

THE LIBERIA CASE INDEX PROJECT

Engaging employees in big-picture solutions that have tangible impact

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the political upheaval and civil war under the regime of Charles Taylor (1989 to 2003), Liberia's legal system collapsed. The Liberian legal system had been rooted in common law and is precedent-driven full stop. Judges require access to previous case decisions when giving a ruling in a case. Post-war, the lack of an index for ease of searching previous case decisions was identified as a significant challenge to reestablishing the rule of law and the development of an equitable and stable society. Once peace was established in the country, Lawyers Without Borders conducted a needs assessment, and in consultation with the Chief Justice of Liberia, uncovered a critical need for a case index. Linklaters was invited to help research Liberia's case law, write individual case summaries, and then index every case for ease of reference. Linklaters commenced the project in 2009 because the firm believes the rule of law plays a critical role in strengthening legal systems and contributes to the conditions needed for a stable government and safer society.

ORGANIZATION

Linklaters

SECTOR

Legal Services

HEADQUARTERS

London, United Kingdom

SDGs IMPACTED BY THE CASE STUDY



INNOVATION IN ACTION

Since the initial publication of the case index and summaries in 2010, Linklaters has completed two index updates, encompassing cases from the 1800s through 2017. In order to enable this massive undertaking, Linklaters created opportunities for its lawyers from across its global offices to contribute to the project remotely. The complexity of the project extended beyond specific legal expertise and other business and administration support was contributed from other professional volunteers throughout the firm. Since its start, 378 lawyers and interns across 18 Linklaters offices have contributed over 9,200 hours to the project.

Moreover, this work has helped to anchor efforts to rebuild Liberia's judicial system and has contributed directly to the establishment of a consistent rule of law. The index ensures that Liberia's judges and lawyers are able to access, consid-

er, and build upon Liberian case precedent. And the index has been made available not only to the judiciary in urban areas but throughout rural areas as well. Copies are also lodged with the Law School of Monrovia as well as Cornell University and the US Embassy in Liberia.

Internally this extensive undertaking has contributed to Linklaters own sense of social value and contributes to the firm's employee value proposition demonstrating it as a great place to work for socially-aware talent. This project also directly contributed to the decision from Linklaters to recognize pro bono volunteering as chargeable time for the purposes of its lawyers performance evaluations, weighing contributions to pro bono efforts equal to fee-paying work in the eyes of the firm.

KEY OUTCOMES AND LEARNINGS

This project is a unique example of cross-sector partnership to address a pervasive and systems-wide barrier for community success. The future of Liberia’s judicial system is meaningfully changed given this program—the impact this work has on the country and its citizens cannot be measured and will endure for generations to come. Many organizations would not consider a program with such a significant scope or such a lengthy runway for completion, but Linklaters prioritized its commitment to the rule of law as a core tenet for any flourishing community, and persisted through the project.

In doing so, Linklaters developed remotely accessible trainings and databases for its employee volunteers and a comprehensive suite of instructions and templates suitable for mass volunteer participation. While time-consuming to prepare, these resources have served Linklaters well in similar projects the organization has committed to given their new capabilities.



John Moore/Getty Images News

PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

The Liberia Case Index Project was identified and initiated by Lawyers Without Borders, and supported with an initial grant from The World Bank, which provided support for the indexing of cases until 2008. Cooperation with the Liberian judiciary was critical as was the collaboration with Thomson Reuters who published the index. The partnership of these organizations has been critical for the success of this project and the over-10-years endurance of this collective effort is a testament to the enduring nature of these particular partnerships.

A deeply seeded belief within Linklaters, that robust economies and stable communities are dependent upon the existence of clear laws, consistently applied, is echoed in the partnership of employees who have contributed thousands upon thousands of hours in support of the project so far.

“The Liberia Case Index Project illustrates the enormous potential of strategically leveraged pro bono resources and truly demonstrates ‘best practice’ in long-term sustainability. The impact of distributing the Liberian case digests and index would truly not have been possible without the commitment, vision and skill of a superlative team at Linklaters.”

- CHRISTINA STORM,
Founder & Director of Lawyers Without Borders

CALL TO ACTION

Our experience on this project has been highly positive. We would encourage firms and companies to apply their professional skills pro bono to complex projects. While such projects can be daunting, staff are clearly motivated to devote time to big-picture solutions that will have tangible impact. Excellent project management and building the right partnerships will make a project with longevity possible.

