

ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC TRUST: NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT IN GBARNGA, BONG COUNTY, LIBERIA

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Abstract

The study evaluated public trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit, Gbarnga City, Bong County, Liberia. It explored community perceptions and the factors influencing procedural and substantive justice trust. Trust reflects the belief in an institution's competence and effectiveness in achieving its goals. Interviews were conducted with 96 randomly selected community members. Data were analyzed descriptively, along with measurement of satisfaction levels of the citizens on the performance of the Ninth Judicial Court in the provision of procedural and substantive justice using a five-point Likert scale. Trust was assessed on an 11-point scale (0 - no trust, 10 - complete trust). The determinants of trust were identified by correlating mean satisfaction ratings with respondents' trust levels. Additional factors like prior court experience and trusting attitudes were also examined. Results showed weak to moderate correlations. Most respondents were male, single, aged 31-40, and fairly educated, with 43 percent having filed a court case. Ratings for responsiveness, integrity, and fairness leaned towards dissatisfaction, while reliability and openness received neutral to satisfied ratings for both procedural and substantive justice. Overall trust was moderate (5.20 out of 10). The study recommended measures to enhance public trust in the 9th Judicial Circuit Court.

Keywords: governance; public trust; procedural justice; substantive justice

1. Introduction

Article 3 of the Liberian Constitution (1986) states that Liberia's form of government is Republican, having three separate coordinated branches: the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. The same article also discusses the "Separation of powers, checks and balances". Consistent with the separation of powers: "No person holding office in one of

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these three branches of government shall be allowed to hold another office or exercise any of the powers assigned to either of the other two branches except in cases wherein the constitution gives such authority/right.”

Liberia's criminal justice scheme is patterned after the American legal liberalism model. It is based on a national constitution that divides power between the three branches of government, with the judiciary branch having the authority to decide whether statutes, court decisions, executive orders, and legislative acts are lawful (Graef 2015).

The Judiciary has the power to interpret the laws of the land aimed to provide everyone with fair justice. Therefore, understanding what is likely to influence the perception of the justice system is an important issue, since people's trust in the judiciary is an important aspect of its performance (Roussey & Deffains, 2012). According to the European Court of Human Rights, not only must an effective judiciary provide good procedural and substantive laws, but it should also inspire respect and trust for citizens (Pham, 2005). Although law professionals and economic scientists believe that public trust in the justice system is a key component of the effectiveness of justice, the literature on what determines it remains inadequate (Roussey & Deffains, 2012). Trust is a belief or perception that an institution is competent and effective in achieving its goals. A good society is often built on confidence in institutions. Oftentimes, the justice system as an institution is relied upon by individuals who feel aggrieved, expecting that they would be treated fairly. That is, when they feel that their rights are trampled upon, they are confident that they will get justice commensurate to their feeling of being offended (OECD, 2017).

Although there have been other studies conducted in Liberia by the United Nations Mission generally on the structure of Liberian courts, there is not one study that directly points to the issue of trust in the Gbarnga courts. As a media practitioner who worked for one of the biggest community radio stations in Gbarnga, the researcher is aware of this problem based on the clamor and outcry of the citizens concerning the issue of trust in the court systems.

The issue of mob violence to the ‘weak justice system,’ crowded prisons, poor gathering of evidence by police, corruption, and the court releasing alleged criminals without due process of law has resulted in the decline of public trust in the justice system. A court that lacks the public's trust cannot expect to function as an effective dispute resolution body, a valued issuer of punishments, or a trustworthy deliverable body for long. This is true whether the court is a trial court or a supreme appellate court (Rottman & Tomkins, 1999).

On a more general note, Bouchaert & Van de Walle (2003) revealed that politicians, journalists, and civil society are increasingly voicing their concerns about a declining degree of confidence in government and the negative impact that this has on government and society's cohesion. Furthermore, in his article, Bjornskov (2010) believes that better governance is equivalent to more trust and more satisfaction. It can now be presumed

that strengthening the level of governance could result in citizens who are more satisfied and trusting of their government. For two reasons, current attempts to measure government trust and satisfaction are misleading if they claim to be measuring good governance (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). First, satisfaction is difficult to calculate and highly dependent on the service. Second, while trust in government is easier to measure, the relationship between trust and good governance is uncertain. Even when government trust can be measured, it is unclear whether changes in trust are influenced by government-related factors (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

This study is an attempt to find updated empirical evidence related to the above claims as it assessed the level of public trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit court of Gbarnga City, Bong County. Specifically, it: 1) described the characteristics and operations of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court; 2) measured the level of satisfaction of the citizens on the performance of the Ninth Judicial Court in the provision of procedural and substantive justice; 3) determined the citizens' trust on the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court in general; and 4) established the drivers of public trust based on the level of satisfaction of citizens in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court.

2. Methodology

2.1 Conceptual Framework

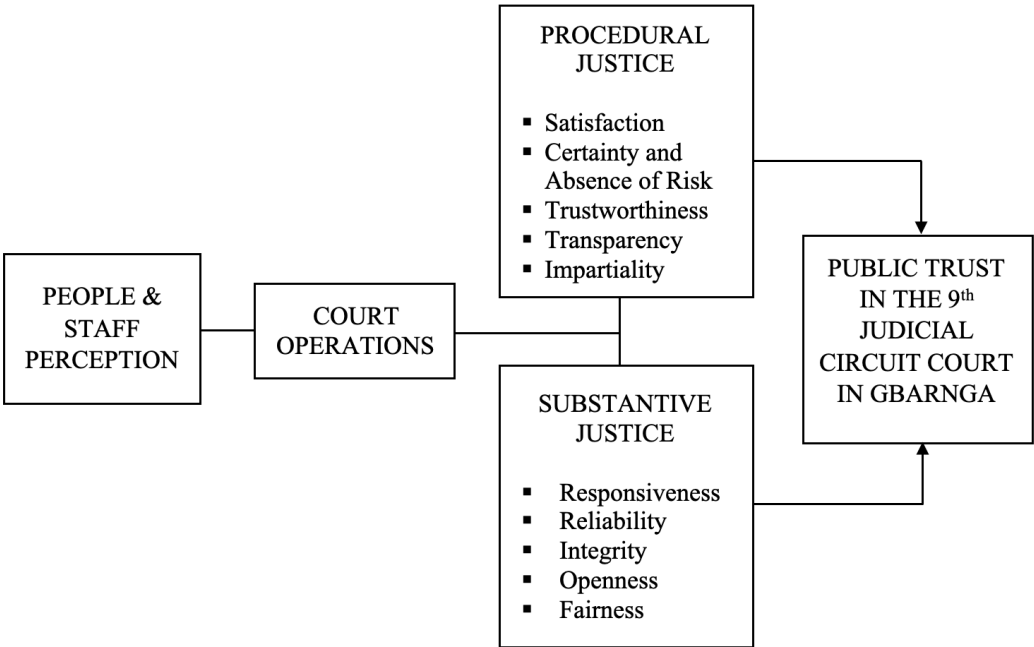
In general, there are three main channels that can possibly influence trust: an individual's characteristics; institutional environment where the individual acts; and the societal and community context. Institutional trust necessitates that important society institutions are performing their functions with integrity and sense of fairness (OECD, 2017). Institutions, however, are varied and their functions are changing as well. Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) claimed that trust is broader than satisfaction, but it can be used as a quick and easy predictor. It cannot, however, be used as a stand-alone indicator of good governance because the public's confidence in government is evolving, and therefore a moving target. For trust in the judicial system to be present, citizen's expectations and the perceived actual functioning of the court should be in harmony (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2003).

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework that depicts trust as being related to the public's perception on the court's performance of its functions, and therefore satisfaction, on the provided procedural and substantive justice to the people of Gbarnga. Procedural justice pertains to fairness of the process by which the court resolves cases under its jurisdiction. According to existing studies, people are more concerned with how they are treated while making overall decisions about the legitimacy of those in positions of authority (Bennett, et al., 2018). On the other hand, the concern of substantive justice is the content of the law, or the actual decision made on a certain case. The moral and cultural values of the society in which the law is formed have a significant impact on whether or not the law is considered just.

Measures of public trust in courts include satisfaction with the certainty and absence of risk in, trustworthiness of, transparency in and impartiality of the courts in its delivery of

procedural and substantive justice. This is based on Bouckaert and Van de Walle’s (2003) operationalization of public trust in government institutions. The level of public trust is influenced by factors that promote confidence in the judiciary or drivers of public trust as identified in the OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust. These drivers correspond to how public trust has been operationalized as the two sets of elements are both based on how the court has been performing its mandate. However, it is possible that there is a discrepancy in public perception and the actual responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness and fairness of the judiciary. It is thus important to analyze the factors and processes that help construct public trust in relation to public perception.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework used in assessing the Level of Public Trust: Ninth Judicial Circuit Court in Gbarnga, Bong County, Liberia



Source: Authors’ framework concept

2.2. Data collection and analysis

The study was conducted in Gbarnga City, the capital of Bong County in Liberia. It focused specifically on the three communities in Gbarnga namely: Iron Gate, Lofa Road, and Brooklyn. They were selected because they are the direct users of the courts, and these communities surround the court facilities. A total of 96 citizen-respondents, equally distributed in the three communities, were surveyed using a pre-tested questionnaire. The sample size of 96 was based on Cochran’s sampling formula with 10 percent assumed margin of error. Key informant interviews, using pre-formulated guide questions, were also conducted among clerks of court and judicial magistrates. To determine the community member’s perceptions on the functioning of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of

Gbarnga, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction on the court's performance of its functions in providing procedural and substantive justice using a five-point Likert scale. Mean satisfaction rating was computed and presented in a frequency distribution table. For the evaluation of trust in the judiciary, respondents were asked direct questions in which responses were selected from an 11-point scale (0 - not at all and 10 - trust completely). Again, mean level of trust was computed, and mode was also determined for a more thorough discussion.

To identify the determinants of public trust and the factors that contribute to the public's level of trust in the court, the mean satisfaction rating for providing procedural and substantive justice was correlated with the respondent's indicated level of trust. In addition, other factors such as previous experience with a case in court were correlated with level of trust.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the citizen-respondents. The average age of the respondents was 34 years and most (43%) of them were within the age bracket 31-40 years but there were about 4 percent who belong to the age bracket 51-60 years. They were male-dominated (73%), which is not surprising because the Global Gender Gap Index of Liberia in 2021 was reported to be 0.69 and still increasing (World Data Atlas, n.d.). They were also mostly single (72%) and had secondary education (44%) and a university diploma (41%). Post-graduate degree holders were about 4 percent.

3.2. Experience in Filing a Case in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court

Among the 96 respondents, 41 (43%) percent claimed to have filed at least one case in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court (Table 1). However, not all the cases filed were elevated as full-blown court cases because either they were settled out of court, or they had no money to pursue the case further.

3.3. Characteristics and Operations of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court

The key informants indicated that the court services are open to all citizens, rich or poor, but poor litigants cannot afford to appear during hearings especially if they live far away from where the court is located. If the court is distant, the poor cannot readily go to and from the court because of lack of means of transportation or the high cost of it. They said that the court receives an average of 15 cases daily (6 criminal and 9 civil), most of which are "appeals" from the magistrate. The cases prioritized for hearing according to the informants are rape, murder, and other criminal cases especially if the victim is a minor; when the "community is deeply involved"; and the "public interest" is very high.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics and experience in filing a case in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, 96 citizen-respondents, Gbarnga City, Bong County, Liberia, 2021

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 30	38	40

31 - 40	41	43
41 - 50	13	14
51 - 60	4	4
Average	34	
Sex		
Male	70	73
Female	26	27
Civil Status		
Single	69	72
Married	23	24
Divorced	2	2
Widowed/Widower	2	2
Educational Attainment		
Primary	4	4
Secondary (including vocational schools)	42	44
University Diploma	39	41
Post Graduate degree	11	11
Filed a Case in Ninth Judicial Circuit Court		
Yes	41	43
No	55	57

Source of raw data: Authors' survey, 2021

In terms of procedure, cases filed in court are usually scheduled for an initial hearing within 3 to 7 days from the date of filing. One key informant who is working as a clerk of court also indicated that a civil case must be filed at least 10 days before the formal opening of the court for a particular term, either February, May, August, or November (judiciary.gov.lr/9th-bong-county), to give time for all the parties to study the nature of the case. Cases filed must be heard/deliberated upon within 30 to 60 days before they are finally decided to be ready for adjudication. The time frame for adjudication is within 15 to 60 days for criminal cases and 30 to 90 days or more for civil cases.

3.4. Level of Satisfaction on the Performance of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court

The mean level of satisfaction with the responsiveness of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court was found higher for its provision of substantive justice than procedural justice with ratings of 2.80 and 2.54, respectively (Table 2). As explained earlier, substantive justice refers to the decisions handed down by the court on the cases it tried while procedural justice pertains to how and how long cases were admitted in court, tried, and eventually decided upon. Responsiveness for procedural justice, on the other hand, means that the court provides the public with timely services like short-duration trials of court cases

(OECD, 2017). According to Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003), responsiveness for substantive justice refers to how satisfied are people with court performance in the adjudication of cases. This means that all sides should be heard (due process) and the law should be applied as per the nature of the case. For one to be satisfied that justice is dispensed, no matter the stature of the person before the court (poor or rich), the law should favour no one, not become biased or take sides, and the substance of the case is what the law looks at in rendering verdict. Moreover, timely adjudication of cases brings about satisfaction, especially when both parties are yearning for speedy trials for either side to find justice. That way, both sides are satisfied.

In the same manner, when it comes to reliability, the Court was adjudged to have been performing better for the provision of substantive justice (mean = 3.18) than procedural justice (mean = 3.04) (Table 2). OECD (2017) operationalizes court reliability as the period within which the court resolves a case which should be in accordance with the existing rules and regulations of Liberia. The processes and decisions of the court should likewise be predictable/reliable (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2003).

The duration for the adjudication commences within ten days before the start of each quarterly meeting. A pre-trial chamber meeting shall be held in a quarterly session of the circuit judges assigned to sit, which shall follow immediately after the start of each quarterly session and continue for 42 consecutive days, excluding Sundays and legal holidays, unless it has expired earlier. Following the conclusion of the trial session, the judge assigned to sit for the quarterly session, as well as any other judge simultaneously assigned to the circuit, will hold a 10-day closing chamber session (<http://judiciary.gov.lr>). Citizens get disappointed when these laid down procedures are not followed and cases go beyond the statutory period, thereby delaying justice, and creating trust issues in the system.

Integrity is equated with trustworthiness, and again, the level of satisfaction for substantive justice delivered by the Court proved higher at 3.08 as against only 2.68 for procedural justice (Table 2). In terms of procedural justice, the judges and the court staff are expected to not be swayed by external influence (OECD, 2017) and there is ethics and independence of judges and staff (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2003). On the other hand, for substantive justice, the judges are supposed to be competent in their position and the same is true for court staff in their performance of court transactions (OECD, 2017). According to Article 69 of the Liberia constitution, judges of subordinate courts of record shall, with the consent of the senate, be appointed and commissioned by the President of the Republic, provided that any person so appointed shall be: a citizen of Liberia, of good moral character and an Attorney-at-law who has practiced for at least three years, or a counsellor of the supreme court bar. With such a high bar set for one to become a judge, the citizens' expectations of judges and their conduct come into question when they perceive that the cases are not being adjudicated on time and justice is delayed, coupled with non-adherence to the rightful procedures. All these hampered the integrity of the Court.

Procedural justice openness, according to OECD (2017), allows the public to observe court proceedings and for substantive justice, it is about allowing authorized persons to easily check the status of a case. For Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003), openness is equivalent to transparency and hence it should have information that is available, accessible, understandable, accurate, and up to date. For this characteristic of the Court, the provision of procedural justice was noted as having a slightly higher mean satisfaction rating of 3.20 as opposed to only 3.11 for substantive justice (Table 2). Under the “General rules applicable in all courts in Liberia, specifically Rule 11”, the taking of photographs in the courtroom during sessions of the court or recess between sessions, and the recording of live broadcasts or televising of court proceedings are seen as enabling lawyers to grandstand, detract the witness in giving his/her testimony, degrade the court, and create misconceptions concerning the court. However, the court gives out invitations to the public/civil society organization (CSO) to witness court proceedings to show transparency but with a strict mandate not to record or do a live broadcast of what is happening in the court.

In terms of fairness, almost equal mean satisfaction ratings were reported for procedural and substantive justice with 2.63 and 2.62, respectively (Table 2). OECD (2017) sees fairness in procedural justice when the same court procedures are applied regardless of the status (male or female, rich or poor, natives or migrants, etc.) of a person while substantive justice means meting the same penalties regardless of the status (male or female, rich or poor, powerful, or not, etc.) of a person. Similarly, Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) consider fairness as synonymous with impartiality which means that law/rules are applied equally to all.

Table 2. Level of satisfaction with the performance of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, by type of justice, 96 citizen-respondents, Gbarnga City, Bong County, Liberia, 2021

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION	PROCEDURAL JUSTICE		SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE	
	No.	%	No.	%
Responsiveness (Mean Rating)	2.54		2.80	
1	21	22	14	15
2	29	30	23	24
3	25	26	28	29
4	16	17	26	27
5	5	5	5	5
Reliability (Mean Rating)	3.04		3.18	
1	12	12	9	9
2	20	21	14	15
3	26	27	34	35
4	27	28	28	29
5	11	11	11	11
Integrity (Mean Rating)	2.68		3.08	

1	18	19	11	11
2	22	23	15	16
3	34	35	32	33
4	16	17	28	29
5	6	6	10	10
Openness (Mean Rating)		3.20	3.11	
1	11	11	12	13
2	14	15	15	16
3	27	28	27	28
4	29	30	32	33
5	15	16	10	10
Fairness (Mean Rating)		2.63	2.62	
1	22	23	25	26
2	26	27	23	24
3	22	23	24	25
4	18	19	13	14
5	8	8	11	11

Source of raw data: Authors' survey, 2021

Before determining the level of trust of the citizen-respondents on the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, their inherent attitude towards trusting most people and those that they know personally was obtained using a 0-10 rating scale. The mean level of trust of the respondents to most people was very low at only 3.5. The modal level of trust was 3-4 with 25 percent reporting and those with the lowest percentage were noted for trust level 9-10 with 4 percent. The highest proportion of them (42%) were found to have the lowest trust level of 0-2. This implies that they have little trust in most people they do not know, and this could also redound to their trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court being low as well if they know nothing or very little about it, its operations and standard protocol.

Table 3. Level of trust by type of trustee, 96 citizen-respondents, Gbarnga City, Bong County, Liberia, 2021

Level of Trust	Trust With					
	Most People		People Known Personally		Ninth Judicial Court	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
0-2	40	42	14	15	24	25
3-4	24	25	20	21	15	16
5-6	21	22	30	31	23	24
7-8	7	7	18	19	15	16
9-10	4	4	14	15	19	20
Mean	3.5		5.5		5.3	

Source of raw data: Authors' survey, 2021

The respondents' mean level of trust to the people they personally know was higher at 5.5, also with modal trust level of 5-6 as reported by 31 percent of them. This time, the lowest percentages were noticeable in trust levels 0-2 and 9-10 with 15 percent each reporting (Table 3). This is suggestive of the fact that if the respondents are familiar with the actual operations of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, and such were in accordance with rules of law, then there is a higher tendency for the people to have higher level of trust for it.

When asked about their actual level of trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, the 96 citizen respondents reported a mean level of trust of 5.3. The modal trust level was 5-6 with 24 percent while the least was in the 7-8 trust level (Table 3). This is closer to the mean level of trust for the people known personally by the respondents, implying that the respondents are quite knowledgeable about the workings of the Court. CSOs are allowed to assign a 'monitor' at courts across the country to follow the substance and proceeding of every matter, especially with cases of rape, murder, and other related human rights cases. Some of the CSOs monitor correction centers to ascertain the condition of the facilities and the inmates. From tracking the correction centers and inmates, the CSO actors can remind judges, and prosecutors about placing on the docket cases like rape, murder, and those who are pre-trial detainees, to avoid having people in prison without trial, and to advise on improving the correction centers and that justice gets served.

3.5 Relationship of Level of Trust to the Court and Relevant Factors

In general, the level of trust of the civil society in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court in Gbarnga is weakly correlated to the identified trusting traits and their levels of satisfaction on the services provided and decisions made by the court. This could have been caused by the small size of sample which was 96 only. The highest correlation coefficient (0.31) was noted for the tested association between the tendency of the respondents to trust most people and their trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court. The positive sign implies that if by nature the respondents have the higher tendency to trust most people, they also have the increasing inclination to also trust the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court. The same trend was observed for those who have the predisposition to trust more the people who are known to them personally. It should be emphasized that in this study, it was revealed that the respondents were more trusting of people who are known to them personally (mean of 5.5, Table 3) than those they rarely knew (mean of 3.5, Table 3). This implies that if the respondents were more knowledgeable about the functioning of the court, its services, and decisions made, then their tendency to trust the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court will be enhanced. The same is implied by the low but positive correlation coefficient (0.28) between level of trust to the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court and trust in people known personally.

Low coefficient (0.22) was again arrived at when level of trust to Ninth Judicial Circuit Court was correlated with overall satisfaction on procedural and substantive justice combined. Almost the same results were obtained when said level of trust was correlated

separately to procedural justice (0.22) and substantive justice (0.24) although the latter had a little higher (Table 4).

The higher positive correlation coefficient for responsiveness was noted for procedural justice (0.20) than for substantive justice (0.12) suggesting that increasing awareness on the responsiveness of the court by the civil society-respondents improves their trust level to the court. The higher correlation coefficient for procedural justice implies the probability that the respondents are more aware of what is going on in the processes of court case acceptance, litigation/trials, and their duration and as such they are more affected by it. For substantive justice, decisions made by the court might have been less known to the respondents and since they are made months and even years after case filing, people might not have that sound memory at all, which could have influenced their response to this question.

Table 4. Summary of correlation results between trusting traits and satisfaction on the performance of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, Gbarnga, Bong County, Liberia, 2021

Trusting Traits and Satisfaction Criteria	R ² (correlation coefficient)
Trust in Most People	0.31
Trust in People Known Personally	0.28
Overall Satisfaction (Procedural + Substantive Justice)	0.24
Overall Satisfaction on Procedural Justice Provided	0.22
Satisfaction on Responsiveness in Providing Procedural Justice	0.20
Satisfaction on Reliability in Providing Procedural Justice	0.23
Satisfaction on Integrity in Providing Procedural Justice	0.05
Satisfaction on Openness in Providing Procedural Justice	0.12
Satisfaction on Fairness in Providing Procedural Justice	0.26
Overall Satisfaction on Substantive Justice Provided	0.24
Satisfaction on Responsiveness in Providing Substantive Justice	0.12
Satisfaction on Reliability in Providing Substantive Justice	0.10
Satisfaction on Integrity in Providing Substantive Justice	0.19
Satisfaction on Openness in Providing Substantive Justice	0.15
Satisfaction on Fairness in Providing Substantive Justice	0.32

Source of raw data: Authors' survey, 2021

In terms of reliability, the correlation coefficient for procedural justice (0.23) was much higher than that of the substantive justice which was 0.10. To a greater extent, civil society respondents might have been more informed, perhaps through observation and experience to some, on the procedures followed by the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court. It is of notable concern that their levels of satisfaction on reliability of the procedural justice and substantive justice are 3.04 and 3.18, respectively (Table 4). The correlations, imply the need to improve the reliability of the court in both procedural and substantive justices

provided so that the level of trust by the people on the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court could be increased.

Surprisingly, the pattern of correlations among level of trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court and three elements of trust, openness, and fairness were reversed since those for substantive were now higher than those of the procedural justice. The correlation coefficient for reliability of the procedural justice and the level of trust on the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court was the lowest (0.05) signifying that the two are not associated at all.

Correlation coefficients for openness and the level of trust to the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court were also very low at 0.12 and 0.15 for procedural and substantive justices, respectively (Table 4). This indicates that the current data collected from the 96 civil society respondents were not enough to have established a pattern of association. Although both are positive, levels of satisfaction using this element were very low at 3.20 for procedural and 3.11 for substantive justice. Actions to improve this are therefore warranted.

For fairness, the correlation coefficients for procedural and substantive justice were 0.26 and 0.32, the highest among all the elements correlated with level of trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court. This implies that the civil society respondents' level of satisfaction on their perception on the fairness of the court is related to their level on the latter. The fact that the mean levels of satisfaction on the sense of fairness of the court under study were very low at 2.63 for procedural justice and 2.62 for substantive justice is cause for alarm. This suggests that if and when the civil society perceives a higher sense of fairness in the way the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court provides justice, then level of trust in the said Court could increase as well.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, it can therefore be concluded that: there is generally a low level of satisfaction by the citizen-respondents on the given elements of a well-functioning court; the respondents have a low level of trust in most people they know but such trust improved when they have personal knowledge about them; there are low levels of trust to the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court among the citizen respondents and to some extent these are correlated to their levels of satisfaction on the functioning of the Court; low level of trust for the Court is correlated to the low level of trust also by the respondents to most people even to people they know personally. Additionally, overall satisfaction with procedural and substantive justice is mostly weak when correlated to the level of trust.

4.2. Recommendations

The above conclusions suggest the need to make concerted efforts to improve the civil society's trust in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court. Therefore, the study recommends that

the Court should give more attention to substantive justice because respondents of the study feel that it has not been fully practiced or implemented following the rules governing substantive justice at the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court.

It is also recommended that strategic actions to increase the level of satisfaction of the civil society on the given elements of a well-functioning trial court (responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness, fairness) be implemented. "OECD evidence shows that government values such as high levels of integrity, fairness, and openness of institutions are strong predictors of public trust. Similarly, the government's competence, responsiveness, and reliability in delivering public services and anticipating new needs, are crucial for boosting trust in institutions." For example, speedy trials and disposal of filed court cases could be one of the more tangible showcases of responsiveness. These are the aspects where the courts must exert more effort to build more trust.

There is a need to educate the public through open forums, and appropriate information campaigns on the different aspects of court functioning to help in improving the image of the justice system. For continuous checks on performance levels, drop boxes in strategic places per office in the judiciary where "satisfaction chips" selected from a pool of choices could be dropped by a satisfied/dissatisfied client. Dropped "satisfaction chips" could then be periodically checked, summarized, and analyzed for improvement of what has been judged as dissatisfactory and continuation or even leveling up of those that were found satisfactory.

Further studies should be conducted utilizing a larger sample size and wider area coverage, possibly the whole area being served by the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, not only Bong County. Information triangulation is also recommended to ensure the reliability of the data collected. This is to be assured of the patterns of correlation exhibited in the data collected for this study. Improved research and further studies can help the concerned parties better understand what policies and reforms the government can design and implement for restoring and maintaining public trust. Research may involve benchmarking with known good performers in providing procedural and substantive justice.

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