

e-judiciary Practices in the Trinidad & Tobago Judiciary

Ensuring Access to Justice in a
Pandemic

The LIDERES Project

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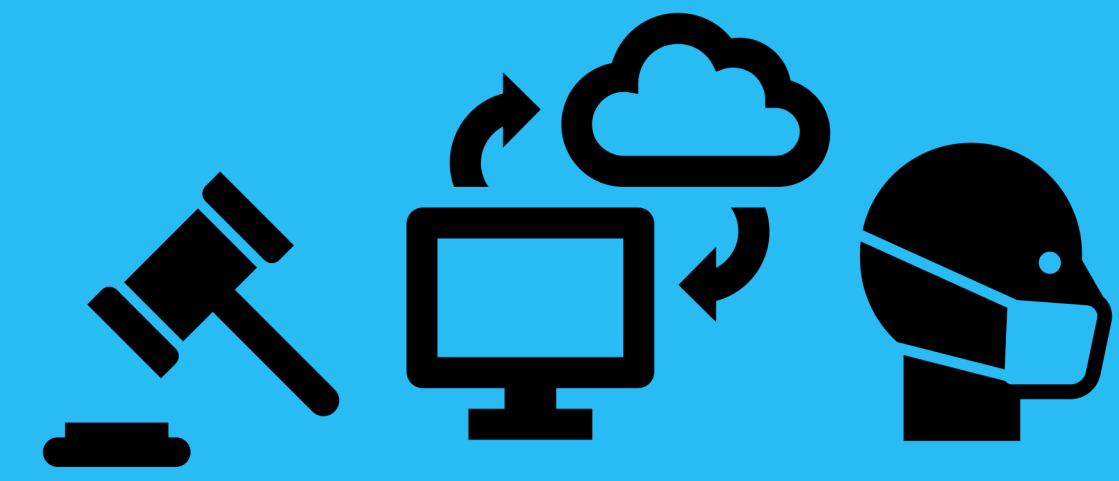


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Pandemic Onset: The World

March 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic hits. Courts all over the world begin to consider how they could continue to function in the lockdowns.

The National Conference of State Court Administrators (USA), in conjunction with the Conference of Chief Justices, creates a Rapid Response Team. They develop innovative new practices to strengthen courts.

Three main tracks:

1. Court Management
2. Technology
3. Communications and Funding

NCSC, 2020

"The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare significant deficits and inequities in fulfilling the promise of UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 to "provide access to justice for all." This imperative forced courts to attempt to move to work from home modalities, create virtual courts, and move paper-based services online.

The World Justice Project (The World Justice Project, 2021)

Some courts needed to start almost from scratch:

1. Purchase and distribute thousands of laptops
2. Develop a WAN
3. Videoconferencing
4. Training of Judges and Court Staff virtually overnight.



Pandemic Onset: The JoRTT

March – April 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic hits.
Complete shutdown.

May 2020 – May 2021

Several lockdowns are enacted.
JoRTT clients unable to easily
access Courts in person.

May – November 17 2021

State of Emergency and curfew
in effect.

JoRTT clients unable to easily
access Courts in person.

Rapid re-evaluation of JoRTT's digital
transformation plan was needed:

1. Place remote access to justice services at its core
2. Create and prioritize projects for this



Pandemic Onset: The JoRTT

2015 – Present

JoRTT had already begun a process of transformation towards an e-judiciary. (Ministry of Planning and Development, 2015):

Court records already digitized.

Prisons set up with videoconferencing tools to allow prisoners to attend court virtually. Removed cost and security considerations of moving prisoners securely to and from Court.

Virtual Court system using Microsoft Teams already in limited use.

e-services such as online payments (accessible by both banked and unbanked court clients) already in use.

Began to implement a new case management system.

Developed and partially implemented several online customer services:

1. CourtPay for family court-ordered payments (maintenance payments)
2. CourtMail for secure communications between the Court and attorneys, and e-filing of court documents. (Archie, 2019a)



Research to design, prioritize and implement 2 sets of projects:

2015-2020

March 2020 - present

Methodology

- Document analysis
- Semi-structured interviews

Interview sampling:

- Purposive method
- Snowball method

Sub-Questions

1. What projects did the Judiciary undertake to support the changes that they wanted to make?
2. What was the rationale behind choosing the projects that they did?
3. What were the process changes that facilitated this transformation?
4. What were the tools that facilitated this transformation?

Method

- Qualitative
- Intrinsic descriptive case study method

Main Research Question

How and why did the Judiciary transform itself into an organization that provides remote access to its clients for Judicial services during the pandemic?



Data Collection

Initial outreach groups:

- Project decision-makers
- Project data facilitators (data used for decision-making)
- Project implementors

Documents Requested and Supplied

Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) Documents
Project Proposals
Project Reports
Annual Reports
Speeches & Presentations

Initial outreach persons

The Honourable Chief Justice
The Court Executive Administrator
Director of Information Technology
Information Technology Project Manager
Manager of the Planning Department
Deputy Court Executive Administrator (Court Administrative Unit)

Process

1. Document Analysis
2. Explanatory questions answered in writing (via text message/email)
3. Explanatory questions answered in virtual video conferences/by phone
4. Video conferences and telephone calls were recorded and transcribed using an artificial intelligence-based transcription service



Data Analysis

All data was coded inductively using MAXQDA qualitative analysis software.

The initial inductive coding process resulted in a list of approximately 50 codes:

Theme

Judicial Goals
Rationale
Projects

Process Re-Engineering
Feedback

Sub-Theme

Court Projects
Administrative Projects
Support Projects

Description

Strategic goals that the Judiciary focused on implementing.
Thinking of the Court Executive in the choices, timing and Court locations of projects.
Processes and Rules, and Court ICT-based projects.
Changes to Financial Processes, and administrative focused ICT projects.
Focused on supporting Court clients in easily accessing Court services.

How processes were reengineered and change management activities.
Reactions of persons to the various innovations and projects implemented in the courts.



Discussion: Judicial Goals

Verbatim quotes are used throughout, as I believe that hearing the authentic voices of the participants supports the grounding of the themes in a more illustrative manner.

The law term has been a year of continuous progress, learning and development. The Division has made strides to becoming a modern customer centered environment where court services are delivered in an efficient, effective and accessible manner.

Archie, 2021a

With the inevitable shutdowns due to the pandemic, our strategic goals became continued access to justice and safety of our customers and our staff.

Archie, 2021a

Initial outreach persons

The goals of the JoRTT were elaborated on in several of the documents, especially the speeches of the Chief Justice.

Certain terms appeared frequently – Client, Customer, Service, Access to Justice, efficiency.



Goals

From the PSIP Documents:

Increase efficiency of the judiciary system through the provision of e-services

Development of Customer Service Centers at the Nation's Court Buildings

Improve efficiency in the service delivery of judicial services and improve systems for witness care

Improve the performance of the judicial management systems

Improve the timeliness and quality of court proceedings

SDG Goal 17: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at all Levels. (Ministry of Planning and Development, 2019)



Digital Transformation The Judiciary of Trinidad & Tobago

2015

- The Judiciary is establishing a Juvenile Court to deal with juvenile crimes and work in conjunction with the Prisons, Children's Authority and Social Services to rehabilitate young offenders towards preventing further deterioration.
- Outfitting of 3 buildings at Fyzabad, Port of Spain and Tobago
- Development of the information systems at the Judiciary: main site backup solution and disaster recovery solution
- Work continued on the video conference rollout. (p.21)

2017

- The Juvenile Court of Trinidad and Tobago is new in 2017 (p.144)
- Development of a Court Annexed Mediation Process in the Judiciary – \$5 million of funds provided for this project (p.122)
- Development and implementation of a Facilities Master Plan for the Judiciary; Development of Customer Service Centres at the Nation's Court Buildings. (p.148) — both continued from 2016.

2018

- The courts at Port of Spain and Fyzabad were opened in March
- SharePoint rolled out to all locations with existing infrastructure
- Implementation of The New Fixed Penalty Traffic Ticketing System at Magistrates' Courts throughout Trinidad and Tobago
- Procurement of a video conferencing solution to facilitate case management hearings by video link between the Courts and Prison Remand Centres
- Launch of the e-Probate System in July, allowing people to conduct online searches for probates (T&T PSIP 2019, p.44: 1792)
- Through the assistance of grant funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), work continued with local counterpart funding of \$8.4 million to establish Juvenile Courts at various locations in Trinidad and Tobago. The aim of the project was to modernize and reform initiatives to support the implementation of the Children's Act 2012 and the establishment of a Youth Court. Outfitting works were completed in Fyzabad and additional works continued in Port of Spain and Tobago.

2019

A comprehensive integrated approach was adopted between the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago and the Prisons Authority, Children's Authority and Social Services in establishing the Children's Court. Rehabilitation of young offenders is a major factor in facilitating their return to social and economic activities.

- \$3 million provided to undertake court configuration and outfitting works at the Children's Courts buildings at Port of Spain and Tobago. Funds also spent to construct an independent circulation to ensure safe traversing of young offenders from the general public at Fyzabad (T&T PSIP, p. 142: 511)
 - \$4.2 million spent to roll out the New Case Management System and the Electronic Payments System. Works to upgrade of the Judiciary Central ICT Service Centre and on increasing the capacity of the Judiciary's Wide Area Network (WAN) (T&T PSIP 2020, p. 53: 13)
 - \$40.1 million allocated to refurbish Magistrates' Courts and establish Children and Family Courts. Increased access to justice and aid in reducing the backlog of ongoing cases.
 - \$2.7 million spent on works at the Children Courts in Fyzabad and Port of Spain:
 - 1. Supervision of construction works as well as the supply, delivery, installation and commissioning for Access Control System and CCTV Solution
 - 2. Supply of furniture, equipment and material for the hearing rooms
 - 3. Design, supply and installation of audio/visual solutions for the court and hearing rooms
 - 4. Psychological tools, Lenovo Thinkpads and laptop carrying cases
- The Rehabilitation of the Hall of Justice, Port of Spain continued with the retiling of washroom areas, installation of Water Closet (WC) sets/flush valves and the supply, delivery, installation, testing and commissioning of 2 new 200-ton Air Cooled Chillers, and the dismantling and removal of two (2) obsolete 200-ton Air Cooled Chillers at a cost of \$3.0 million.

2020

Continued upgrades and increases in the number of court facilities throughout the country, \$52.6 million allocated in 2020 for the programme Improvement/Refurbishment to Court Facilities:

- The Programme Rehabilitation of the Hall of Justice in Port of Spain continued with a \$6.0 million allocation to establish the Criminal Division in accordance with the Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Courts Act, 2018. Upgrade safety systems to facilitate OSH Act compliance and improve the building conditions of the building:
- 1. Modification of the Hall of Justice to accommodate Criminal Division
- 2. Caulking and leak management
- 3. Upgrading of vault, shelving and fire suppression
- 4. Supply and installation of fresh air and pressurization units, and Uninterruptable Power Supply
- 5. Washroom upgrade – Phase 3
- 6. Upgrading the outrigger panels
- 7. Replacement and change out of lighting fixtures.
- \$6.0 million provided for works to be completed:
- 1. Refurbishment of St. George West Magistrate Courts
- 2. Expansion of Couva and Chaguanas Magistrates' Courts
- 3. Electrical and disabled access works for OSH compliancy in Point Fortin Magistrates' Court
- 4. Refurbishment and expansion of Siparia Magistrates' Court: installation of fire alarms, fire extinguishers, fire hoses, emergency lights and other equipment for OSH compliance; installation of a wheelchair lift; supply and installation of electrical mains and a 200 KW generator; expansion of the Rio Claro Magistrate Court with an allocation of \$0.5 million to kickoff building design; and restoration of the San Fernando Supreme Court Building was allocated \$2.0 million (upgrade of the Central AC system, life safety systems and installation and commissioning of a full load generator).
- \$5.0 million to build a Video Conferencing Centre at Golden Grove Arouca to reduce the cost of prisoner transport. Entailed a pre-engineered/prefabricated building at the Remand Prison, Golden Grove, Arouca.

2020

- \$52.6 million spent to upgrade court facilities throughout the country
- \$5.8 million spent for the Family and Children's Courts in Tobago:
- 1. Institutional Strengthening project for the following: installation of beam seaters, furniture and furnishings
- 2. Supply and installation of electric bill counter and standby power systems
- 3. Purchase of office equipment and installation of FTR Digital Court Recording System
- 4. Installation of air condition systems
- 5. Construction of a guard booth, pedestrian walkway and installation of signage
- Upgrade works continued on the nation's court facilities:
- 1. \$0.4 million for supply and installation of the water and waste system, installation of laminate flooring and replacement of washroom fixtures at the Hall of Justice
- 2. \$2.6 million to install 9 walkthrough baggage scanners in the nation's courts under the project for the Implementation of a Comprehensive Security System in the Judiciary.
- \$11 million under the Refurbishment of Magistrates' Courts to upgrade a number of Magistrates' Courts and purchase equipment:
- 1. Upgrade of UPS Systems and cleaning and sanitizing of numerous Magistrates' Courts
- 2. Supply of touch mask (slide) and purchase of office furniture for all of the Magistrates' Courts
- 3. Repairs to the sewer systems and extensive cleaning and servicing of the Chaguanas Magistrates' Court
- 4. Repairs to the sewer system at the Couva Magistrates' Court which included the installation of a pump down tank
- 5. Installation of air conditioning units at the Port of Spain Magistrates' Court, 80% completion of external works, completion of ceilings, electrical and plumbing works

2021

- The Development of the Judiciary Information System continued:
- 1. Development and roll out of the Court Case Management System — TT.jim — to the entire Judiciary
- 2. Expansion of CourtPay, CourtMail and E-Probate
- 3. Development of an Online Small Claims Court
- 4. Development and rollout of BailNet
- 5. Development of E-Self Service Kiosks (T&T PSIP 2021, p.148: 14)

2016

- Establishment of Juvenile Court continues.
- Hardware and software upgrades (Judiciary Project 1)
- Network redesign (Judiciary Project 2)
- Roll-out of the Judiciary's video conferencing software (Judiciary Project 3) in 2 parts:
- 1. Acceptance test of Phase I at three sites: San Fernando Magistrates' Court (Madinah Building), King's Court and the Golden Grove Prison. The successful implementation of this system would reduce the need to transport prisoners to the Court (T&T PSIP 2017, p.46: 911)
- 2. Construction of a video conferencing facility at Remand Yard, Golden Grove (T&T PSIP 2017, p.137: 1462)
- Implementation of a VOIP Telephony System
- Design and development of Intranet (T&T PSIP 2016, p.85: 1034)
- Development of a Court Annexed Mediation Process in the Judiciary (T&T PSIP 2016, p.19)
- Development and implementation of a Facilities Master Plan for the Judiciary (T&T PSIP 2016, p.141)
- Development of Customer Service Centres at the Nation's Court Buildings. (T&T PSIP 2016, p.141)

2018

- Preparatory works continued on Judiciary buildings with a provision of \$0.6 million:
- 1. Preliminary designs and project costs completed, chain link fence erected around the site for the Judges' and Magistrates' Housing in Tobago.
- 2. Preliminary designs completed and Request for Proposal (RFP) to be completed for the Construction of an Official Residence for the Honourable Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago.
- Improvement/Refurbishment of Court Facilities with a \$9.1 million investment. Improved safety and better working conditions for staff, improved accommodation & effective service delivery to the public:
- 1. Refurbishment of the Hall of Justice Trinidad and Tobago
- 2. Provision of accommodation for the San Fernando Supreme Court Building
- 3. Rehabilitation of the San Fernando Supreme Court
- Works completed on a number of magistrates' courts through the Refurbishment of Magistrates' Courts Programme, with a \$2.29 million investment to facilitate improved delivery of services to customers and provide suitable workspaces for staff:
- 1. Upgrading of the Point Fortin Magistrates' Court — Contract awarded for a sewer system upgrade, with approvals from the TTPS and Solicitor General before mobilization
- 2. Port of Spain Magistrates' Court — Scope of works prepared, contractor was selected, and 50% down payment made for the upgrade of the façade of the building, including civil & external painting works (T&T PSIP 2019, p. 63: 197)

2019

- Over 500 matters have been heard at the Juvenile Court (T&T PSIP, p. 67: 1518)
- Decision by Judiciary to undertake to judicial system improvements (T&T PSIP, p. 122: 1844):
- 1. Development of the Judiciary information system
- 2. Development of Technology Court
- 3. Network redesign
- 4. Implementation of cloud-based solution for Video Conferencing
- 5. Development and rollout of new Court Case Management System (CCMS)
- Works continued with \$29.4 million investment for the Improvement/Refurbishment to Court Facilities Programme (to enhance and expand the court facilities throughout the country):
- 1. \$10 million provided for ongoing works at the Hall of Justice, Port of Spain. Upgrade of the life safety systems to facilitate OSH Act compliance and improve the building conditions, reducing the likelihood of process shut downs: upgrade of AC Chiller, caulking and leak management, vault shelving and fire suppression, and replacement of outrigger panels
- \$5 million for refurbishment of Magistrates' Courts — upgrades to the life safety systems to ensure OSH Act compliance and provide modern, safe and conducive work environment for staff and the general public:
- 1. Internal electrical upgrade works at Couva Magistrates' Courts
- 2. Refurbishment works at Rio Claro Magistrates' Courts
- 3. Refurbishment works at the Princes Town Magistrates' Courts
- 4. Refurbishment works at Magistrates' Courts in Tobago (T&T PSIP 2019, p. 141: 130)

2019

- Under the Improvement/Refurbishment to Court Facilities, works continued on Magistrates' Courts:
- 1. \$0.1 million on the upgrade of the Sewer Treatment Plant and the replacement of the Shop Front at the Point Fortin Magistrates' Court. This included the replacement of an air conditioning unit at the Sangre Grande Magistrates' Court
- 2. The Air Conditioning System Units were replaced through the Refurbishment of the San Fernando Supreme Court Building at the expense of \$0.2 million
- 3. \$2.1 million for continued upgrades to the San Fernando Magistrates' Court (Madinah Building), including the replacement of air conditioning units, and kickoff of refurbishment and expansion works of the Eastern Credit Union Building for use as the Magistrates' Court
- 4. \$0.3 million for works done under Provision of Accommodation for Court Administration Offices project: Design and supervision services for the fit-out of Corporate Offices for the Judiciary; installation and testing of an Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS) System at Judiciary's IT Building; design, delivery and supply of industrial shelving and electrical variation works at the 3G Technologies Building (T&T PSIP, p. 80: 371)

2020

- The establishment of Juvenile Courts continued with a \$1 million allocation for works at courts in the North and South Trinidad:
- 1. Children Court, South (Fyzabad) - expansion of entry gateway, installation of life safety systems.
- 2. Children Court, North (Port of Spain) - expanding ICT and For The Record (FTR): a digital court recording solution; installation of life safety systems.
- Continuation of upgrade works at the Youth Training Centre with \$3.0 million allocation to refurbish 7 dormitories and the Reflection Unit for the Rehabilitation of Young Offenders.
- \$5.0 million for the Refurbishment of Buildings at Youth Training Centre:
- 1. Upgrade and furnishing of the Technical Vocational Building
- 2. Electrical and plumbing system upgrade
- The Development of the Judiciary Information System continued with the development of a technology court, network redesign, a new Court Case Management System (CCMS), the implementation of cloud-based solution for Video Conferencing and the expansion of e-Services including CourtPay, CourtMail, E-Probate and the development of an Online Small Claims Court and BailNet. (T&T PSIP 2020, p. 201: 1696)
- Works continued on the upgrade of the Judiciary Central ICT Service Centre and increasing the capacity of the Wide Area Network (WAN) of the Judiciary (T&T PSIP 2021, p. 62: 1772)
- Works continued at Children's Courts (Fyzabad and Port of Spain) under the project for the Establishment of a Children Court:
- 1. Funds totalling \$2.4 million were expended for the purchase of IT equipment, furniture as well as for the upgrade of the air conditioning

2020

- ICT and security works continue at the Princes Town Magistrate Court
- External works completed at the Princes Town Magistrate Court
- Construction of Video Conferencing Centre at Golden Grove, Arouca
- \$0.8 million spent to improve the timely access of persons to justice and reduce the backlog of cases within the courts, eight (8) 20-foot refurbished containers were installed at the Golden Grove Prison for the establishment of the Video Conferencing Centre. These served as temporary video conferencing trial rooms for prisoners and their legal representatives. With the establishment of the Centre, trials are now conducted virtually via video link from the prison facilities resulting in the cost of transporting prisoners to courts have been reduced (T&T PSIP 2021, p. 87: 413)



Structural Changes The Judiciary of Trinidad & Tobago

1992

- Report of the review team appointed by Cabinet to advise on systems to reduce existing delays in the administration of justice. Chairman: Dennis Gurley.

1998

- In July, the Department of Court Administration was created.

2000

- Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into and report and make recommendations on the machinery for the administration of justice in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Chairman: Lord Mackay of Clashfern.

2005

- New Civil Proceedings Rules took effect on September 16. [Legal Notice No. 200 of 2005](#).

2016

- [2016 Family and Children Division Act, No. 6 of 2016](#). This Act created the Family and Children Division, the Family Court and the Children Court [proclaimed by L.N.38/2017 w.e.f. May 15, 2017 and L.N. 23/2018 w.e.f. February 28, 2018]

2017

- The Criminal Procedure Rules, 2016. Came into force on April 18, 2017. [Legal Notice 55/2016](#).

2018

- [The Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Courts Act, 2018, No. 12 of 2018](#). This Act created the Criminal Division in the High Court, and also created the District Criminal and Traffic Courts.

2020

- [The Miscellaneous Amendments \(No. 2\) Act, 2020](#). Adjusted the rules for many of the Divisions of the Courts to make them more efficient and correct errors in previous Acts.



Discussion: Judicial Goals

US Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Warren Burger first indicated the need for a specialist Court Administration function:

The courts of this country need management, which busy and overworked judges, with drastically caseloads, cannot give. We need [...] trained administrators or managers to manage and direct the machinery so that Judges can concentrate on their primary duty of judging.

Burger, 1969

Court Administration Departments professionally manage internal operations, deal with organizational system complexity, large workloads and volumes, and ever-increasing expectations for organizational performance and accountability.

Court Administration, 2021

“At the JoRTT, this Unit, staffed by specialists, led the thrust to improve the management of the administration of the Courts, in order to provide better and faster access to Justice in Trinidad and Tobago”.

The Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, 2021b



Discussion: Rationale

Over 24 coded segments from the research done supported the rationale for the implementation of project activities.

Some sample quotes:

“ Suffice it to say that by the beginning of 2020, we were well poised to transition the judiciary to a place where we could leverage the best available technology in support of more rational, streamlined and effective workflows and processes. And then there was COVID-19. Crises present both incentive and opportunities for change. In order to maintain service delivery, some priorities were reordered and timelines advanced. Guided by our medical response team in the preservation of a safe environment, and development of new protocols for court users, staff, and facilities management, we have made the transition to e-delivery of justice quite successfully, and the expectations and desires of our clients have now shifted towards full acceptance. This is the new normal.”

Archie, 2021a

“ The aim was to ensure the courts, in the event of an emergency, could remain open and accessible without the barriers to accessibility that location and travel restrictions could present.”

Morris-Alleyne, 2020



Transformation to e-Judiciary

1993: Before

Judicial Enforcement Management (JEMS) implemented:

- Expensive proprietary software licensed from a foreign company.
- Supported automated workflow and court processes
- Disadvantage: Difficult to configure to suit the JoRTT's processes.

“With Nigeria and the National Center for State Courts, we formed the nucleus of a consortium to develop case management software with no licensing costs. That consortium has now grown to the extent that 22 interested countries were represented at the consortium meeting in early October. With Namibia being the latest to formally join, we will continue to benefit from innovations and improvements developed in any of the member countries. And TT Jim is now in its second iteration facts to that fruitful collaboration whose product is on its way to becoming the gold standard internationally.”

Archie, 2021b

Transformation to e-Judiciary

2019-2021: After

JEMS replaced by TT.Jim — an open-source software system created by a consortium that included the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the Judiciary of Nigeria.

Projects

“e-initiatives that had been developed and were optional became essential and others that were at varying stages of development were accelerated. The organization sought innovative and in some areas untried approaches to facilitate citizens’ rights to have their matters resolved by the courts.”

Morris-Alleyne, 2020

1. TT.jim

Version 2 developed during pandemic and currently in rollout, including to the Probate Division.

2. Digital signing and stamping

“The Judiciary uses two electronic signing solutions recognized as tamper-free and built on encryption technologies. During the lockdown, Judges, Registrars and senior administrative staff used the solution to digitally sign, stamp and dispatch Notices, Summonses, Warrants, affidavits, declarations, etc to Attorneys remotely and securely, without having to interface personally. An electronic seal was also developed and used to affix documents filed electronically with the official seal, where appropriate. Court office staff can now prepare and transmit documents electronically to the Judge, judicial or administrative officer for their review and signing from any internet- enabled device, from any location.”

Archie, 2020

3. Network infrastructure upgrade (WAN and LAN) to support remote work and virtual courts.

“At the Judiciary, works continued on the upgrade of the Judiciary Central ICT Service Centre and increasing the capacity of the Wide Area Network (WAN) of the Judiciary.”

Ministry of Planning and Development, 2020

Projects

4. Digital Voice Writing for transcription and e-certification of transcripts.

In the virtual world, the Court Reporting Services Unit (CRSU) conducts real-time reporting for Court of Appeal and High Court matters. This is accomplished with the use of CAT Reporters and Digital Voice Writers. The CRSU has been working towards finalizing the e-certification of transcripts. The e-service process involves the use of DocuSign — a cloud-based electronic signature solution.

As a result of this e-initiative pilot with the Supreme Court, any court reporter will be able to have their transcripts certified electronically before a Registrar, Assistant Registrar or District Clerk of the Peace (DCOP). The process improves productivity by eliminating the costs for paper and printing as well as delays in transporting the documents to the various Court locations.

Chief Justice Speeches 2017-2021 Law Term/CJ Speech 2020: 17: 4 - 17: 1593)

“We’ve been working with digital voice technology for producing transcripts. So while we have been using audio digital recording systems, for some time, we had found that in our jurisdiction, and I found that in a lot of the Caribbean jurisdictions on the whole, there's still a need to reduce that to a hardcopy transcript. And the act of doing that has been quite elusive a way of doing that quickly and efficiently. So we married two things. And we have trained a large group of digital voice writers who use digital voice writing technology and work with audio digital recording systems. So therefore, we have been able to counter that and that's an area which we're very pleased about.”

World Bank, 2021

Projects

5. Virtual Courts using Microsoft Teams virtual meeting software and CaseLines Digital Evidence Management Software.

Video-conferencing was already a component of court operations given its initial introduction to the Judiciary in 2005. Systems were in operation at several courtrooms and prison sites across Trinidad and Tobago that facilitated hearings involving stakeholders located outside of Trinidad and Tobago and/or persons who for reasons of health, disability, security or otherwise were unable to physically attend court.

“We of course, have also been spending a lot of energy on remote hearing technology. That has been extremely important; we started to do it before COVID hit. And we were able to make the transition quite quickly to virtual courts completely, because of the fact that we had started to look at that.”

Transcripts\World Bank Panel Discussion 2021-11-13_08-50-05:10

The Information Communications Technology (ICT) Unit began working on an alternative to in-person hearings to keep the Courts open and accessible without the barriers of location and travel restrictions. Court Administration quickly acquired and converted shipping containers into fully outfitted virtual hearing rooms at the Golden Grove Remand Prison, Maximum Security Prison and Eastern Regional Correctional Facility. These, in addition to previously existing systems at the Youth Transformation and Rehabilitation Centre (formerly YTC), Frederick Street prison, Scarborough prison and female prison at Arouca brought the total number of virtual hearing rooms at prison/correctional facilities to fourteen (14).

“The technology evolved into a virtual cloud-based meeting room to which internal and external stakeholders could connect and communicate in real time. The solution allows the Judiciary’s ICT staff to remotely manage and automate the processes for court-to-court and court-to-prison video connections. Inmates attend their hearings virtually from the containerized solution on the prison compound and their counsel may attend from the prison compound or remotely from their home, office or other location.”

Archie, 2020

Projects

6. CaseLines Digital Evidence Management Software

After a period of use of the Virtual Courtroom with Microsoft Teams, it became clear that there was the need for additional evidence presentation software to make the virtual courtroom more efficient. This led to the implementation of the Thomson Reuters CaseLines software, first in the High Court:

“We now have full virtual hearings about to be further enhanced by the use of case presentation software.”

Archie, 2020

“CaseLines is litigation support software that facilitates paperless access to uploaded trial bundles, and affords advantages in preparing for and navigating evidence. For example, just imagine, even in a jury trial, the efficiency of an automatic page direction to the relevant photograph or specific timestamp on CCTV footage.”

Archie, 2021b

“CaseLines software, which is Litigation Support Technology, and case presentation technology. So we anticipate that that will further enhance our ability to deal with virtual courts. But it's also available for you know, if and when our courts come back into the courthouses.”

World Bank, 2021

Projects

7. CourtMail

After a period of use of the Virtual Courtroom with Microsoft Teams, it became clear that there was the need for additional evidence presentation software to make the virtual courtroom more efficient. This led to the implementation of the Thomson Reuters CaseLines software, first in the High Court:

“The use of CourtMail at the Judiciary began in 2018 and expanded over the 2019- 2020 Law term and the need for this service intensified during the COVID-19 restrictions. The service, which was developed in-house originally as an electronic solution for communicating with and mailing court orders and notices to Attorneys-at- Law and court parties in a fast and secure format, was developed further and is now an integral tool used for electronically signing, stamping and sealing court and other official documents.”

Morris-Alleyne, 2020

“CaseLines is litigation support software that facilitates paperless access to uploaded trial bundles, and affords advantages in preparing for and navigating evidence. For example, just imagine, even in a jury trial, the efficiency of an automatic page direction to the relevant photograph or specific timestamp on CCTV footage.”

Archie, 2021b

“CaseLines software, which is Litigation Support Technology, and case presentation technology. So we anticipate that that will further enhance our ability to deal with virtual courts. But it's also available for you know, if and when our courts come back into the courthouses.”

World Bank, 2021

Projects

7. Electronic filing of documents

“Persons needing to initiate an action or having to comply with schedules for filing documents were allowed to do so via the readily accessible and convenient to use on-line portal. Through its e-services portal available on the Judiciary’s website, Attorneys-at-Law, self-represented litigants, Police Officers and other justice sector agencies gained online access to court offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago to file court documents without having to commute to a court building.

To date (July 13, 2021) four thousand, four hundred and forty-one attorneys (4441) and one thousand eight hundred and forty-two (1840) *pro se* litigants have registered for E-Services. The organization provided public access kiosks at High Court locations for the convenience of members of the public who did not have on-line access personally. The interface contained simple and easy to follow instructions for scanning and uploading documents to the e-services portal and help was available. The placement of these kiosks helped to limit in-person interaction at Counters.

As at July 13, 2021, one hundred and eighty-six thousand three hundred and ninety (186,390) documents have been filed electronically at Court offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago.”

Morris-Alleyne, 2020

Projects

8. Attorney Registration & Fees Payments

“By integrating E-Services with CourtPay and CourtMail, the Judiciary allows attorneys to pay for their practising fees electronically. CourtPay allows attorneys to pay via credit card or CourtPay voucher, which can be purchased by numerous locations across Trinidad and Tobago. Once payments are processed, an electronic Practising Certificate is delivered to the inbox of the attorney using CourtMail.

Up to the end of July, two-hundred and ninety (290) practising certificates had been paid for online via E-Services. The system verifies Attorneys' eligibility against the Roll and persons who are not in good standing are unable to file. However, the portal guides Attorneys who wish to bring their practicing certificates up-to-date by paying their fees online through a secured gateway.”

Archie, 2020

Projects

9. Probate Searching, Lodging & Filing

“Among some of the other improvements introduced during the past year were the introduction of online Probate searches with a guaranteed maximum turnaround time of three days, and by this time next year we expect to have full e-lodging and processing of probate applications and queries, including an online template for pro-se applicants. All of this is in keeping with our movement to a complete, fully integrated E-Filing platform across the whole judiciary.”

Archie, 2018

“Attorneys-at-Law were able to submit probate lodgings for review electronically on the E- Services Platform. Once processed the Probate Registry issues queries to the Attorney or an appointment date for filing of original documents over the Counter. The Probate registry received and processed over one thousand (1000) lodgings since the system launched in May 2020.”

Archie, 2020

Court Administration for Digital Transformation

e-Judiciary transformation could not happen without strengthening administrative support. Accountability lies with the Court Administration Unit (CAU) for:

1. Collection of state revenue
2. Expenditure of funds appropriated by Parliament for its operation
3. Trust funds
4. CourtPay (responsible for the majority of funds collected by JoRTT)
5. Administrative Records (including Human Resources)

“The Administration Department is also responsible for the administrative records of the JoRTT, including Human Resources. The Human Resource function was one of the foundational systems that was updated. “Our HR processes are also being modernized and we are now doing recruitment online from application to initial screening and assessment.”

Archie, 2018

“During the pandemic, the entire recruiting and on boarding process was done virtually. Given that staff were also in Work from Home mode, some staff were interviewed, contracted, hired, provisioned with necessary technology, and started work in a purely virtual environment.”

Personal communication, 2021)



Administrative Projects

Financial Information Management System

Goal: To strengthen and modernize the Judiciary's financial management

"[A]n integrated electronic court payments solution to receive disburse and account for all monies paid into and out of court makes it simple, accessible, fast, effective and reliable."

"The automated Financial Information Management Software is fully designed, developed, and maintained by our in house information and communication technology staff and is compliant with the Public Service financial rules and regulations. The system facilitates online processing of statutory and contractual payment obligations, produces on demand customized reports on these obligations and alerts the organization about the financial resources required at specific periods during the financial year. This removes the current limitation of access to paper records during normal working hours."

"The judiciary now collects, reconciles in advance, and remits to the Treasury daily via automated clearing house, all state revenue collected online."

Archie, 2021a

Electronic Pay Record Cards

An electronic system developed to replace the handwritten employees' pay record cards. The new system incorporates automatic calculations, ease of access to authorized persons, secured storage and improved records management.

Movement of Records

An electronic system developed to replace the handwritten employees' pay record cards. The new system incorporates automatic calculations, ease of access to authorized persons, secured storage and improved records management.

Online Requisition Requests

An online system for submitting requisition requests and notification when items are ready for collection.

Electronic Vote Book

"The electronic vote book, a bespoke contract management, invoice processing and supplier payments system was fine-tuned, and new features developed in the past year. While the automated system operates alongside the established paper-based system, we hope to convince the relevant state agencies to approve its use as a replacement for the antiquated manual paper-based financial management and records keeping system by the end of the 2021 calendar year."

Archie, 2021a

Electronic Maintenance Cards

A database application developed to record information captured on the Maintenance Card. The system provides easier access to information and the ability to generate reports.

Correspondence Management

An application developed to record incoming/outgoing correspondence and the relevant actions taken.

Non-Criminal Register

An application that records non-criminal matters at the District Courts, with task generation, notifications, and document generation built in.



Without support infrastructure, Court process and technology advances, and administrative projects that were put in place, the JoRTT would not have been able to provide the best possible experience for its clients.

Projects like CourtPay, CourtMail, e-filing, and e-signatures supported access to justice for Court clients during the pandemic.

Domestic Violence Portal

During the pandemic, the JoRTT created a Domestic Violence Hotline for requests for Protection orders.

“The Domestic Violence Portal was constructed to quickly dispatch Orders, Summonses, and documents pertinent to Domestic Violence to the Gender-Based Violence Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.”

Morris-Alleyne, 2020

Customer Contact Centre

“The Contact Centre is a digital solution which seeks to provide a platform for Judiciary customers to access services more directly. The Contact Centre will provide customer support for persons seeking information on court services, guidance in using its e-service platform to pay or contest fines, and to respond in general to customer queries.”

The Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, 2021a

Bail Payments Online

This project will be implemented soon. It will afford another option for convenient e-payments by clients during the pandemic.

Feedback is constantly solicited by the customer-facing staff. Feedback here is from attorneys, clients, other internal and external stakeholders, and more.

Attorney Feedback

Several attorneys commented on the convenience of virtual hearings:

“They were pleased with their ability to appear at geographically dispersed courts on the same day, thus reducing the need to seek adjournments. They expressed appreciation at not having to endure work downtime while waiting at a courthouse for their matters to be called; and not having to drive to a location, look for parking, walk to the courthouse and wait, all for a fifteen minute case management conference. Many attorneys who initially expressed displeasure with the arrangement subsequently indicated their support after participating in virtual hearings.”

Morris-Alleyne, 2020

Fighting Domestic Violence

“Another interesting thing is that and where we have found a very good uptick, and in this whole area with virtual courts, is actually in domestic violence matters. And domestic violence victims have expressed great thanks for the fact that they can appear using their smartphone and not have to come into close contact with the alleged perpetrator. And also they don't have to know where you are. So as simple as that is, that has really assisted so greatly.”

World Bank, 2021

Global Feedback From Courts

Many positive comments made about the JoRTT's innovation, forward planning and cutting-edge technology.

“We heard a lot about the impact of technology, improving the ability of very, shall we say ordinary citizens, often impoverished, to access the justice system, whether it means that they no longer have to travel to a court is a difficult journey, whether they can easily make payments. Then we also heard some remarkable innovations. And I mentioned earlier I just particularly love the idea of the local courts in shipping containers. It's such a good idea and things that people on this call can easily learn from and replicate around the world. We also heard about barriers and the thing that I've taken from that conversation about the barriers is mostly that those barriers are transitional. They are about migration, about change management, about training.”

“There are some people out there and Trinidad and Tobago is one of them that are ahead of you now. And so it's time for you to follow up and look at the sort of innovations that you've heard today.”

World Bank, 2021

The research questions that this investigation intended to answer:

- What projects did the Judiciary undertake to support the changes that they wanted to make?
- What was the rationale behind choosing the projects that they did?
- What were the process changes that facilitated this transformation?
- What were the tools that facilitated this transformation?

The main rationale behind choosing the projects was based on the JoRTT's overarching philosophy of a judiciary as an organization that provides a service to the people.

Based on this philosophy and the values of the JoRTT, independence, integrity and access to justice and fairness, we can build the rationale.

The projects chosen supported:

- Access to justice and safety of our customers and our staff.
- Ensuring equal and fair justice
- Rules, processes, and procedures that created a strong foundation for the additional projects that directly supported client access and satisfaction.

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