PHOTO CREDIT: USAID Justicia Efectiva

USAID BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE

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From Insight to Impact: Justicia Efectiva's Collaborative and Agile TWP Approach

OVERVIEW

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SUMMARY

The USAID Honduras Justicia Efectiva Activity, which tackles crime and corruption in Honduras and is managed by DAI, was tasked with pursuing urgent reforms in the criminal justice system within a complex environment. While annual Political Economy Analyses (PEAs) and a multi-city Conflict Sensitivity Analysis (CSA) were built into the Activity from its inception, Justicia Efectiva realized

early on that these alone were not enough. Local dynamics were evolving at a pace that required prompt analysis and programmatic adaptation.

To successfully drive reforms within a shifting context, Justicia Efectiva required mechanisms to keep up with the pace of the operating environment. The team pivoted to craft more agile tools to analyze developments in real time, enable rapid cycles of learning and reflection, and anticipate and respond to shifting local dynamics. Central to this approach was Justicia Efectiva's recognition that truly effective and sustainable solutions that are responsive to local needs must be built around and with those closest to the problem.

JUSTICIA EFECTIVA'S THINKING AND WORKING POLITICALLY (TWP) APPROACH

The Justicia Efectiva team introduced new tools that enabled rapid cycles of learning and action while also tapping into the knowledge, experiences, and technical expertise of the Activity's civil society and government stakeholders. By embedding collaboration into every step of its Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) approach, from context monitoring to activity co-creation with local partners, the team engaged those closest to the problem to help identify solutions. Through this agile and collaborative approach, Justicia Efectiva was able to move the needle on reforms and broker lasting alliances between multi-sectoral actors.

A key first step consisted of training Justicia Efectiva staff in TWP methods, including how to gather and scrutinize political insights and detect 'signals' of future developments. Staff now collect and analyze this information daily from diverse sources, including news articles, social media, and stakeholder engagement activities. This trove of information is then filtered, systematized, and analyzed by team members, resulting in two key products: 1) weekly context analyses and 2) a horizon scanning radar. Weekly context analyses unpack current political developments and assess their potential impact on programming. The horizon scanning radar is a living document that is updated regularly and focuses on anticipating future developments, so that Justicia Efectiva can proactively manage risks and seize upon emerging opportunities. Potential political events are organized on the radar by their expected timeframe, probability level, and action required.

This learning is integrated into programming through multiple channels. For example, weekly meetings with USAID Honduras counterparts serve as frequent feedback loops to determine best-fit solutions. Justicia Efectiva's Quarterly Strategic Review Sessions also include a Pause and Reflect component to assess the political context and make any necessary adaptations to the Activity's approach. Critically, conversations with government and civil society counterparts provide a space to workshop ideas and co-design activities that respond to political insights. These mechanisms have allowed the team to make programmatic adaptations that enabled Justicia Efectiva to advance several key activities.
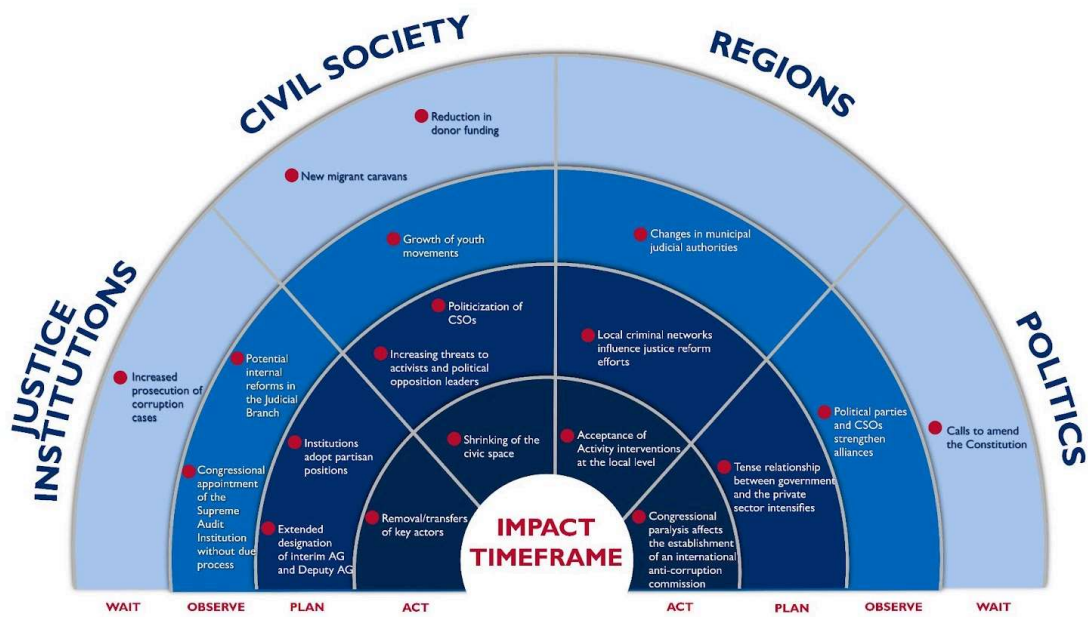
Snapshot of Justicia Efectiva's horizon scanning radar
PHOTO CREDIT: Sophia Andrews, Justicia Efectiva

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- **Pivoting to local justice systems**: The team learned that local justice operators are interested in working with Justicia Efectiva to promptly solve critical justice administration challenges. In response, the team decided to adapt and pivot from its national-level reform efforts to the municipal level, which is essential to advance the Activity's objectives while embedding locally led development principles in the design of its interventions. This included the development of Justicia Efectiva's own innovative Local Justice System model, which provides effective and context-specific solutions to address citizen's local priorities and integrates a people-centered justice approach. This model is now being piloted in seven municipalities, where over 395 local justice stakeholders have signed on to participate.

- **Bolstering collective action for effective citizen oversight:** The Activity's political analysis revealed that civil society organizations (CSOs) are often viewed as partisan actors, and as a result, civil society has played a limited role in key decision-making circles. In response, through technical and communications assistance to 16 diverse CSOs, Justicia Efectiva enhanced their oversight of legal reform initiatives and elevated their advocacy efforts. They also provided technical assistance to the CSOs to develop proposals for formally integrating citizen input into the proposed reforms and facilitating meetings with congressional leadership to present these proposals, thereby enhancing citizens' decision-making power. As a result, lawmakers adopted a significant number of civil society recommendations.

- **Facilitating inclusive legislative partnerships**: Justicia Efectiva also learned that there were actors inside and outside of Congress who shared similar goals but lacked coordination, and that advancing criminal justice sector reform would require sustained efforts among a broad coalition of actors. As a result, the team decided to follow a more

incrementalist and locally led approach to promote an anti-corruption reform agenda, by making two adaptations. First, Justicia Efectiva adapted programming to focus on a gradual process of promoting dialogue and bolstering advocacy for reform, instead of measuring success solely on the passage of new laws. Second, the team decided to reframe its role as a facilitator, convener, and technical advisor, to instead work through local actors that are already leading reform agendas. As a result, the Activity provided technical and communications assistance to a multi-partisan congressional alliance and helped them forge partnerships with CSOs that shared common goals, equipping them with the tools to strengthen and elevate their advocacy efforts. Together they developed and launched social media campaigns and held public forums around the country to promote their shared agenda. These activities built public awareness on key reforms and amplified civil society perspectives.

- **Brokering lasting alliances**: Beyond these immediate results, Justicia Efectiva's TWP approach has achieved sustainable outcomes. This includes establishing and strengthening alliances among government actors and civil society, including the private sector. While alliances may at first appear to be only a means to an end, this is a key achievement that can be sustained and leveraged for future reform efforts. In a similar vein, the team also strengthened and expanded civil society organizations that can continue to advance key reforms in future initiatives. These broad alliances, forged with USAID's support through Justicia Efectiva, represent the foundations needed to transform the justice system now and beyond the life of the Activity.

WHO AND WHAT ENABLED SUCCESS

Justicia Efectiva's learning and context monitoring leveraged the wealth of experiences and expertise from local partners to triangulate research findings and forecast future developments. The team collaborated with diverse actors, especially within the CSOs, including the private sector, and government partners to co-create activities, drive implementation, and evaluate impact to ensure interventions are grounded in contextual realities. Continuous engagement activities with government partners, such as strategic planning sessions, serve as feedback loops to reflect on activities. For example, to inform its Private Sector Engagement Strategy, the team met with chambers of commerce across five municipalities to understand their justice priorities and incentives and tap into their political insight and on-the-ground knowledge. The Activity's work across 20 vastly different municipalities makes CSOs, who have the pulse of their communities, indispensable resources for understanding hyperlocal political contexts. For example, CSOs were critical sources of information for the Activity's CSAs of ten municipalities.

Justicia Efectiva also holds periodic consultations with key stakeholders to stay attuned to the shifting local dynamics. Regular check-in meetings with selected CSOs and GOH officials, who expressed keen interest in promoting critical reforms, informed situational analyses on the contours of the civic space, feeding into Justicia Efectiva's horizon scanning. Coordination meetings with other donors working on aligned areas provided a window into potential risks, unexpected opportunities, and successful approaches within a complex environment. Through its TWP approach, the Activity was able to identify champions in civil society and Congress willing to lead interventions.

Lastly, USAID staff were aligned with and supportive of Justicia Efectiva's approach within a fluid context and provided the team with flexibility to adapt its programming. Together, these data points

feed into Justicia Efectiva's cycles of learning, analysis, and adaptation.

Photo credit: USAID Justicia Efectiva

THE ROADBLOCKS

While commitment from stakeholders was critical, it was not enough to effect change on its own. Justicia Efectiva also had to equip stakeholders with the organizational, communication, and technical skills needed to advance their reform agendas. Although CSOs were open to collaborating, the Activity took proactive measures to consider power dynamics between CSOs and empower smaller and underutilized organizations to ensure a more inclusive development approach that went beyond the 'usual suspects.' Justicia Efectiva's support in establishing transparent governance rules for working with civil society organizations was vital for fostering consensus and neutral operating guidelines. As a new project, Justicia Efectiva also faced initial credibility challenges, which meant that the team had to first invest time in tactically positioning the Activity before advancing multi-sectoral initiatives. Although the Activity has since seen great success, there are still obstacles ahead. The team must still work on emphasizing the importance of critical thinking among Activity staff to address potential personal biases and ensure objectivity in its evidence-based approach. While training in TWP practices has proven invaluable, this is a gradual and iterative process that Justicia Efectiva remains committed to enhancing and expanding over time.

To learn more about the USAID Justicia Efectiva Activity, check out DAI:
https://www.dai.com/our-work/projects/honduras-justicia-efectiva-contra-la-criminalidad-y-corrupcion-jeccc-project