experience can guide similar reforms elsewhere, particularly in countries grappling with rural exclusion, weak legal aid systems, or gender-based injustices. The project's integrated approach, linking community-level empowerment with policy advocacy, provides a practical framework for strengthening rule of law and accelerating progress toward global justice goals.



The *Supporting Access to Justice for All* project in Kenya **strengthens community-level and digital justice systems** by enhancing the capacity of legal aid providers, court users' committees, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. It focuses on expanding access to justice for marginalized groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, through legal awareness campaigns, paralegal training, digital services and institutional reforms. By fostering collaboration between formal and informal justice actors, the project promotes people-centred, inclusive, and gender-responsive justice delivery across Kenya's counties.

Despite progressive legal frameworks, **many Kenyans**—particularly those in rural or marginalized areas—**still face barriers to justice** due to cost, distance, limited awareness, and social discrimination. This project helps bridge the gap between the promise of rights and the reality of access by empowering communities to understand and claim their legal entitlements. It strengthens institutional responsiveness and trust in the justice system, contributing to social cohesion and accountability.

E-Judiciary Mobile App over 6,000 downloads



So far, the catalytic intervention has **enabled the development of a digital app for the Small Claims Courts**, transforming how citizens engage with the judiciary. The **E-Judiciary Mobile App**, now with **over 6,000 downloads**, allows users to file cases, track rulings, verify judgments, and even attend hearings remotely. Since its launch, **2,456 cases have been filed online, 3,720 mapping requests submitted, and 4,518 judgments verified**, significantly improving transparency and efficiency. These innovations are **reducing costs and travel burdens** for low-income users—especially women-led microenterprises—while building confidence in the justice system. The app directly tackles the judiciary's historical backlog of **over 276,000 cases**, marking a crucial step toward a faster, more accessible justice system, even as only 40% of courts are yet digitally equipped.

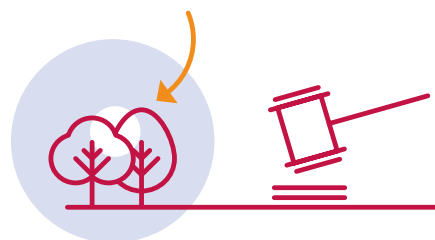
Kenya's experience offers valuable lessons for countries seeking to **localize and digitalize justice delivery while maintaining national standards**. Its community paralegal model, integration of informal dispute resolution with formal institutions, and people-centred digital tools illustrate practical pathways to make justice accessible and sustainable. The project demonstrates how partnerships between government, civil society, and communities can drive systemic change.



The *Supporting the Roll-out of the Agrarian and Rural Jurisdiction* project in Colombia assists the government in implementing a new justice mechanism created under the 2016 Peace Agreement to **resolve land-related conflicts and guarantee access to justice for rural populations**. It supports the Ministry of Justice in designing and facilitating inclusive consultations, developing pedagogical tools, and strengthening the capacities of newly appointed agrarian judges. The project prioritizes gender, ethnic, and territorial approaches to ensure the participation and empowerment of rural women, Indigenous peoples, and other groups historically excluded from justice.

Land use and tenure disputes lie at the heart of Colombia's long-standing inequality and armed conflict. Many rural communities still lack effective access to justice, with limited institutional presence and deeply rooted social and gender disparities. The Agrarian and Rural Jurisdiction (JAR) is therefore a cornerstone for peacebuilding and rural transformation, providing timely, people-centred mechanisms for **resolving land conflicts and rebuilding trust** between citizens and the State. By addressing structural barriers and incorporating human rights and gender equality, the project contributes directly to reconciliation, inclusion, and the realization of the 2016 Peace Accord's vision of rural justice.

Empowering rural communities



Colombia's experience offers a valuable model for countries seeking to **link justice reform, peacebuilding, and land governance**. The project's participatory design process, its integration of formal and customary systems, and its emphasis on differential and gender-sensitive approaches demonstrate how justice institutions can become more inclusive and responsive to local realities. The project's methodological and pedagogical innovations such as virtual courses, multimedia tools, and community-led training show practical ways to democratize access to justice. Lessons from this initiative can inspire people-centred, context-specific justice solutions to similar across post-conflict and rural settings globally.



Dominican Republic

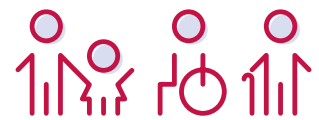
The project “Justice of the Future for Sustainable Human Development: Evidence for Person-Centered Action in the Dominican Republic” supports the Dominican Republic’s judiciary in its ongoing **institutional transformation toward more inclusive, data-driven, and people-centred justice**. It focuses on scaling up innovations in case management, developing future-justice indicators, and implementing the newly approved Protocol and Guide for Dignified Treatment to improve access to justice for women, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people. The initiative strengthens judicial capacities to anticipate conflicts, enhance service delivery, and make justice more accessible and dignified for all.

Justice institutions play a critical role in **preventing social tensions and ensuring trust** in times of uncertainty. In the Dominican Republic, persistent inequality, gender-based violence, and barriers faced by marginalized communities continue to undermine access to justice. By promoting procedural fairness, inclusive digitization, and dignified treatment, this project directly tackles those gaps. It empowers citizens to exercise their rights, supports judicial operators in adopting people-centred practices, and strengthens the judiciary’s ability to use evidence for better decision-making. Ultimately, it positions justice as a driver of human development and resilience within broader national reform efforts.

So far, the project has developed **66 new indicators** and a **data collection model** to go beyond administrative data and measure how people live, perceive, and access justice. This evidence is enabling the judiciary to **identify justice gaps and barriers** faced by women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, guiding inclusive policymaking and strengthening governance. Additionally, the project is **making court infrastructure disability-inclusive**, ensuring that persons with disabilities—whether litigants, lawyers, witnesses, or citizens—can access buildings and proceedings with dignity.

The Dominican Republic’s experience demonstrates how **digital innovation, human rights, and data can converge to transform justice systems**. Its approach to developing future-justice indicators, embedding inclusive design, and implementing dignity-based protocols offers practical lessons for countries seeking to make justice more equitable and responsive. By documenting and systematizing results, the project will generate adaptable models that can inform similar justice reforms across Latin America and beyond.

People-centered,
evidence-based model
of justice



São Tomé and Príncipe

The *Proximity Justice: Bringing Justice Closer to the People Project* aims to expand people-centred, gender-responsive justice by **pairing mobile justice units with strengthened alternative dispute resolution (ADR)** in civil and family matters, and by building the **capacities of civil society and frontline justice operators**. In practice, this means reviewing and updating the ADR framework, deploying mobile outreach to underserved communities, and delivering two complementary trainings so that institutions respond more effectively to people's needs, especially those furthest from services.

Many residents, particularly in remote districts face long travel times and costs to reach justice institutions, which can discourage reporting and resolution of disputes. By **bringing services closer to people** and strengthening coordination between state institutions and community actors, the project supports earlier, safer pathways to remedy and helps ensure that women, children, and other at-risk groups can exercise their rights. The design is explicitly people-centred, informed by recent assessments and consultations, and aligned with UN partners to complement ongoing work and avoid duplication.

Catalytic actions have **created strong foundations**. Inter-agency alignment refined outputs toward capacity-building for CSOs and an inter-institutional training track, reinforcing coherence with partners and local ownership. Training content has been prepared to standardize ethical referrals, survivor-sensitive practice, and coordinated responses across justice, health, and social services. A South-South peer exchange to Cabo Verde surfaced transferable practices on mediation models, coordinated protection pathways, and digital justice information systems relevant to small-island contexts.

This pilot offers a **practical pathway to embed people-centred justice at both service and policy levels**. By pairing mobile justice outreach with strengthened ADR, it meets people where they are while creating fair, predictable routes to resolve disputes. Partnerships between CSOs and public institutions build a shared response that is easier for people to navigate and more accountable. A sequenced policy track modernizes ADR step by step, drawing on peer learning and evidence from the field. The peer exchange with Cabo Verde showed how mediation institutions can be adapted, how protection flows can be coordinated across agencies, and how justice information can be digitized, offering options that other island and remote settings can tailor.



Bringing services
closer to people



The *Strengthening equitable access to fair justice for All Project* aims to enhance people-centred legal aid by completing a comprehensive review of the current scheme, developing a gender-responsive Legal Aid Policy, and building the capacities and coordination mechanisms needed for fair, accessible services. The initiative led by the Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration is designed to align policy reform, stakeholder consultations, and training with **practical improvements on how people seek and receive support**.

This work will drive meaningful change because Samoa has placed people-centred justice at the heart of its access to justice vision, with a strong emphasis on protecting women, children, and other vulnerable groups. **Advancing a people-centred legal aid** system supports these priorities by making remedies more reachable and user-friendly, while complementing existing services and strengthening public trust. The approach is rights-based and inclusive so that policy and practice reflect how people navigate justice processes.



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The project has largely delivered the core review and consultation process for the Legal Aid Programme, advanced the drafting and validation pathway for a Gender-Responsive Legal Aid Policy, and initiated the planned capacity-strengthening for operators and service providers. These advances keep the initiative on track on **supporting equitable and people-centred access to assistance**.

The pilot is designed to generate **practical learning for Samoa and other small island developing states**. Knowledge products and a possible national policy dialogue will capture what works and why, with opportunities to share insights across the Pacific Region. It will also distill policy-level lessons on applying a people-centred justice approach, including how participatory reviews and consultations feed into a gender-responsive Legal Aid Policy, how evidence from user journeys informs provisions and implementation arrangements, and how validation through national processes supports adoption and sustained delivery that is rights-based, inclusive, and locally owned.

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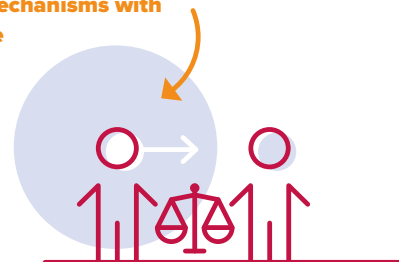




The *Strengthening People-Centered Justice Project* in Ethiopia aims to **increase community access to justice** by supporting Community Justice Centers, aligning customary dispute resolution with human rights standards, and building practical links with the formal system. Led by the Ministry of Justice and implemented by the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiIL) and Destiny Ethiopia, the project combines assessments, training, dialogue platforms, and a co-developed scale-up and financing plan. Early work will focus on evidence from Afar, Sidama, and Addis Ababa to inform people-centred improvements that can be owned and sustained by national and regional institutions.

This project is of great importance as Ethiopia has a **strong tradition of community-based justice** that people trust and use frequently, especially in rural areas. The Government's Justice Sector Transformational Plan recognizes this value and seeks to enhance access by supporting community justice alongside formal institutions. A people-centred approach helps bring the two closer together in ways that are rights-based and inclusive, with participation, local ownership, and accountability guiding delivery.

Generate learning that other countries can adapt when linking customary mechanisms with formal justice



Although newly launched, the intervention is structured to deliver early, practical outputs that show **progress in people's journeys to justice**. Planned results include CJC effectiveness assessments and citizen experience surveys in Afar, Sidama, and Addis Ababa, the development of people-centred training modules with attention to women, youth, and marginalized groups, and roundtables where communities and institutions share perspectives on service quality. The project will also co-develop a scaling strategy that includes a sustainable financing plan for CJs, produce knowledge products on people-centred justice, and support region-specific information materials that help increase public knowledge of how to seek remedies.

The pilot will **generate learning that other countries can adapt when linking customary mechanisms with formal justice** in a rights-consistent way. Ethiopia will document a participatory pathway for scaling CJs, including dialogues that share lessons, indicative unit costs for operations, and approaches for aligning community practices with national standards. The focus on local ownership, financing options, and partnerships with the Ministry of Justice, regional justice bureaus, and community actors provides a practical blueprint for sustainable, people-centred justice that strengthens trust and social cohesion.

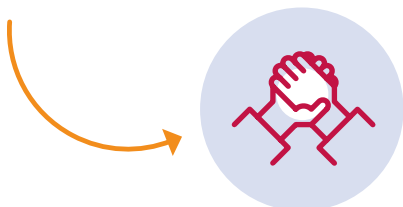


The *Bridging the Justice Gap: Strengthening Legal Access for Marginalized Communities Project* aims to **expand accessible, rights-based justice services** through mobile courts, strengthened legal aid and paralegal support, and community engagement in targeted districts. Led by the Judiciary of Malawi, the Legal Aid Bureau, CSOs, the Malawi Law Commission, and traditional leaders, the project will deploy mobile justice services in Salima, Mzimba, Machinga, and Nsanje, complemented by legal awareness clinics and coordinated case-flow management. Integration with national case-management tools will help track user journeys and improve responsiveness, especially for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

This work matters because it **complements national efforts to make justice more reachable and user-centred, particularly for rural communities** who often resolve disputes outside formal courts due to distance, costs, and limited coverage. By bringing services closer to people, supporting fair process, and coordinating among institutions and communities, the initiative advances inclusion and trust while respecting the important role of customary forums. The people-centred approach guides deliver, anchored in rights, participation, empowerment, local ownership, and accountability, so that remedies are timely, understandable, and sensitive to the needs of women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

Although newly launched, the intervention is structured to **demonstrate early, tangible improvements in people's justice journeys**. In the first phase, mobile courts will operate in four districts with a working target of resolving matters in about two months and addressing around 200 priority cases.

Expand accessible, rights-based justice services



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User experience will guide course corrections. The programme will track whether more people know how and where to seek help, moving from a baseline of 42 percent toward 60 percent, and whether users feel they are treated fairly and with respect, rising from 66 percent toward 75 percent. Rights awareness efforts aim to lift knowledge from 29 percent toward 50 percent, alongside usability feedback on linked services. These are measured, realistic targets designed to show practical gains without overpromising.

The pilot is designed to generate practical learning others can adapt: how mobile courts, legal aid, and paralegals can work in concert, how inclusive digital tools can strengthen coordination and accountability, and how engagement with traditional leaders, CSOs, and communities can reinforce rights-based practices. Knowledge products, such as policy briefs, case studies, learning reports, and multi-stakeholder dialogues will document what works and why, **supporting replication within Malawi and across contexts**. By aligning innovations with existing structure, including the Judiciary and the Legal Aid Bureau's strategic direction, the project aims to leave a durable, locally owned pathway to people-centred justice.

The *Community-Based Restorative Justice Pathways Project* in Saint Kitts and Nevis aims to **embed restorative and diversion pathways in national practice** by developing a Restorative Justice Bill, establishing a Mediation Bureau, building frontline capacity, and piloting services at community level supported by a simple digital platform. The initiative is led by the Attorney General's Office and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs in partnership with the Royal Saint Christopher and Nevis Police Force, the Department of Constituency Empowerment, the Department of Community Development, and civil society partners including the St. Kitts and Nevis CSO Alliance and the Youth Parliament.

This project is critical as it **builds on national priorities for justice modernization and complements existing responses** by expanding accessible, community-rooted options that are responsive to people's needs. The design recognizes that mediation and diversion pathways are emerging areas with strong potential, and that clear referral processes, shared tools, and capacity-building can help institutions and communities work together more seamlessly. The people-centred approach provides the compass for this work, anchoring support in rights, inclusion, participation, empowerment, local ownership, and accountability, and balancing

institution-focused measures with community-focused engagement to strengthen trust between people and the State.

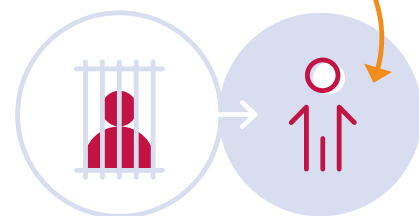
Although new, the intervention is **structured for measurable gains**. The draft Restorative Justice Bill is expected to be validated, accompanied by practical tools such as a mediation roster database and a national roundtable summary and evaluation report. The project plans for twenty police and community personnel to report enhanced capacity through pre- and post-assessments, two pilot sites to be operational with standardized protocols, and an operational digital platform to support access and case handling. Civil society and youth partners will support outreach and feedback, with two organizations engaged and one youth-led creative justice initiative completed.

The pilot is designed to generate **transferable learning for countries seeking practical entry points to people-centred justice**. It will document how to align law and practice with community participation, including a Mediation Bureau model, a safe data-sharing protocol for case tracking, and an inclusive legislative process that brings CSOs, youth groups, law enforcement, and frontline providers into rule-making. Lessons will be captured through agreed knowledge products and a final learning report, consistent with UNDP's commitment to integrated, adaptive programming that advances systems change and a renewed social contract.

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Embed restorative and diversion pathways in national practice







**For more information,
please contact:**

Mr. Yann Cres

Project Specialist - People-Centred Justice
and Security; Governance, Rule of Law and
Peacebuilding Hub, UNDP

✉ yann.cres@undp.org

Mr. Roman Meier

Rule of Law and Justice Analyst; Governance, Rule
of Law and Peacebuilding Hub, UNDP

✉ roman.meier@undp.org