

Access to Justice and Legal Empowerment: Strengthening the Rule of Law in Developing Societies

Dedi Supriadi¹

¹ Doctoral Student at Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University Bandung, Indonesia, E-mail: dedisupriyadi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Access to justice remains one of the most persistent deficits in the global rule of law landscape, with over five billion people lacking meaningful access to formal justice systems and unresolved legal problems imposing costs of up to three percent of GDP in developing economies. This study examines the relationship between access to justice and legal empowerment through a comparative analysis of community-based justice strategies, institutional reform models, and hybrid governance arrangements across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Drawing on a normative juridical methodology with a comparative-analytical design, the research synthesizes theoretical frameworks of legal empowerment, people-centred justice, and intersectionality with empirical evidence from community paralegal programs, mobile court initiatives, customary justice engagement, and digital justice innovations. The analysis reveals that legal empowerment strategies strengthen both the demand and supply sides of justice systems: on the demand side, community paralegals build legal capability by increasing knowledge, confidence, and agency among justice seekers, with participatory action research across seventeen organizations documenting that eighty-four percent of participants reported deeper legal knowledge and ninety percent greater confidence engaging government officials. On the supply side, community paralegals generate grounded, case-based data that reveals patterns of institutional failure and informs systemic reform. A central finding is the persistent tension between the accessibility and cultural legitimacy of customary and informal justice systems and their compliance with human rights and gender equality standards. The study develops an integrated analytical framework that distinguishes between legal empowerment as individual capability building, community mobilization, and systemic reform, arguing that effective access-to-justice interventions must operate simultaneously across these dimensions. The findings challenge the assumption that strengthening formal legal institutions alone can close the justice gap, demonstrating instead that people-centred approaches that engage customary systems, leverage technology, and build grassroots legal capability are essential complements to institutional reform. Practical implications for legal aid design, customary justice engagement, and the measurement of access to justice through SDG indicator 16.3.3 are discussed.

Keywords: Access To Justice, Community Paralegals, Customary Justice, Legal Aid, Legal Empowerment, People-Centred Justice, Rule Of Law

Citation: Aisy, Nesty Rihhadatul and Saputra, Muhammad Agil, 2024. "Access to Justice and Legal Empowerment: Strengthening the Rule of Law in Developing Societies". *JLCS: Journal of Law and Cultural Studies* 2 (1), 87-108. <https://doi.org/10.30872/jlcs.v1i2.6>

1. INTRODUCTION

The global justice gap constitutes one of the most consequential and least addressed challenges of contemporary governance. More than 5.1 billion people—approximately two-thirds of the world's population—lack meaningful access to justice,

and unresolved legal problems impose costs of up to three percent of GDP in developing economies. These figures represent not merely a deficit in institutional capacity but a fundamental failure of the rule of law to deliver on its promise of equal protection. The consequences are particularly severe for poor and marginalized populations, who face the most serious legal problems with the least capacity to resolve them, and for whom unresolved legal issues can trigger a cycle of decline encompassing homelessness, eviction, health problems, and loss of income.

The conventional response to this deficit has been institutional reform: strengthening courts, training judges, and expanding formal legal aid. Yet decades of rule-of-law programming have produced disappointing results, and a growing consensus has emerged that traditional, top-down approaches have failed to reach the populations most in need. Legal empowerment—the process through which individuals and communities, especially those historically excluded from the justice system, gain the ability to understand, use, and influence the law to improve their lives—has emerged as a workable alternative to rule-of-law orthodoxy. Where rule-of-law approaches concentrate on state institutions, particularly the judiciary, as the primary vehicles of reform, legal empowerment employs a more integrated approach that includes informal forums, community-based justice strategies, and the strengthening of civil society.

The theoretical foundations of legal empowerment draw on several interconnected traditions. Golub (2003) articulated the concept as the use of legal services and related development activities to increase disadvantaged populations' control over their lives, positioning it as a corrective to the technocratic orientation of formal rule-of-law models. Legal empowerment advances rule of law in the sense that where the poor have more power, they are better able to make government officials implement the law, and this power enables disadvantaged groups to play a greater role in local and national law reform. The approach differs from rule-of-law orthodoxy in four key respects: attorneys support the poor as partners rather than dominating them as proprietors of expertise; the disadvantaged play a role in setting priorities rather than government officials and donor personnel dictating the agenda; addressing these priorities frequently involves non-judicial strategies that transcend narrow notions of the legal system; and the use of law is often just part of integrated strategies that include other development activities.

Empirical research has provided increasingly robust evidence for the effectiveness of legal empowerment approaches. A randomized controlled trial involving 1,707 displaced people in Greece found that legal empowerment interventions improved participants' knowledge of exploitation under Greek law by 0.17 to 0.7 standard deviations and increased confidence in responding to violence by 0.15 to 0.57 standard deviations three months after treatment. Participatory action research across seventeen legal empowerment organizations in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia documented that eighty-four percent of participants reported deeper legal knowledge and ninety percent greater confidence engaging government officials. Community paralegals generate grounded, case-based data that reveals patterns of institutional failure, suggests improvements, and informs advocacy strategies aimed at

systemic reform, demonstrating how casework evolves into broader systems change through pathways such as turning the wheel from individual cases to collective action, building alliances, and engaging state actors.

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain in the scholarly literature. The relationship between legal empowerment and the rule of law is undertheorized: while legal empowerment is often presented as a complement to rule-of-law programming, the conditions under which empowerment strategies contribute to systemic legal reform—as opposed to providing palliative relief for individuals—are not well understood. The gendered dimensions of access to justice require more systematic attention: customary and informal justice systems, which serve as the primary pathway to justice for millions of people in developing societies, frequently reflect and reinforce gender inequalities, and the challenge of engaging with these systems in ways that respect cultural legitimacy while upholding human rights standards remains unresolved. The role of technology in expanding or constraining access to justice is contested: digital innovations such as e-judiciary platforms and mobile courts have demonstrated potential to reduce physical proximity barriers, but the digital divide threatens to create new forms of exclusion for populations lacking connectivity or digital literacy.

This study addresses these gaps. The central research questions are: (1) Through what mechanisms do legal empowerment strategies improve access to justice in developing societies? (2) How do different institutional models for delivering legal aid and justice services affect outcomes for marginalized populations? (3) What are the tensions between the accessibility and cultural legitimacy of customary justice systems and their compliance with human rights and gender equality standards? (4) How can technology be deployed to expand access to justice without reproducing existing inequalities? (5) What analytical framework can integrate the insights of legal empowerment theory with institutional reform strategies?

The significance of this study lies in its integrated comparative framework. By examining access to justice and legal empowerment across multiple levels of legal governance and diverse substantive domains, the research demonstrates that effective justice interventions must operate simultaneously at the individual, community, and systemic levels. The findings have implications for legal aid design, customary justice engagement, technology deployment, and the measurement of access to justice. The study also contributes to theoretical debates about the relationship between legal empowerment and the rule of law by developing an analytical framework that distinguishes between legal empowerment as individual capability building, community mobilization, and systemic reform.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundations: Legal Empowerment and People-Centred Justice

The theoretical foundation for examining access to justice and legal empowerment lies in the critique of legal centralism and the emergence of people-centred approaches to justice. Legal empowerment is closely related to the concept of

people-centred justice, which prioritizes empirical data and a deep understanding of people's justice needs when generating solutions to justice challenges and designing fairer and more accessible justice systems. The people-centred justice paradigm shifts the focus from top-down approaches to the active participation of ordinary people in justice processes, emphasizing local ownership rather than externally imposed solutions.

The theoretical literature on people-centred justice is multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary. Legal empowerment theory, informed by Golub's foundational work, emphasizes community-driven strategies including legal literacy initiatives, grassroots legal aid, paralegal networks, and community-based dispute resolution. Intersectionality theory, as articulated by Crenshaw (1989), provides a critical framework for understanding how overlapping systems of discrimination—including those based on race, gender, class, disability, and geography—intensify exclusion from access to justice. Within people-centred justice, intersectionality challenges universalist assumptions by promoting tailored responses and sensitivities that address interconnected vulnerabilities, requiring participatory and multi-sectoral collaboration to advance justice outcomes alongside other societal needs. Restorative and relational justice theory focuses on repairing harm and restoring relationships rather than punitive measures, promoting dialogue among victims, offenders, and the community to foster shared understanding and restore social harmony. This theory acknowledges the value of indigenous and customary justice systems that emphasize relationships and collective responsibility. Deliberative democracy theory holds that the legitimacy of legal and institutional norms is grounded in reasoned deliberation among citizens, and people-centred justice is founded on a participatory ethos that seeks to enable justice users to co-create policies, provide feedback on services, and hold institutions accountable.

However, theoretical perspectives converge on a common premise—that justice systems should be centred on human rights and dignity, participation, and lived experiences of justice seekers—yet significant gaps persist. A key gap is the absence of a unified theoretical paradigm that systematically integrates these varied perspectives into a cohesive model, yielding weak and underdeveloped conceptual clarity that contributes to inconsistencies in interpretation and practice. Commitments to inclusion, dignity, and participatory justice are frequently articulated in aspirational terms without sufficient theoretical grounding, resulting in contradictions that may generate conflict between universal human rights and recognition of multiple legal systems. Addressing these theoretical gaps requires a holistic approach that balances normative objectives, structural complexity, conceptual clarity, and practical implications.

2.2 The Rule of Law and Its Limits in Developing Societies

The relationship between the rule of law and development has been a central preoccupation of legal and policy scholarship for decades. The conventional rule-of-law paradigm emphasizes formal legal institutions, judicial independence, and the enforcement of contracts as prerequisites for economic development and democratic governance. Yet this paradigm has been subjected to sustained critique from scholars who argue that institutional reforms carried out under the banner of rule-of-law reform

can actually undermine rule-of-law ends. The likelihood that Western mischaracterizations of the appropriate roles of law will be accepted by developing countries, leading to misallocation of domestic effort and attention, has been identified as a significant risk of externally driven legal reform.

Recent scholarship has emphasized that the rule of law is a product of conflict, dialogue, and debate—uncertain and unpredictable—rather than something that can be engineered through technical assistance. For many development actors today, the rule of law emerges from political contestation and social negotiation rather than from the transplantation of institutional models from developed to developing countries. This perspective challenges the assumption that there is a single template for rule-of-law reform and emphasizes the importance of context-sensitive, politically smart approaches to legal adaptation. The citizens of nations experiencing foreign-funded rule-of-law reforms may become resistant and perhaps even hostile to development initiatives if they feel that the rule of law is being used to smuggle in foreign moral or political agendas.

The African context illustrates both the challenges and possibilities of rule-of-law reform. Crises surrounding the rule of law remain at the heart of many development problems in Africa, including political instability, economic decline, poverty, unemployment, and lack of energy infrastructure. Contemporary challenges to the rule of law in Africa focus primarily on judicial independence, executive dominance, and the tension between constitutionalism and political practice. Yet the African experience also demonstrates the resilience of customary and informal justice systems, which remain the primary pathway to justice for millions of Africans and are acknowledged for their strategic importance in advancing Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

2.3 Legal Aid Models and Institutional Design

The institutional design of legal aid systems varies significantly across jurisdictions, reflecting different legal traditions, political economies, and developmental contexts. Comparative analysis identifies several distinct models. The staff attorney model employs lawyers on a full-time basis, generally by a public legal aid agency, with the sole purpose of providing legal assistance and representation to eligible individuals. The judicare model, by contrast, relies on private practitioners who are reimbursed by the state for services provided to eligible clients. Mixed models combine elements of both approaches, and several jurisdictions that have recently developed or modified their legal aid systems, particularly in East Asia, have opted for mixed models of publicly funded legal aid services.

The funding and delivery of legal aid services differ markedly between high-income and low-income countries. While the main provider of legal aid services in high-income countries is a state-funded legal aid entity, in least developed countries, civil society organizations funded by private and international donors deliver the bulk of legal aid services. This disparity reflects broader patterns of institutional capacity and fiscal constraint in developing societies, where governments frequently lack the resources to

fund comprehensive legal aid programs and where donor funding, while essential, may be unpredictable and subject to shifting priorities.

The Liberian experience illustrates the challenges of building legal aid systems in post-conflict and low-income contexts. Liberia's justice system faces significant challenges, including overloaded court dockets, limited access to courts for many citizens, and prolonged pre-trial detention contributing to prison overcrowding, with these issues disproportionately affecting poor and vulnerable groups. The Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with UNDP, drafted a Legal Aid Bill in 2021 aiming to establish a structured and coordinated framework for legal aid services, strengthening access to justice and reducing systemic inequalities. The proposed legislation seeks to create a national legal framework for legal aid, establish a Legal Aid Fund and an independent Legal Aid Board to coordinate services, ensure structured support from lawyers and civil society organizations, and reduce pre-trial detention and ease court congestion. The consolidation of two competing drafts—one holistic and one gender-focused—into a single bill required sustained consultative engagement, with the Liberian National Bar Association actively advocating for the bill's passage.

Sierra Leone provides another instructive case. The country's Legal Aid Board began operations in 2015 and adopts a mixed model, with paralegals supporting pre-trial detainees in similar ways to Bangladesh, Malawi, and Uganda. The paralegal model deployed in these countries was found to be cost-effective, below the Overseas Development Institute's benchmark unit cost. Sierra Leone's paralegal model seeks to bring justice to the doorstep of all Sierra Leoneans, including those in the most far-reaching communities, with paralegal offices providing a wide range of services at a much lower cost than lawyers. Timap for Justice, an organization co-founded by the Open Society Justice Initiative and the Sierra Leonean National Forum for Human Rights, trains and deploys paralegals in the country's rural areas, and research on this experimental community-based paralegal program has documented its effectiveness in assisting poor and disempowered communities to remedy breaches of fundamental rights and freedoms.

India's National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), established under the Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987, represents one of the largest state-funded legal aid systems in the world. NALSA provides free legal services to weaker sections of society and organizes Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes. Through the aid of panel lawyers and Legal Aid Defense Counsels, 16,60,249 persons were provided free legal aid and advice during FY 2025–26 up to January 2026, and 4,91,990 legal awareness programs and camps were organized. The scale of NALSA's operations demonstrates the potential reach of state-funded legal aid, though questions remain about the quality of representation, the adequacy of funding, and the extent to which legal aid reaches the most marginalized populations.

2.4 Community Paralegals and Grassroots Legal Empowerment

Community paralegals have emerged as the frontline of legal empowerment efforts in developing societies. Knowledgeable in law and policy and skilled in organizing

and advocacy, community paralegals work directly with people affected by injustice through a grassroots approach primarily based on legal empowerment. One of the main advantages of community-based paralegals over lawyers is their ability to establish relationships of trust with the communities they serve, enabling them to bridge the gap between formal legal systems and the lived experiences of marginalized populations.

Community paralegals provide frontline legal support to poor communities—often in informal settlements—and have done so since the 1970s. In some countries, including China, Indonesia, Malawi, New Zealand, the Philippines, Moldova, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia, community justice workers have received formal recognition as legal aid providers, either generally or in specific sectors. This recognition reflects growing acknowledgement of the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of paralegal models, but the scope of recognition varies considerably, and many paralegals continue to operate in legal grey zones without clear mandates or protections.

The work of community paralegals extends beyond individual casework to systemic advocacy. Community paralegals generate grounded, case-based data that reveals patterns of institutional failure, suggests improvements, and informs advocacy strategies aimed at systemic reform. This body of work demonstrates how legal empowerment contributes to changes in law, policy, institutional practice, and social norms—from securing citizenship rights in Kenya to advancing land and environmental governance in Sierra Leone. The pathway from individual cases to systemic change operates through mechanisms such as turning the wheel from individual cases to collective action, building alliances, and engaging state actors.

A book exploring grassroots justice strategies in informal settlements across the Global South documents how community-led justice strategies are being used to advance human rights in urban settings. The case studies focus on informal settlements in and around Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Karachi, Pakistan. These chapters were written by members of the organizations—lawyers, activists, researchers, and community members—who have supported informal settlement communities for years, sometimes decades, grounding the analysis in the lived experiences of those on the front lines. The strategies investigated include community paralegals, strategic litigation, participatory research, and community mobilization.

2.5 Customary and Informal Justice Systems

Customary and informal justice systems remain the primary pathway to justice for millions of people in developing societies. In Africa, over 71 percent of the population in conflict-affected regions relies on traditional leaders for justice, rising to over 80 percent in countries such as Burundi, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mali, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Even in non-conflict-affected African countries, customary systems play a dominant role. In Somalia, over 95 percent of disputes are resolved by traditional elders using Xeer, the country's centuries-old customary legal system, with elders resolving land disputes and inter-clan conflicts while playing a central role in governance and peacebuilding. In South Sudan, customary courts handle over 90 percent of disputes nationwide.

The High-Level Regional Conference on Traditional Dispute Resolution, held in Addis Ababa in March 2026, brought together stakeholders from across Africa to explore the critical role of customary justice systems in expanding access to justice. Participants recognized that traditional justice systems remain the primary pathway to justice for millions of Africans and acknowledged their strategic importance in advancing Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the African Union vision of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. They underscored the vital role of traditional dispute resolution systems as accessible, cost-effective, and culturally legitimate mechanisms that complement formal justice systems, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

A key consensus emerged on the need to move from parallel to more integrated frameworks by strengthening legal and institutional linkages between customary and formal systems, including clearer jurisdictional boundaries, referral pathways, and alignment with constitutional and rule-of-law standards, as reflected in reforms such as those in Ethiopia and Kenya. However, participants also emphasized the importance of safeguarding human rights and gender equality by addressing discriminatory norms, enhancing participation by women and youth, and ensuring that sensitive cases such as gender-based violence are handled appropriately. Persistent gaps in documentation, capacity, and financing were noted, along with the need for structured training, improved data systems, and sustainable investment models.

The tension between the accessibility and cultural legitimacy of customary systems and their compliance with human rights standards is particularly acute in cases involving gender-based violence and women's property rights. In parts of eastern Uganda and northern Kenya, women must turn their backs when speaking to elders in the local customary court, undermining their ability to clearly express themselves. The patriarchal attitudes embedded in some customary systems can result in the systematic exclusion of marginalized groups, particularly women and youth. Yet research also reveals that it is possible to find customary norms and practices that are in line with human rights and constitutional principles of gender equality, and that supporting concrete examples of such norms can be a more effective way to encourage broader normative and legal changes than external imposition.

The South Sudan experience illustrates the potential for internally driven customary law reform. In Warrap State, the harmonization of customary law led to the consensual abolishment of early and forced marriage, with the decision pending translation into formal law. Chiefs, elders, legal experts, women, and youth worked together to review and modernize customary laws, expanding women's rights to property and divorce, adjusting bride wealth rates to reduce tension, and ensuring that local norms uphold basic rights. The case of S., a 16-year-old girl who refused an arranged marriage and was imprisoned after the rejected suitor complained to the police, illustrates the human stakes of legal pluralism and the importance of reforming customary norms that conflict with fundamental rights.

2.6 Technology and Digital Innovation in Access to Justice

Digital technologies have emerged as potentially transformative tools for expanding access to justice in developing societies. Mobile courts, e-judiciary platforms, and digital filing systems offer the promise of reducing physical proximity barriers, lowering costs, and improving the efficiency of justice delivery. Kenya's E-Judiciary Mobile Application, launched in May 2025, offers a digital gateway to court services and legal resources designed to benefit not just legal professionals but ordinary citizens who seek justice. The platform enables users to track case progress, access judgments, and receive court notifications, bringing services closer to people previously marginalized by geography, cost, or bureaucracy. The app is described as a virtual courthouse that supports the goal of reducing physical proximity to courts while empowering the elderly, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups to access court services.

Mobile and decentralized courts have been deployed across multiple jurisdictions as a people-centred justice imperative. Rwanda deploys mobile courts during Judicial Service Weeks, and its Maisons d'Accès à la Justice Centres, present in every district, deliver integrated services such as legal aid, documentation, and dispute resolution, emphasizing proximity and simplicity. Uganda's small claims courts increase access to justice in post-conflict districts in the north, emphasizing speed, informality, and low cost. Brazil's Justice in the Neighbourhood program sends judicial teams into rural areas, providing on-site resolution of civil, administrative, and family disputes. The Philippines' Justice on Wheels program uses mobile courtrooms to address jail congestion by processing pre-trial detainees and offering plea-bargain options. In Tanzania, mobile courts and Integrated Justice Centres demonstrate the value of hybrid approaches that bring justice services directly to underserved communities, equipped with solar power and other appropriate technologies.

However, the deployment of technology in justice delivery is not without risks. In lower-income countries, particularly in rural areas, the immediate promise of digital solutions may be limited due to connectivity constraints, digital literacy gaps, and the possibility that relocating courts could undermine access, at least in the short term. The digital divide threatens to create new forms of exclusion: 710 million Africans remain offline, and the expansion of digital justice services may disproportionately benefit urban, educated, and connected populations while leaving the most marginalized behind. Parliamentarians across Africa have emphasized the need for model laws, continental strategies, and investment in the foundational pillars of digital infrastructure to ensure that technology serves empowerment and inclusivity rather than exacerbating existing inequalities.

2.7 Measuring Access to Justice: SDG Indicator 16.3.3

The measurement of access to justice has been transformed by the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.3.3, which measures the proportion of persons who have experienced a legal problem in the last two years and who accessed adequate information or assistance from an expert and were able to resolve their problem. This indicator represents a significant departure from traditional measures that focused on institutional inputs—the number of courts, judges, or legal aid lawyers—by centering the measurement on the lived experiences of justice seekers.

The UNDP Policy Brief on strengthening civil justice with SDG 16.3.3 explains the relevance of this indicator as a people-centred measure of access to justice and provides an overview of the methodology underpinning it. The indicator captures three dimensions: legal empowerment and capability, legal assistance availability and quality, and resolution process timeliness, cost, and fairness. By measuring whether people were able to resolve their legal problems, the indicator provides a more comprehensive assessment of justice outcomes than institutional metrics alone.

The use of SDG 16.3.3 data has the potential to transform justice policy by revealing patterns of unmet legal need, identifying populations most excluded from justice systems, and enabling evidence-based resource allocation. UNDP has tested the new SDG global indicator 16.3.3 within a national poverty survey in Argentina to evaluate the everyday justice experiences of poor people. However, significant challenges remain in data collection, particularly in low-income countries where survey infrastructure is weak and where the populations most in need of justice services may be the least likely to be captured by household surveys. Complementary indicators measure the accessibility of legal aid services, the percentage of justice seekers receiving legal assistance, and the existence of accessible, sustainable, and credible legal aid services.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a normative juridical methodology with a comparative-analytical design. Normative juridical research examines legal norms, principles, and doctrines through the analysis of primary legal sources—statutes, regulations, judicial decisions, and international instruments—as well as secondary sources including scholarly commentary, empirical studies, and reports from international organizations. The comparative dimension systematically examines how different legal systems and institutional models address access to justice and legal empowerment challenges, identifying patterns of convergence and divergence and explaining variation through reference to institutional, doctrinal, and contextual factors.

The research design is qualitative and multi-level. Primary sources include legal aid statutes and policies from Liberia, Sierra Leone, India, Kenya, and Rwanda; customary law frameworks from South Sudan and Somalia; and international instruments including the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Target 16.3), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and reports from United Nations agencies (UNDP, UNODC, UNHCR, UN Women), the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), and civil society organizations including Namati, the American Bar Foundation, and the Grassroots Justice Network.

The analytical framework integrates three dimensions of analysis. First, doctrinal analysis examines the content, structure, and internal coherence of legal and policy frameworks governing access to justice and legal aid. Second, comparative analysis identifies patterns of convergence and divergence across jurisdictions and institutional

models, with attention to the factors that explain variation. Third, socio-legal analysis examines how formal legal frameworks interact with social norms, customary justice systems, and community-based justice strategies, drawing on empirical research where available. The integration of these dimensions enables a holistic assessment of access to justice as a multi-level governance phenomenon.

The selection of cases and jurisdictions was guided by three criteria: (1) theoretical significance, understood as the contribution of a case or jurisdiction to broader debates about legal empowerment and access to justice; (2) diversity of legal tradition, developmental context, and institutional design; and (3) availability of authoritative legal texts and empirical research. The analysis prioritizes developments from 2015 to 2026, with reference to foundational instruments and scholarship where necessary for contextual understanding.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Dual Demand and Supply Functions of Legal Empowerment

The comparative analysis reveals that legal empowerment strategies operate simultaneously on the demand and supply sides of justice systems, strengthening both the capacity of individuals and communities to seek and use the law and the responsiveness of institutions to justice seekers' needs. This dual function distinguishes legal empowerment from conventional legal aid, which focuses primarily on the supply side by providing legal representation to eligible individuals.

On the demand side, legal empowerment builds legal capability by increasing knowledge, confidence, and agency among justice seekers. Participatory action research across seventeen legal empowerment organizations in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia documented that eighty-four percent of participants reported deeper legal knowledge and ninety percent greater confidence engaging government officials. This finding is corroborated by a randomized controlled trial involving 1,707 displaced people in Greece, which found that legal empowerment interventions improved participants' knowledge of exploitation under Greek law by 0.17 to 0.7 standard deviations and increased confidence in responding to violence by 0.15 to 0.57 standard deviations three months after treatment. The Greek study is particularly significant because it demonstrates the effectiveness of legal empowerment even in highly constrained environments where displaced people face high levels of violence and exploitation and few incentives to report.

The demand-side effects of legal empowerment are not limited to individual knowledge and confidence. In Guinea-Bissau, the Centers for Access to Justice (CAJ) handled 7,711 cases between 2022 and 2024, with women accounting for nearly forty-seven percent of submissions. Year-on-year increases—from 146 women's cases in 2021 to 386 in 2022—underscore growing legal literacy and confidence in the formal system. Most cases relate to family law—custody, inheritance, domestic violence—demonstrating both persistent gaps in protections and a rising willingness to seek redress. The case of Cadija, a 38-year-old woman in rural Guinea-Bissau who was

abandoned by her emigrant husband but trapped in marriage by cultural norms and the prohibitive costs of legal action, illustrates the transformative potential of demand-side legal empowerment. Though entitled to free legal aid, she first had to secure an "Atestado de Pobreza" (poverty certificate), which meant traveling from bank to bank, paying for proof of her own poverty—an insurmountable barrier for many rural women. Supported by the CAJ, she obtained the certificate, received legal assistance, and secured full exemption from court fees. "Without the help of the CAJ, I would have remained trapped and unheard," she said. "Their support gave me the strength to reclaim my life and dreams".

On the supply side, community paralegals generate grounded, case-based data that reveals patterns of institutional failure, suggests improvements, and informs advocacy strategies aimed at systemic reform. This supply-side function operates through several pathways. First, paralegals identify recurring problems that indicate systemic weaknesses—for example, patterns of unlawful detention, denial of citizenship rights, or failure to protect land rights—and use this evidence to advocate for institutional change. Second, paralegals build alliances with state actors, creating channels for communication and collaboration between communities and government agencies. Third, paralegals engage in policy reform processes, drawing on their casework to propose legislative and administrative changes. The pathway from individual cases to systemic change has been described as turning the wheel, capturing the iterative process through which casework generates evidence that informs advocacy, which in turn creates conditions for broader reform.

The dual demand and supply functions of legal empowerment have significant implications for the design of access-to-justice interventions. Programs that focus exclusively on providing legal representation without building the legal capability of justice seekers may resolve individual problems but do not strengthen the capacity of communities to prevent or resolve future disputes. Conversely, programs that focus exclusively on legal literacy and awareness-raising without providing concrete assistance may leave justice seekers frustrated and disillusioned. The most effective interventions integrate both demand-side and supply-side strategies, combining individual casework with community mobilization and systemic advocacy.

4.2 Institutional Models for Legal Aid Delivery: Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis reveals significant variation in the institutional models through which legal aid is delivered, with important implications for access, quality, and sustainability. The staff attorney model, in which lawyers are employed on a full-time basis by a public legal aid agency, provides a dedicated cadre of legal professionals committed to serving low-income clients but may be constrained by limited budgets and geographic concentration in urban areas. The judicare model, in which private practitioners are reimbursed by the state for services provided to eligible clients, can mobilize a broader pool of legal expertise but may create incentives for cost containment that undermine quality. Mixed models that combine state-funded legal aid agencies, private practitioners, civil society organizations, and community paralegals

offer the potential for greater coverage and flexibility but require effective coordination mechanisms.

The Liberian experience illustrates the challenges of building legal aid systems in post-conflict contexts. Liberia's justice system faces significant challenges, including overloaded court dockets, limited access to courts for many citizens, and prolonged pre-trial detention contributing to prison overcrowding, with these issues disproportionately affecting poor and vulnerable groups. The Legal Aid Bill drafted in 2021 aims to establish a structured and coordinated framework for legal aid services, strengthening access to justice and reducing systemic inequalities. The proposed legislation would create a national legal framework for legal aid, establish a Legal Aid Fund and an independent Legal Aid Board to coordinate services, ensure structured support from lawyers and civil society organizations, and reduce pre-trial detention and ease court congestion. The consolidation of two competing drafts—one holistic and one gender-focused—into a single bill required sustained consultative engagement, with the Liberian National Bar Association actively advocating for the bill's passage.

The Sierra Leone model demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of community-based paralegal approaches. Sierra Leone's Legal Aid Board, which began operations in 2015, adopts a mixed model with paralegals supporting pre-trial detainees. The paralegal model deployed in Bangladesh, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Uganda was found to be cost-effective, below the Overseas Development Institute's benchmark unit cost. Sierra Leone's paralegal offices are free and accessible to justice seekers, providing a wide range of services at a much lower cost than lawyers. The Timap for Justice program, which trains and deploys paralegals in rural areas, has been the subject of extensive research documenting its effectiveness in assisting poor and disempowered communities to remedy breaches of fundamental rights and freedoms.

India's NALSA represents a large-scale state-funded legal aid system that has achieved significant reach. In FY 2025–26 up to January 2026, 16,60,249 persons were provided free legal aid and advice, and 4,91,990 legal awareness programs and camps were organized. NALSA provides free legal services to weaker sections of society and organizes Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes. The scale of NALSA's operations demonstrates the potential reach of state-funded legal aid, though questions remain about the quality of representation, the adequacy of funding, and the extent to which legal aid reaches the most marginalized populations. The concentration of legal aid services in urban areas, the limited availability of panel lawyers in rural and remote regions, and the cultural and linguistic barriers that justice seekers face in navigating formal legal institutions are persistent challenges.

The comparative evidence suggests that no single institutional model is universally optimal. The effectiveness of legal aid delivery depends on the broader institutional and political context, including the level of government commitment, the availability of fiscal resources, the strength of civil society, and the accessibility of formal legal institutions. In contexts where government capacity is limited, civil society organizations and community paralegals may play a more prominent role in delivering legal aid services. In contexts where government commitment is strong and fiscal

resources are available, state-funded legal aid agencies may be able to achieve broader coverage and greater sustainability. The most promising approach appears to be a mixed model that combines state funding with civil society implementation, professional legal services with community-based paralegal support, and formal representation with legal literacy and community mobilization.

4.3 Customary Justice Systems: Between Cultural Legitimacy and Human Rights

The engagement with customary and informal justice systems represents one of the most complex and contested dimensions of access to justice in developing societies. Customary systems are the primary pathway to justice for millions of people, particularly in rural and underserved communities where formal courts are distant, costly, or culturally alien. In Somalia, over ninety-five percent of disputes are resolved by traditional elders using Xeer, and in South Sudan, customary courts handle over ninety percent of disputes nationwide. The accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and cultural legitimacy of customary systems make them indispensable components of the justice landscape in many developing societies.

The High-Level Regional Conference on Traditional Dispute Resolution in Addis Ababa recognized that traditional justice systems remain the primary pathway to justice for millions of Africans and acknowledged their strategic importance in advancing Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants underscored the vital role of traditional dispute resolution systems as accessible, cost-effective, and culturally legitimate mechanisms that complement formal justice systems, particularly in rural and underserved communities. A key consensus emerged on the need to move from parallel to more integrated frameworks by strengthening legal and institutional linkages between customary and formal systems, including clearer jurisdictional boundaries, referral pathways, and alignment with constitutional and rule-of-law standards.

However, the engagement with customary justice systems raises profound human rights concerns. Customary systems frequently reflect and reinforce existing inequalities, particularly for women and marginalized groups. In parts of eastern Uganda and northern Kenya, women must turn their backs when speaking to elders in the local customary court, undermining their ability to clearly express themselves. The patriarchal attitudes embedded in some customary systems can result in the systematic exclusion of marginalized groups, particularly women and youth. Questions around fairness, accountability, and alignment with human rights standards remain pressing, and sensitive cases such as gender-based violence require particular attention to ensure that customary processes do not revictimize survivors or deny them effective remedies.

The South Sudan experience illustrates both the possibilities and the challenges of customary law reform. In Warrap State, the harmonization of customary law led to the consensual abolishment of early and forced marriage, with the decision pending translation into formal law. Chiefs, elders, legal experts, women, and youth worked together to review and modernize customary laws, expanding women's rights to property and divorce, adjusting bride wealth rates to reduce tension, and ensuring that local norms uphold basic rights. This internally driven reform process suggests that

sustainable change requires local ownership and cultural legitimacy, and that external imposition of human rights standards may generate resistance rather than transformation.

The South Sudanese case also illustrates the human stakes of legal pluralism. S., a 16-year-old girl, refused an arranged marriage as the fourth wife of an influential business owner. She was imprisoned after the rejected suitor complained to the police, and although she was eventually released, her family faced continued threats as long as customary law allowed early and forced marriages to be completed. This case demonstrates that cultural practices embedded in customary law can directly conflict with fundamental rights, and that the protection of vulnerable individuals may require the reform of customary norms themselves.

The study's analysis suggests that engagement with customary justice systems should be guided by three principles. First, engagement should be grounded in respect for cultural legitimacy and community ownership, recognizing that sustainable change requires internal dialogue and reform rather than external imposition. Second, engagement should be conditioned on compliance with constitutional and international human rights standards, with mechanisms for review and remedy where conflicts arise. Third, engagement should prioritize the participation of women and marginalized groups in customary justice processes, both as decision-makers and as justice seekers, and should support the development of customary norms and practices that are consistent with human rights and gender equality. The experience of the High-Level Regional Conference in Addis Ababa suggests that there is growing consensus on these principles, but the translation of principles into practice remains a significant challenge.

4.4 Technology and Digital Innovation: Promise and Peril

Digital technologies have emerged as potentially transformative tools for expanding access to justice in developing societies, but their deployment is characterized by both promise and peril. Mobile courts, e-judiciary platforms, and digital filing systems offer the promise of reducing physical proximity barriers, lowering costs, and improving the efficiency of justice delivery. Kenya's E-Judiciary Mobile Application, launched in May 2025, offers a digital gateway to court services and legal resources designed to benefit ordinary citizens who seek justice. The platform enables users to track case progress, access judgments, and receive court notifications, bringing services closer to people previously marginalized by geography, cost, or bureaucracy. The app is described as a virtual courthouse that supports the goal of reducing physical proximity to courts while empowering the elderly, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups to access court services.

Mobile and decentralized courts have been deployed across multiple jurisdictions as a people-centred justice imperative. Rwanda deploys mobile courts during Judicial Service Weeks and operates Maisons d'Accès à la Justice Centres in every district, delivering integrated services such as legal aid, documentation, and dispute resolution with an emphasis on proximity and simplicity. Uganda's small claims courts increase access to justice in post-conflict districts in the north, emphasizing speed,

informality, and low cost. In Tanzania, mobile courts and Integrated Justice Centres demonstrate the value of hybrid approaches that bring justice services directly to underserved communities, equipped with solar power and other appropriate technologies. These innovations demonstrate the potential of technology to extend the reach of justice systems to populations that have historically been excluded.

However, the deployment of technology in justice delivery is not without risks. In lower-income countries, particularly in rural areas, the immediate promise of digital solutions may be limited due to connectivity constraints, digital literacy gaps, and the possibility that relocating courts could undermine access, at least in the short term. The digital divide threatens to create new forms of exclusion: 710 million Africans remain offline, and the expansion of digital justice services may disproportionately benefit urban, educated, and connected populations while leaving the most marginalized behind. Parliamentarians across Africa have emphasized the need for model laws, continental strategies, and investment in the foundational pillars of digital infrastructure to ensure that technology serves empowerment and inclusivity rather than exacerbating existing inequalities.

The study's analysis suggests that technology should be understood as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, face-to-face legal assistance and community-based justice strategies. Digital platforms can extend the reach of legal information and enable remote access to court services, but they cannot replace the relationships of trust that community paralegals build with the communities they serve, nor can they substitute for the culturally grounded dispute resolution processes that customary systems provide. The most effective approach appears to be a hybrid model that combines digital tools with community-based legal assistance, ensuring that technology expands rather than constrains access to justice for the most marginalized populations.

4.5 Measuring What Matters: SDG 16.3.3 and the Evidence Gap

The adoption of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.3.3 represents a significant advance in the measurement of access to justice. Unlike traditional metrics that focus on institutional inputs—the number of courts, judges, or legal aid lawyers—SDG 16.3.3 measures the proportion of persons who have experienced a legal problem in the last two years and who accessed adequate information or assistance from an expert and were able to resolve their problem. This people-centred indicator captures the lived experiences of justice seekers and provides a more comprehensive assessment of justice outcomes than institutional metrics alone.

The indicator captures three dimensions: legal empowerment and capability, legal assistance availability and quality, and resolution process timeliness, cost, and fairness. By measuring whether people were able to resolve their legal problems, the indicator provides a more holistic assessment of justice outcomes. The UNDP Policy Brief on strengthening civil justice with SDG 16.3.3 explains the relevance of this indicator as a people-centred measure of access to justice and provides an overview of the methodology underpinning it. UNDP has tested the new SDG global indicator 16.3.3

within a national poverty survey in Argentina to evaluate the everyday justice experiences of poor people.

However, significant challenges remain in data collection, particularly in low-income countries where survey infrastructure is weak and where the populations most in need of justice services may be the least likely to be captured by household surveys. The indicator relies on self-reported experiences of legal problems and their resolution, which may be subject to recall bias and cultural variation in the willingness to report legal problems. Complementary indicators measure the accessibility of legal aid services, the percentage of justice seekers receiving legal assistance, and the existence of accessible, sustainable, and credible legal aid services. The SDG16 Data Initiative's complementary indicators for Target 16.3 measure the accessibility of legal aid services and the percentage of justice seekers that receive legal assistance.

The evidence base on access to justice has been strengthened by randomized controlled trials and participatory action research that measure the impact of legal empowerment interventions. The Greek study of displaced people and the participatory action research across seventeen organizations in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia provide robust evidence that legal empowerment strategies improve knowledge, confidence, and agency among justice seekers. However, important empirical questions remain—particularly around the mechanisms through which legal empowerment contributes to resilience and democratic renewal, and its relationship to broader development outcomes. Future research should examine the long-term effects of legal empowerment interventions, the conditions under which individual casework translates into systemic reform, and the cost-effectiveness of different delivery models.

4.6 Synthesis: Toward an Integrated Framework for Access to Justice

The comparative analysis reveals that access to justice in developing societies is characterized by three persistent tensions. The first is the tension between institutional reform and community empowerment. Traditional rule-of-law approaches emphasize strengthening formal legal institutions, while legal empowerment approaches emphasize building the capacity of individuals and communities to understand, use, and shape the law. The evidence suggests that neither approach alone is sufficient: formal institutions are necessary but not sufficient for access to justice, and community empowerment is essential but requires institutional responsiveness to translate into systemic change. The most effective approach integrates institutional reform with legal empowerment, strengthening both the supply side and the demand side of justice systems.

The second tension is between the accessibility and cultural legitimacy of customary justice systems and their compliance with human rights and gender equality standards. Customary systems are the primary pathway to justice for millions of people, but they frequently reflect and reinforce patriarchal norms and exclude women and marginalized groups from meaningful participation. The resolution of this tension requires engagement with customary systems that is grounded in respect for cultural legitimacy and community ownership while conditioned on compliance with

constitutional and international human rights standards, and that prioritizes the participation of women and marginalized groups in customary justice processes.

The third tension is between the promise of technology and the risk of digital exclusion. Digital innovations offer the potential to extend the reach of justice systems to populations that have historically been excluded, but the digital divide threatens to create new forms of exclusion. The most effective approach appears to be a hybrid model that combines digital tools with community-based legal assistance, ensuring that technology expands rather than constrains access to justice for the most marginalized populations.

An integrated framework for access to justice must navigate these tensions without resolving them prematurely. Such a framework should be grounded in four principles. First, access to justice should be understood as a multidimensional concept encompassing legal empowerment and capability, legal assistance availability and quality, and resolution process timeliness, cost, and fairness. Second, legal empowerment should be understood as operating simultaneously at the individual, community, and systemic levels, and interventions should be designed to strengthen all three. Third, engagement with customary justice systems should be grounded in respect for cultural legitimacy while conditioned on compliance with human rights and gender equality standards. Fourth, technology should be understood as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, face-to-face legal assistance and community-based justice strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between access to justice and legal empowerment in developing societies through a comparative analysis of community-based justice strategies, institutional reform models, and hybrid governance arrangements across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The analysis reveals a global justice landscape characterized by persistent deficits in formal legal institutions alongside the resilience and vitality of customary and community-based justice systems.

The principal findings can be summarized as follows. First, legal empowerment strategies operate simultaneously on the demand and supply sides of justice systems, strengthening both the capacity of individuals and communities to seek and use the law and the responsiveness of institutions to justice seekers' needs. Participatory action research and randomized controlled trials provide robust evidence that legal empowerment improves knowledge, confidence, and agency among justice seekers.

Second, the institutional models through which legal aid is delivered vary significantly across jurisdictions, with important implications for access, quality, and sustainability. Mixed models that combine state funding with civil society implementation and professional legal services with community-based paralegal support appear most promising, though their effectiveness depends on the broader institutional and political context.

Third, customary and informal justice systems remain the primary pathway to justice for millions of people, but they frequently reflect and reinforce gender inequalities. Engagement with customary systems requires a balance between respect for cultural legitimacy and compliance with human rights and gender equality standards, and internally driven reform processes are more likely to be sustainable than external imposition.

Fourth, digital technologies offer the potential to extend the reach of justice systems but also risk creating new forms of exclusion through the digital divide. The most effective approach appears to be a hybrid model that combines digital tools with community-based legal assistance.

Fifth, the adoption of SDG indicator 16.3.3 represents a significant advance in the measurement of access to justice, but significant challenges remain in data collection, particularly in low-income countries where survey infrastructure is weak.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its integrated framework for understanding access to justice as a multidimensional phenomenon that requires simultaneous attention to individual capability building, community mobilization, and systemic reform. The study also advances the theoretical understanding of legal empowerment by distinguishing between its demand-side and supply-side functions and by demonstrating how casework generates evidence that informs systemic advocacy. The concept of turning the wheel captures the iterative process through which individual cases contribute to broader systems change.

The practical and policy implications are several. Policymakers should prioritize mixed models of legal aid delivery that combine state funding, civil society implementation, professional legal services, and community-based paralegal support. Engagement with customary justice systems should be grounded in respect for cultural legitimacy while conditioned on compliance with human rights and gender equality standards, with priority given to internally driven reform processes. Technology should be deployed as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, face-to-face legal assistance and community-based justice strategies. Data collection on access to justice should be strengthened through the systematic use of SDG indicator 16.3.3 and complementary indicators, with particular attention to reaching populations that are typically excluded from household surveys.

The limitations of this study include its reliance on documentary sources and legal analysis rather than primary empirical data. Future research should examine the long-term effects of legal empowerment interventions, the conditions under which individual casework translates into systemic reform, and the cost-effectiveness of different delivery models through rigorous impact evaluation. Additionally, the study's focus on Africa, Asia, and Latin America means that other regions—including the Pacific, Central Asia, and the Middle East—are underrepresented. Future research should examine how access to justice and legal empowerment operate in these regions and what alternative models exist.

The justice gap—the distance between the promise of equal justice under law and the lived reality of billions of people who cannot access legal remedies—remains one of the most consequential challenges of our time. Closing this gap requires not only institutional reform but also a fundamental reorientation of justice systems toward the needs and experiences of justice seekers. Legal empowerment offers a pathway toward this reorientation, building the capacity of individuals and communities to understand, use, and shape the law while simultaneously generating the evidence and advocacy necessary for systemic change. The framework developed in this study offers a foundation for such engagement by clarifying the conceptual distinctions, comparative patterns, and practical implications that must inform any effective approach to strengthening the rule of law in developing societies.

REFERENCES

- American Bar Foundation. (2026). Advancing people-centered justice through legal empowerment (P. Chitalkar & A. Moy, Authors). Global Perspectives on People-Centered Justice. <https://www.americanbarfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Advancing-People-Centered-Justice-Through-Legal-Empowerment.pdf>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
- Di Giovanni, A., & Bercovich, L. (Eds.). (2023). Legal empowerment in informal settlements: Grassroots experiences from the Global South. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003538806>
- Golub, S. (2003). Beyond rule of law orthodoxy: The legal empowerment alternative (Rule of Law Working Paper No. 41). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. MIT Press.
- Hartmann, A., et al. (2025). Empowerment on the move? An experiment on supporting forcibly displaced people in Greece. *Journal of Development Economics*, 172, 103378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2024.103378>
- IDLO. (2025). UGANDA: Strengthening access to justice and promoting sustainable development for marginalized and vulnerable people in Uganda. International Development Law Organization. <https://www.idlo.int>
- IDLO. (2025). Inclusive practices in alternative dispute resolution: Delivering people-centred justice in Somalia. International Development Law Organization. <https://www.idlo.int>
- International Development Law Organization. (2021). Priority action 4: Invest in justice services and expand legal aid. <https://www.idlo.int>

- Mott Foundation. (2025). Legal Aid Board — Sierra Leone, access to justice in remote areas of Sierra Leone. <https://www.mott.org>
- Namati. (2025). Power up: Lessons from twelve years of organizing with community paralegals. <https://namati.org>
- National Council on the Administration of Justice (NCAJ). (2026). People-centred justice study. Kenya Judiciary. <https://www.ncaj.go.ke>
- Republic of Rwanda. (2026). Mobile courts and Maisons d'Accès à la Justice Centres. Rwanda Ministry of Justice.
- UNDP. (2025). Driving justice through innovation: Kenya's E-Judiciary application paves the way for a more inclusive legal system. <https://www.undp.org/kenya/news/driving-justice-through-innovation>
- UNDP. (2025). Justice beyond the courtroom: Local solutions that make a difference. <https://www.undp.org/stories/justice-beyond-courtroom-local-solutions-make-difference>
- UNDP. (2025). From data to action: Strengthening civil justice with SDG 16.3.3. <https://www.undp.org/policy-centre/governance/publications/data-action-strengthening-civil-justice-sdg-1633>
- UNDP. (2025). UNDP and partners support harmonization of Legal Aid Bill. <https://www.undp.org/liberia/news/undp-and-partners-support-harmonization-legal-aid-bill>
- UNDP. (2026). Outcome document — Strengthening traditional dispute resolution for access to justice in Africa. <https://www.undp.org/ethiopia/publications/outcome-document-strengthening-traditional-dispute-resolution-access-justice-africa>
- UNODC. (2023). Access to justice as an enabler for creating prosperity and sustainable development. <https://www.unodc.org>
- United Nations. (2025). In Guinea-Bissau, joint UN initiative helps build a culture where women can demand their rights. <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding>
- United Nations Mission in South Sudan. (2024). Bridging the justice gap in post-conflict South Sudan with mobile courts. <https://peacekeeping.un.org>
- United Nations Mission in South Sudan. (2025). Customary justice reform in South Sudan aims to end harmful practices and reduce displacement. <https://southsudan.iom.int>
- UN Women. (2026). Access to justice: A fundamental step toward a life free from violence. <https://lac.unwomen.org>
- World Justice Project. (2019). Global insights on access to justice. <https://worldjusticeproject.org>

World Justice Project. (2026). Indicator 16.3.3: Proportion of persons who experienced a legal problem in the last two years and accessed adequate information or assistance. <https://worldjusticeproject.org>