

Multidisciplinary perspectives from the World Justice Project's Multidisciplinary Outreach Meetings

The World Justice Project is a global initiative to strengthen and expand the rule of law. One of its activities is to “mainstream” rule of law advancement into the work of different disciplines. Mainstreaming meetings were held on five continents, attended by representatives of 14 disciplines and 71 nations. Their comments, cited below, illustrate the centrality of the rule of law to achieving the goals of disciplines around the world.

Business

- “We want certainty of regulation, of operating environment, of dispute resolution, et cetera. And we want certainty of policy.”
- “Business needs rules which everyone recognizes, that are clearly stated, reliable, predictable, and accessible. We have not yet achieved these goals. And delay in the legal process is justice denied, because time is an important factor for business.”
- “In business we all want more revenues and more profits. That can only happen if we are efficient in our products and pricing, but also if there is no violence, corruption, poverty, or health issues in our employees and within the community. And if there is a certain level of education. So the rule of law is very important for our businesses.”
- “In Kyrgyzstan, the rule of law helps small businesses defend their rights against the oligarchies that are an increasingly common feature of the commercial landscape. Local NGOs have found that working with small businesses has been a way to get the rule of law implemented on the ground.”

Education

- “The teachers talked about how the absence of the rule of law limited them in what they can teach people. Where there is no rule of law, they aren’t able to teach what they want to teach.”
- “If you ask what obstacles education faces in advancing the rule of law, it was mainly issues of government interference. So in Nigeria for instance, you had 40 university lecturers who were recently sacked. That sort of interference severely hampers the advancement of rule of law.”
- “If our citizens can’t understand the law, how can we expect them to follow the law? Educators must lead the way when it comes to translating the law so that it will become more accessible to everyone in our society.”

Engineering

- “Corruption in business engineering and science means there are continuous elements of disruption to business. It's important to be able to get permits and licenses according to law without having to bribe.”
- “If money meant for projects is used to bribe people, it will not be used for the materials that were supposed to be bought. The outcome can be that a building will fall down. It can be a disaster. The job will not be done correctly and it will cost a lot more money.”
- “The group noted that a construction project involves large, complex activities, in which quality can be very hard to assess. In the absence of full rule of law, it is very difficult to look at cross-border quality issues in construction.”

Environment

- “Developing countries have a strong imperative to improve the economic situation, but that brings on a lot of environmental issues. In Mongolia, there are mining issues; in Indonesia, deforestation issues; in China, water pollution, air pollution, and other issues. These countries are all passing laws to deal with these issues. But how good are the laws? Do they actually reflect the interests of the public? Even where there are laws, enforcement tends to be fairly poor.”
- “The rule-making process is very important in the environmental area. We deal with lack of public participation, lack of access to information, and lack of responsiveness to public comments.”
- “In our country, there was a serious issue with how much the public actually could get involved in decisions. That's very relevant to the environmental area, because decisions on permits for large projects are often the only point where there can actually be some input of the public's view.”
- “Corruption can fundamentally undermine the entire enterprise of rule of law if it is not dealt with. In the environmental area in particular, where often the people that are harming the environment are very well-moneyed interests, that is of particular importance.”

Faith

- “Inter-religious interface dialogue brings us to a better rule of law. ... We found out that it can bring us to support each other's values, find common values, and protect the dignity of the human being.”
- “The rule of law brings about justice, which then ensures that there's peace in the communities. The clergy here do not just look at the concept of peace as the absence of war, but in a holistic manner. Children would go to school, everybody has got equal opportunities, there's equity in societies and general well-being in the communities. The religious leaders are the voice of the voiceless, speaking for the downtrodden. The peace

ensured by the rule of law enables religious leaders to work effectively, efficiently and makes their work easy.”

- “The group noted that women under customary and religious systems faced physical constraints in accessing the court. At times some of the litigants, just because they are women, cannot even physically enter the court premises, because they are not allowed. And in customary courts also women at times face discrimination.”

Health

- “Access to medicines, access to healthcare -- In an international world, health has become increasingly important in relation to trade regulations, intellectual property agreements, and the like.”
- “Ethiopia is a largely traditional society where there are traditional practices which adversely affect the health of people. Female genital mutilation is one of the most widely practiced. Also, male supremacy and female subordination have made the country a breeding ground for violence against women.”
- “There is inadequate regulation of the professions, which is very relevant to the medical profession. In some countries there is no effective professional regulation. Sometimes there is no law, and sometimes there's no real government effort to enforce the law.”
- “National public health systems are not sufficient anymore. They can no longer guarantee the health rights and the health security of their population. There is an increasing urgency for transnational and international law... There is a limit to national sovereignty when we talk about health.”

Human rights

- “Access to our legal system is more difficult for the poor. Generally the poorest of the poor are invisible. If they demand justice, they become illegal. And if they protest more, they become criminal.”
- “You can have a good legal system, but it may not be accessible to many people, for instance if they're poor, non-English speaking, a migrant person, perhaps someone who's not well-educated. The assumption that everyone will know English and how the system works just obviously doesn't work.”
- “In Sierra Leone women were able, just in 2007, to achieve three pieces of legislation: one on domestic violence, another on the registration of customary laws, and then the third one on devolution of property so that women and girls can inherit properties like their male counterpart.”

Labor

- “The rule of law matters when you come to labor. In Africa, there are a lot of informal labor issues. Sometimes people are employed without contracts, others are not properly paid, they do not have proper protective clothing, and so on. There is a lot of exploitation of workers, which we realize the rule of law and observance of corporate governance would eliminate.”
- “Does labor law cover the informal economy? In some countries, that's up to 98 percent of the population. That workforce is not covered by labor legislation.”
- “There are things labor is doing to strengthen its role in the rule of law: promoting common labor standards across countries, providing advice on elimination of discrimination in employment and child labor, and promoting international agreements on labor issues.”

Law enforcement

- “One concern is the breakdown of shared community standards among youthful offenders, who seem to have concluded that there is no benefit to them to play by the rules that the rest of us respect.”
- “Another obstacle is safety for judges. We've had this come up a number of times, in terms of prosecuting corruption or decisions that might go against prominent people. How do you deal with the safety and security of people making these sorts of decisions?”
- “There is a difference between having good laws and getting them enforced and implemented on the ground. Kyrgyzstan being a very good example – indeed, all the Central Asian Republics have good constitutions and laws, reflecting the work of some excellent Rule of Law lawyers around the world. The difficulty, of course, is ensuring that they are implemented.”

Media

- “The media will not and cannot promote the rule of law if there is an oppressive regime, if there are oppressive contempt laws. ... Oppressive contempt laws are used against academics and journalists.”
- “The media set the agenda and public opinion in terms of government accountability. We often see distortion of facts and sensationalization of reports, and lack of vigorous investigation and sustained follow-up on cases. We agreed that media when empowered, when free, will be a vehicle for promoting accountability.”
- “You can educate people using radio dramas. For example, showing how they should be aware of their rights if they are questioned in a police station or somewhere.”

Security

- “We had a recent experience with cyber attacks on government computers. You have no idea where, for example, an attack could be coming from, who is behind it, who can be held responsible for it? And who is supposed to be enforcing rules about it? Particularly

the Internet. It is very difficult in military and security because it's uncontrollable, essentially.”

- “In Afghanistan it's very difficult to promote rule of law when you have non-traditional actors operating in various parts of the country, or terrorists in urban areas. And there are issues with drug lords and drug trade, and the corruption that comes with it.”
- “Security concerns can erode the rule of law. In the area of counterterrorism, drug enforcement, and organized crime, in order to combat those undoubted evils, there has been, in some occasions, erosion of fundamental principles of rule of law. But there is a conflicting tension because an inability to effectively combat those forces is, itself, destructive to the rule of law. If you allow things like organized crime, drug dealing, or terrorism to take over, then you're going to break down the basis of society.”
- “The balance between individual rights and national security is very important. We've certainly observed that in the United States, what with the eavesdropping and other extraordinary measures that have been taken in the name of combating terrorism. One wonders about the legitimacy of some of that and what kind of international standards should be set to deal with it.”