Access to justice—the ability of citizens and communities to resolve disputes and uphold rights—is key to attaining the World Bank’s twin goals of eliminating poverty and promoting shared prosperity. It supports the vulnerable to prevent and address various forms of abuse. It helps businesses, especially MSMEs, to grow. It is crucial for achieving high-quality public service delivery in all sectors, including security, health, education, transport, information and communication technology (ICT), utilities, housing, and social protection. Access to justice also helps to prevent and mitigate conflict and violence.

INITIATIVES IN ACCESS TO JUSTICE
The World Bank works with client countries to enhance access to existing legal services and promote legal empowerment. Where these mechanisms are weak or lacking, the World Bank partners with state and nonstate service providers to develop legal services that are accessible and affordable for all. Activities are financed by development policy operations, investment project financing, or trust funds, among others. They can be stand-alone activities or components of broader or sector-specific projects in areas such as health, education, social protection, anti-corruption, and labor. The components vary depending on need and include instruments such as mobile courts, legal clinics, alternative dispute resolution, and paralegal services. Initiatives also focus on the law-making process and how to make use of law and justice institutions to improve public sector accountability.

MOBILE COURTS
Mobile courts provide access to justice services in rural areas where they are often scarce or lacking. In Tanzania, the World Bank’s Citizen-Centric Judicial Modernization and Justice Services Delivery Project is implementing a program called Justice-on-Wheels. Mobile courts empower vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and small businesses, by providing quick and affordable justice services where they live and work. Mobile courts initiated under a project in the Philippines allowed judges to travel to prisons and underserved communities to adjudicate, leading to the release of thousands of pretrial detainees. Similar mobile courts were established in Ecuador and Honduras as well as Guatemala, among others.

LEGAL CLINICS
The Jordan Legal Aid for Poor Women Project targets legal aid funding specifically for poor women and their children who face particularly high obstacles to legal and judicial services. The establishment of legal aid clinics for women increased the probability of obtaining favorable judgments in child support cases and the chance of actually obtaining child support payments and decreased the probability of severe physical violence from ex-spouses or ex-partners. A World Bank project in the Russian Federation on Strengthening Access to Justice for the Poorest and Most Vulnerable established 20 pilot local legal aid centers that provided free assistance to 13,376 rural dwellers, of whom 513 were criminal defendants or victims. The Justice Services Improvement Project in Peru increased the number of free legal aid centers across the country and extended the justice sector’s ability to reach those in need of its services.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND MEDIATION
In Azerbaijan, the Judicial Services and Smart Infrastructure Project is helping the government develop alternative dispute resolution (ADR) systems for internally displaced persons, refugees, and other vulnerable groups. Through the Engaging Citizens through Mediation in Kaduna State Project, the World Bank partnered with the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria to develop staff capacity through ADR and mediation training and by introducing paralegal training, all of which were novel in the Nigerian legal education system. The Alternative Dispute Resolution Project in Pakistan helped improve access to justice for small and medium enterprises by providing ADR and commercial mediation services at the Karachi Center for Dispute Resolution.

INFORMATION, DISSEMINATION, AND EDUCATION
By partnering with local civil society organizations, the Justice Sector Support Project in Serbia published a guide for victims of crime informing them about their rights and how to navigate the criminal justice system. The project is developing an online interactive map that enables victims of crime to identify state and nonstate organizations that provide support services for victims.
To help cut the costs of legal representation and improve legal education, the project also published a series of toolkits for lay people, including a Self-Representation Guide, First Time in Court or at Courthouse Guide, Guide for Exemption from Court Fees: Court Fees in Civil Proceedings and How To Dispense with Payments, and Guide for the Exercise of Right to a Court Interpreter. To strengthen legal education and improve access to justice, the World Bank also contributed to the development of the Afro-barometer and carried out a regional survey on women’s access to justice in Africa.

E-JUSTICE AND ICT
In the Justice Services Improvement Project II, the Peruvian government instituted an electronic filing and notification system to implement quicker and more secure processes in its justice system that saved time and reduced the risk of loss and document tampering. Among ICT-driven strategies that can reap benefits are computerization of judicial processes, online dispute resolution platforms, and the use of mobile technology to reach populations in rural areas, according to the sixth edition of The World Bank Legal Review.

PARALEGALS
The World Bank Justice for the Poor Program assisted the implementation of the Indonesia National Strategy on Access to Justice. Policy advice and technical assistance ensured that paralegals were recognized in the provision of legal services and expanded the number of organizations that could offer legal aid, thereby making services more widely available in the country. Technical assistance also improved the effectiveness of complaint handling processes, particularly those related to large corruption cases. The Justice for the Poor Community Paralegal Program in Sierra Leone helped improve accountability around the government’s initiative to provide free health care to pregnant and breastfeeding women as well as children under five.

PUBLIC SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY
To increase government accountability and enhance access to justice, the Demand for Good Governance Project in Cambodia worked to strengthen citizen organizations that bring grievances against the state. To improve coordination between nongovernmental organizations and the government of Ghana in providing services to female-headed households and HIV/AIDS orphans, the Legal Reform and Legal Aid for the Advancement of Women Project developed a more comprehensive approach to legal aid by fostering partnerships between the government and civil society. Analysis under the grant was instrumental in increasing access to justice and women’s access to land.

GOING FORWARD
Client countries are increasingly looking for solutions to reduce barriers to access to justice. The Justice and Development Community of Practice at the World Bank is committed to building on the lessons learned from over 25 years in the field and continuing to investigate ways to develop good, replicable, and scalable access to justice programs.

At a time when income inequality is rising, it’s increasingly important that governments provide citizens and businesses with access to the tools they need to resolve their disputes and uphold their rights in ways that are fast and fair.