
For a Government that Works: ASJ's Theory of Change, with a Case Study of Their Efforts in Education

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The Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ) is a Christian, Honduran NGO that fights corruption and works to ensure that the Honduran government functions well for the benefit and well-being of all Hondurans, especially the marginalized and vulnerable. The paper begins by explaining ASJ's theory of change and how it applies pressure and provides support to the government in bringing about more just outcomes for the general population of Honduras. The paper proceeds to a case study of ASJ's work in public education and explains how, over the last decade, ASJ has been instrumental in bringing about transformational improvements in hiring practices, number of class days, and overall institutional integrity in the Ministry of Education.

Introduction

The Central American country of Honduras faces numerous challenges, including one of the highest homicide rates in the world, generalized insecurity, and some of the highest rates of poverty and inequality in the Americas (World Bank n.d.). In response, foreign aid and both local and international nonprofits have invested in job creation, violence prevention, and the provision of services in such areas as health, education, and agriculture. Underlying these challenges, however, is a deeper, more insidious pair of issues – corruption and weak governance. Between 2014 and 2018, the percentage of Hondurans stating that corruption was the principal problem facing the country more than tripled from 5.8% to 17.1%, and while a majority of Hondurans found insecurity to be the most pressing issue, 32.7% of those surveyed believed that corruption was the primary cause of the nation's violence (IUDPAS 2019).¹

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index ranks Honduras in the bottom third

of the world its annual ranking of countries' corruption (Transparency International), which reflects deeply entrenched failure in Honduras' public systems of health, education, security, justice, infrastructure, and others. A study by the Central American Institute of Financial Studies found that in just a few major, emblematic cases of corruption, the country had lost \$367 million, equivalent to 4.3% of the country's GDP, 35% of the Ministry of Education's budget, or 70% of the budget of the Ministry of Health ("La Corrupción" 2017).

Despite the importance of corruption to the daily lives of so many Hondurans, few civil society organizations in Honduras address the topic, and Christian organizations that do are exceedingly rare. The Association for a More Just Society (in Spanish, la Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa, or ASJ), however, is a Christian organization focused around the idea of "making government systems work" through denouncing corruption and supporting the implementation of systemic government reforms.²

ASJ was founded in Honduras in 1998 by a group of friends, four Hondurans and two North Americans,

¹ 42.8% felt the principal problem in Honduras was insecurity, down from 70.5% in 2014. In 2018, 38.2% stated it was the economy, a significant increase from 25.3% in 2016.

² La Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ) has a U.S. affiliate called the Association for a More Just Society (AJS-US), which is largely dedicated to fundraising and supporting ASJ in Honduras. The acronym ASJ is used throughout this paper to refer exclusively to work done by the Honduran organization. For more information, see www.ajs-us.org/who-we-are/partnership.

who were frustrated by the limitations of their work in charity and development. They felt their interventions, though helping certain individuals, were doing little to tackle the corrupt, unjust government systems that were behind much of the country's suffering. The founders wanted to work directly on improving the institutions that most affect the majority of people in Honduras, including public health, public education, and public security. From this goal came the mission "to be brave Christians dedicated to making Honduras' system of laws and government work and be just for the poorest and most vulnerable of Honduran society" (ASJ website).

ASJ works in vulnerable communities in Honduras' capital city, work that helps them to understand the population's interests and needs. Its focus, however, is principally on a structural level, as it seeks incremental changes in the country's most essential public systems. ASJ believes that this is one of the most effective and far-reaching strategies for helping the poor and marginalized. As ASJ works to build up the Honduran state's capacity for effective governance and institutional accountability, it helps improve the population's access to quality health, education, infrastructure, and other crucial public services, and contribute to safer lives and better opportunities for the population. In doing so, ASJ helps to build a more just society, one that serves all its citizens with competence and justice.

At its heart, ASJ is a Christian organization, whose unstated mission is to evangelize the church to reclaim the justice aspect of their faith and to live it out as "brave Christians" focused on protecting those on the margins of society. ASJ consistently and publicly claims their Christian identity, while also unmasking corruption, working in violent and dangerous neighborhoods, and denouncing and pressuring government to do what is right for its people. These are very high-risk and uncommon Christian pursuits. This public proclamation of faith, backed up by concrete actions, allows ASJ to witness to Christians and non-Christians alike, modeling an active faith that is concerned not only with people's eternal souls but also with their earthly well-being.

This paper begins by describing ASJ's theory of change. From a foundation of solid research and trusting relationships, ASJ both pressures and supports government institutions, contributing to reforms that

make the country safer and more just. ASJ has led reforms in several major Honduran institutions, but to explain more fully how ASJ's strategy works in practice, we will focus on ASJ's work in public education. Over a period of eight years, ASJ played a major role in taking the education sector from a period of chaos and anarchy (Cerna 2014) in 2010 to a new era of public education in which students attend school more than 200 days a year, teachers no longer buy teaching positions, and citizens are increasingly empowered to ensure quality education in their local schools. The paper closes by drawing together some key lessons from ASJ's two decades of experience in ensuring that the government functions more as it should.

Making Systems Work: ASJ's Theory of Change

With work grounded both in personal relationships and solid research, ASJ pressures the Honduran government to eliminate corruption and to make the reforms necessary to provide quality services to the population. ASJ employs three main strategies to apply this pressure. One is speaking out through Honduran media, which brings important topics to light and informs the general public about corruption, negligence, and failures of public systems. A second is to mobilize organizations and civil society groups towards informed action, and a third is to make use of government systems themselves, bringing legal cases against violent offenders or government officials accused of illegal actions. All three strategies draw negative attention to problems in the government and incentivize government officials to change.

The pressure ASJ applies on government agencies is similar to that utilized by other advocacy organizations, from the ACLU to Amnesty International to any number of smaller lobbying groups. What is unique about ASJ is that it doesn't limit itself to calling the government to account; it also offers to help, first by suggesting viable solutions, and then by working alongside the government to implement those solutions. ASJ's theory of change is summarized in Figure 1, with each component of the strategy described in further detail below.

ASJ's Strategy for Improving Government Performance

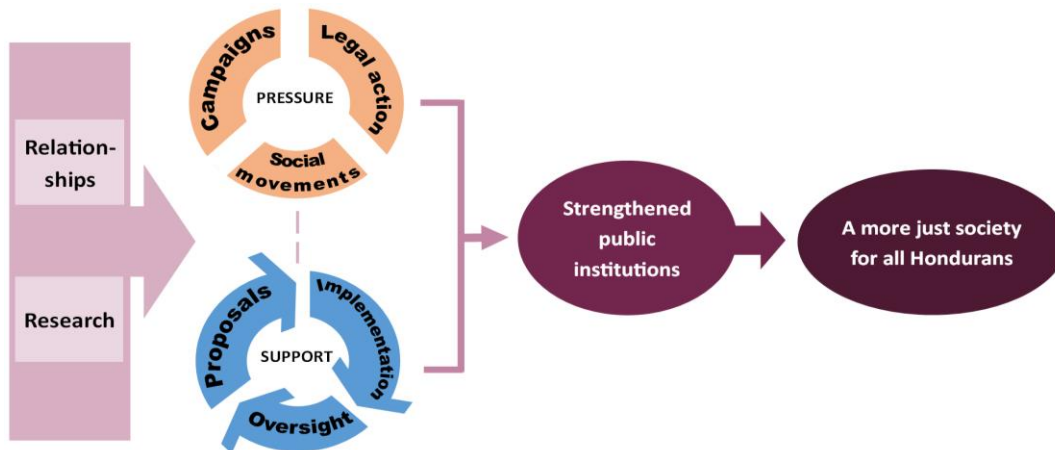


Figure 1: ASJ's strategy utilizes both negative pressure and positive support to encourage and assist government agencies in the implementation of needed changes

This work is complicated, and when it touches powerful interests, it can be controversial and dangerous. Threats of physical harm to ASJ staff are common. For many reasons, it is much easier to open a private school than to reform the whole public education system. Nonetheless, it has always been ASJ's goal to strengthen government systems that serve everyone – not to create parallel systems that benefit a few. This philosophy is both practical and hopeful; practical because ASJ works within systems that currently exist, and hopeful because ASJ believes that the reforms it advocates can make a big difference in the lives of millions.

The foundation: research and relationships

ASJ's work has been strongly influenced by the living situation of its co-founders, who chose in the organization's early years to move from the suburbs of Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, to one of its marginalized *barrios*, a settlement that at the time was one of the city's most dangerous neighborhoods. Living alongside Hondurans who were most affected by limited state resources greatly influenced ASJ directors' understanding of which interventions would do the most good. This experience shaped one of ASJ's central values, the importance of relationships. As an organization that works in defense of the poorest and most vulnerable, they feel they must know the poor and vulnerable intimately, and understand the way they live, the things they value, and the potential they have. Relationships with civil society allies and members of government have also been crucial to how ASJ works. Even though ASJ focuses on systems, they understand that those systems are made up of individuals, and knowing their motivations and goals is essential to advocacy and implementation of reforms.

Complementing their emphasis on relationships is ASJ's insistence on careful, detailed research. Advocacy falters when reports of corruption are dismissed as nothing more than opinion. ASJ therefore seeks out evidence that identifies, among other things, budget shortfalls, collusion, corruption, and weakness in government systems. It also works to present this information in a way that is clear and accessible, not just by politicians or experts, but by the general population. Research-based advocacy is not only convincing, it is also productive, as it offers an analysis of what went wrong as well as reasonable solutions.

Applying pressure

Research and relationships allow ASJ to identify needed reforms, which must then be followed up with action. Unsurprisingly, those who benefit from corruption have little interest in addressing it, especially when doing so is tacit acknowledgement of their own corruption or weakness. Even government officials who are not corrupt may feel powerless to bring about change. To counteract this stasis, ASJ tries to make it attractive for government officials to lead reforms rather than accept the status quo.

As shown in Figure 2, ASJ found they could shift the cost-benefit scale through legal action and public media campaigns, especially if they were in alliance with other civil society organizations. Furthermore, broader social movements that raise awareness about injustice can tip the balance for politicians concerned about public perception and their own prospects for reelection. ASJ effectively uses all three of these methods to pressure the Honduran government to make reforms.

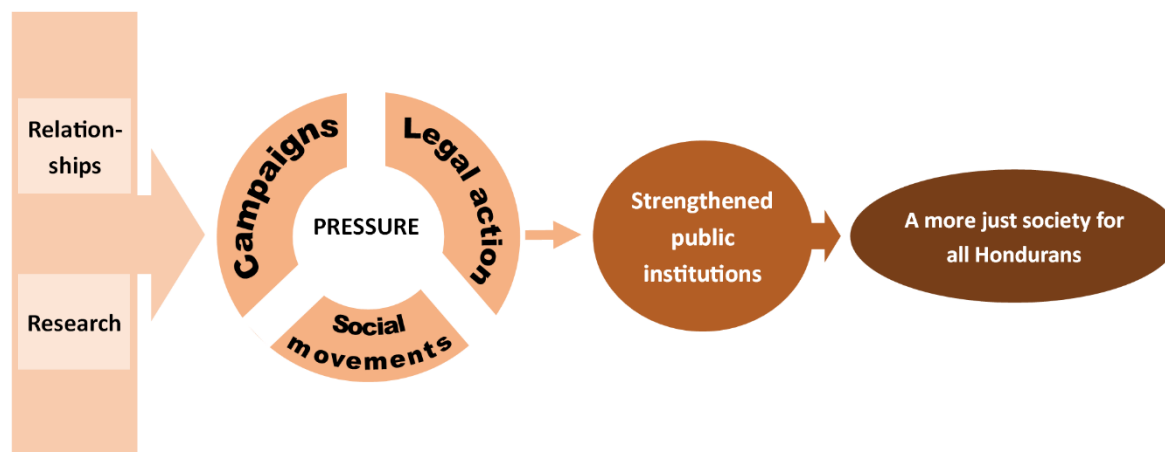


Figure 2: ASJ works through three parallel strategies to generate pressure that encourages the government to change

Legal action

Honduras has many good laws, but they are not enforced consistently. When ASJ brings criminal reports or corruption cases to the courts and ensures that they are heard and appropriately processed, they not only achieve justice in certain individual cases, but also demonstrate that the public system can indeed bring justice.

Sometimes ASJ's legal work directly implicates economic or political elites in acts of corruption. For example, ASJ released a report in 2015 demonstrating that the government had purchased medicine for children with malnutrition that had only four of the eleven required ingredients ("Astropharma intenta" 2015). Deeper investigation uncovered that the offending medicine company, Astropharma, was owned by Lena Gutierrez, Vice-President of Congress, and several of her family members ("Lena Gutiérrez y sus parientes" 2015). ASJ's investigators went deeper and found evidence not just of poor-quality medicines but of abuse of power – the same year Gutierrez joined Congress, the size of her family's company government contracts increased over 100-fold ("Sin participación activa" 2011).

This report resulted in the Honduran Supreme Court issuing an arrest warrant, and in June 2015, Gutierrez and three other members of her family were arrested ("Arresto domiciliario" 2015). The pressure that ASJ was able to exert through legal action not only stopped Astropharma's illegal and unsafe dealings with the government, it put dozens of other medical companies on notice that they were being watched and that the consequences of corruption could be serious.

While undeniably effective, such legal work is extremely unpopular with the powerful people it

targets, which makes it dangerous. After they went on record making accusations against the Gutierrez family, ASJ was threatened with legal action, and their executive director, Carlos Hernández, received multiple threats against his life. Such threats are common at ASJ. In 2006, on the road to a court hearing, Dionisio Díaz García, one of ASJ's lawyers, was assassinated (AJS, "Dionisio" n.d.). In 2016, a board member was the target of an assassination attempt, resulting in the death of a bodyguard (AJS "AJS Condemns" 2016). Today, ASJ directors receive a constant barrage of threats against themselves and their families. They are not surprised by this. As founder Kurt Ver Beek says, "if you are not making people mad, you are probably not doing justice work" (Ver Beek 2018a).

Media campaigns

When ASJ cannot bring government officials to court, sometimes they can still bring them to the "court of public opinion," generating awareness, accountability, and demand from the general public to promote positive change.

There is a television in almost every Honduran house, and if not, a radio. As ASJ works on getting their messages into public debate and onto the national agenda, they take advantage of public media, one of their most effective tools for mass communication. In 2017 alone, ASJ appeared in Honduran media 4,400 times.³ ASJ's Director of Advocacy is quoted an average of six times per day. Each of these appearances is an opportunity to impact the national dialogue, and influence government institutions.

One example of this sort of campaign occurred in 2015, after ASJ, together with a broader coalition of

³ Data from Seproc, an independent media monitoring company: <https://seproc.hn>. Seproc provides this and other information to ASJ in weekly emails.

organizations, released a groundbreaking study analyzing impunity rates for homicides in Honduras. The study, which looked at homicides that had occurred between 2010 and 2012, reported that only 4% of homicides in Honduras had resulted in a conviction; the remaining 96% remained in impunity (ASJ “Estudio sobre Impunidad”). ASJ organized a campaign “Overturn Impunity” (“*Dale Vuelta a la Impunidad*”), that invited individuals and organizations to film a simple video of them turning their hand over and speaking out against Honduras’ abysmal conviction rates.

Prominent organizations and ASJ supporters in Honduras and the United States made dozens of videos, and the statistic decrying “96% impunity” became a major talking point in both Honduran and international media. People had already been asking why so few cases were being reported to the police, and why so few court cases resulted in convictions. This statistic gave people a concrete metric to discuss and compare internationally, resulting in more targeted and specific advocacy.

Since this campaign, ASJ has been able to lead reforms specifically designed to reduce impunity rates. The reform of court management models, for example, which is described in the next section, increased case clearance in one court by 73%. One driver of openness for this sort of technical assistance is public support, and the media remains one of the best ways to inform and rally the public around these big goals.

Social movements

Awareness-building through the media is an important first step, but the likelihood of real change is greatly enhanced if public awareness leads to a social movement demanding change. As ASJ works towards an active, engaged public that holds government accountable, they empower communities to know their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and to lead coalitions of organizations in advocating change.

Working in local communities, ASJ first identifies people affected by injustice, and then connects them with people who can help change their situation. As the movement grows, ASJ leads trainings for community members that teach individuals both how government systems are supposed to work and trains them in the actions they can take to hold these systems accountable. Once community members are aware of how the system can work, they are more likely to expect that it will, and to organize when it does not.

ASJ leads community members in monitoring and auditing their local public schools and public health centers, documenting weaknesses, demanding change, and ensuring that the government continues to function after changes are made. Reports by community

members become powerful tools in the maintenance of effective public services. Such social movements and their empowered citizens come to form a “bridge of trust” between populations who have learned not to trust the government and the government, which all too often has not been deserving of that trust.

In their efforts to foster social movements, ASJ works directly with individuals in communities, but also invites other organized groups to join them. ASJ has led the creation of several coalitions that greatly strengthen the impact of their work. In 2009, ASJ helped organize a coalition of development organizations, Protestant and Catholic churches, and other groups to create “Let’s Transform Honduras,” a coalition advocating for improved education and health services. In 2012, ASJ launched the “Alliance for Peace and Justice” (APJ) to advocate for changes in Honduras’ security and justice sectors.

This second alliance was born out of dissatisfaction with the deeply corrupt law enforcement system. In 2011, uniformed police officers, in an attempted carjacking, murdered the son of the President of the National University, Julieta Castellanos. ASJ joined Castellanos, and, along with other influential organizations, like the National University, World Vision, the National Fellowship of Protestant Churches, and the development arm of the Catholic Church, lifted their voices to protest police violence and impunity. For years, the APJ refused to let police corruption be ignored. They carried out studies to better understand violence in Honduras, organized marches, press conferences, and events, and sat in meetings with members of Congress. All this work paid off when, in 2016, four members of APJ, two of whom were ASJ staff, were invited to lead the process of cleaning up and reforming the National Police. This has been a multi-year effort that resulted in more than 5,100 suspect officers being fired, multiple prison sentences, and ultimately, a stronger, more effective police force (BID n.d.).

The credibility and breadth of the organizations and institutions in these coalitions reinforce the importance of ASJ’s work and carry their messages even further, paving the way for dramatic reforms in public institutions. Informed by their experience with individuals, and accompanied by other organizations, ASJ has been able to channel social movements into successful reform.

From pressure to support

Unlike other organizations that engage in advocacy or organize citizens to protest and demand change, ASJ takes the additional step of supporting the government in its work. This strategy has become a unique and essential complement to ASJ’s advocacy work. In

addition to demanding change, ASJ offers the support of technically competent staff to help the government design, implement, and monitor institutional change. As in its advocacy work, ASJ's proposals and assistance are based on irrefutable research that facilitates the preparation of practical and technically sound proposals.

In ASJ's early days, nearly all its actions were public critiques that pressured the government to change. Over time, as ASJ continued to take cases public, always supported by good research, solid evidence, and practical solutions, their credibility increased to the point where government institutions began to seek its advice directly. This shift to supporting, and not just denouncing, was not simply opportunistic. ASJ discovered that it was often more effective to address problems through collaborative engagement than through public shaming that generated outrage but could also burn bridges with the people ultimately responsible for carrying out desired reforms.

For their part, government officials' motivations for seeking out ASJ's help are not purely selfless. They face constant pressure to protect their reputation, and openness to transparency reflects well on them at election time. Indeed, ASJ found some government leaders who were genuinely disturbed by corruption in their institutions and welcomed ASJ's help to identify and implement concrete improvements. They needed fresh ideas, and they were happy to have the support of the public as they worked to overcome internal resistance to change.

One of the benefits of collaboration is that government institutions often provide access to their internal data, statistics, processes, and protocols. Sometimes such openness comes as a result of public pressure, but in other cases it is the result of ASJ showing institutions their willingness to put in the work to help them improve. Figure 3 illustrates how relationships and research inform proposals for improvement, the implementation of those proposals, and ongoing government oversight to hold authorities responsible for continual improvement.

Supporting Government: Proposals, Technical Support, and Oversight

Ideally, when the government cooperates, ASJ moves through the following four steps, reflected in Figure 3. First, ASJ diagnoses the problem through careful **research**. Second, ASJ recommends **proposals for improvement**. Third, it offers consulting expertise for the **implementation of the plans**, including determining budgets, management and accountability structures, and identifying necessary resources and funding. Finally, once a reform is implemented, ASJ offers **oversight**, monitoring progress to ensure the government continues to improve its service delivery to all Hondurans. Let's consider each of these areas in more detail.

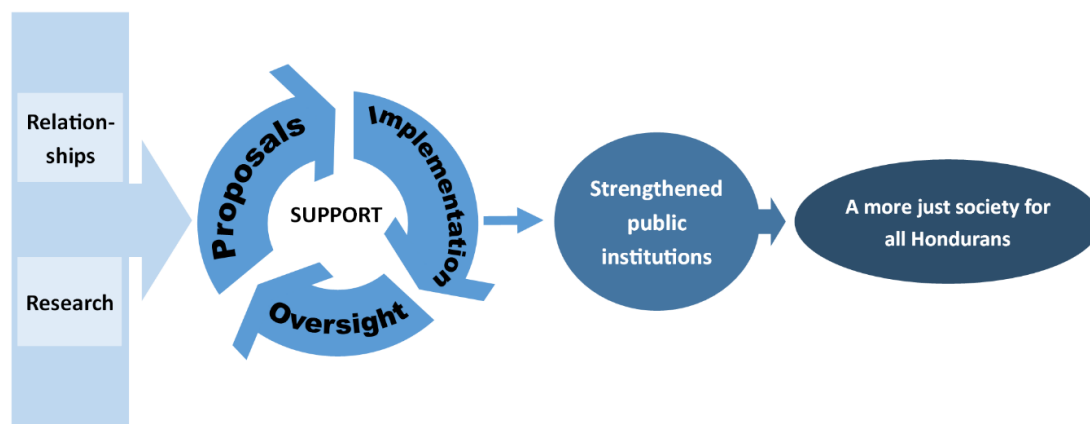


Figure 3: ASJ collaborates with government institutions to help them implement reforms

Research and analysis: When a government agency agrees to collaborate with ASJ, the first step is to create a detailed “baseline report” that identifies opportunities for improvement and serves as a benchmark against which to measure anticipated progress.

In 2014, for example, ASJ signed a groundbreaking three-part agreement with the Honduran government and Transparency International, an international anti-corruption organization for which ASJ serves as Honduras’ chapter. This agreement authorizes ASJ to carry out audits of seven major government institutions, evaluating them by their compliance with legal and administrative standards for purchases, public contracts, human resources, and the management of statistical information.

These detailed analyses, crafted after revising tens of thousands of pages of documentation and hundreds of hours of interviews, often uncover irregularities, inefficiencies, and occasionally, blatant instances of corruption. The baseline report assesses both transparency and effectiveness. In this preliminary study, public institutions have scored, on average, just 33%.⁴ Among the anomalies the studies have uncovered are “ghost” employees who never show up to work, restrictive calls for bids that prevent competition for million-dollar government contracts, and vehicles purchased with public money that end up in the homes of public officials – all instances of corruption that, together, take millions of dollars away from essential government services. Making such accusations is a serious matter, which makes it vital to have carefully documented evidence and a deep understanding of the law before making any findings public.

Proposals for improvement: Once it completes the study, ASJ presents its findings publicly, often in a media event, typically accompanied by government leaders. At the same event, ASJ and government officials present their collaboratively designed improvement plans. While ASJ findings are often not favorable, they come as no surprise to government officials, with whom the findings have already been shared. The government is thus presented with a brief window during which they have the opportunity to create a plan, in collaboration with ASJ, to address deficiencies in their institution. This is no mere face-saving formality. ASJ obtains signatures and a public

commitment from the institution to be held accountable to specific, measurable improvements. The theme of the event is thus hope for the future, not scandal from the past.

ASJ’s intention is not to disgrace or shame the ministers who cooperate with it to collect often-damaging information about their institutions. Instead, though ASJ highlights instances of corruption, it also points out institutional strengths, and give ministers the opportunity to commit publicly to improvement. Many public officials have responded well to this strategy. Seeing that ASJ is not necessarily hostile towards them, they are open to work with ASJ to implement constructive reforms.

Implementation of reforms: In ASJ’s supportive work with government, it finds that the *will* to improve is often not the only barrier to structural improvement. True, some government institutions resist change because the benefits from a corrupt status quo outweigh the costs. But others *are* willing to change, if only they had the resources, training, and technical expertise they need. The commitment to address these latter challenges sets ASJ apart from many advocacy and anti-corruption institutions. Many NGOs critique the government, but few work actively to implement reforms.

One example of ASJ’s work first proposing and then supporting the implementation of reforms can be seen in the implementation of new management models for Honduran courts. In 2015, ASJ signed an agreement with the Honduran Attorney General’s office committing to offer technical support to the judicial body in areas of investigation, transparency, accountability, access to information, and the protection of human rights. The heart of this agreement was a four-year strategic plan that included the implementation of a results-based management model.

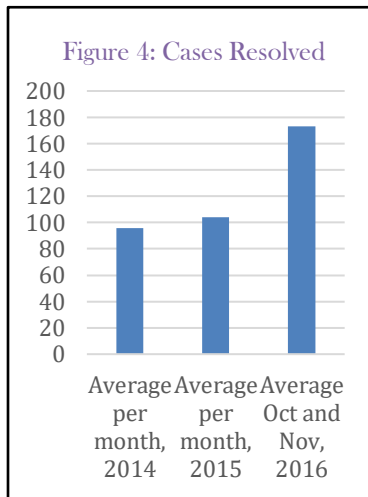
In 2016, this management model was piloted in the Special Court for Common Crimes in Tegucigalpa. This court was chosen for the pilot because of the large quantity of cases it received – approximately 20% of all cases processed by the Attorney General’s office. By December 2016, ASJ had carried out a careful diagnosis that resulted in a structural reorganization of employee responsibilities and job descriptions, case management strategy, assignment, and filing protocols, and even its physical space. As a result, the court adopted changes in administration, human resources,

⁴ Scores are calculated based on the compliance of Honduran government entities with legal requirements, protocols, and procedures in the area of Purchases and Contracts, Human Resources, and Statistics-based Management. ASJ research staff, with input from Ministry officials, compile a list of indicators for each of the three research areas. They then request and analyze information to determine compliance. For example, ASJ staff may request payroll documentation, and make in situ visits to verify whether employees on payroll actually show up to work. Compliance with these indicators is calculated, and the percentage of standards the institution meets is the overall score.

and customer service, resulting in more criminal reports processed, more trials, and, ultimately, a reduction in impunity See figure 4).

Criminal reports had previously taken between five and seven days to be assigned to an attorney. With the implementation of a new ticket system, this was reduced to an average of 38 hours. In addition, the creation of an Early Response Unit increased the number of resolved cases by 73%, resulting in as many as 70 additional processed cases per month.

In addition to resolving a greater number of cases, new management models also eliminated certain possibilities for corruption. Under previous



management, individuals who brought a case to the Attorney General’s office would know weeks before which judges had been assigned to their case, giving them an opportunity to approach judges in an attempt to illicitly influence their decision. Under the new structure, neither the plaintiff nor the judge is aware of case assignment until the day of the trial, bringing more transparency and objectivity to the legal process.

ASJ’s work with Honduran courts and the Ministry of Education, described in the second half of this paper, are two examples of how ASJ accompanies the Honduran government in the implementation of more transparent and efficient management structures. ASJ has found that its willingness to volunteer its time and other resources to support the government as they implement these changes can be the difference between a reformed institution and simply a chastened one.

Monitoring and oversight: Once government institutions have implemented reforms and changed their operating structures, ASJ returns after 18 months to monitor improvements using the same indicators from the initial baseline report. In every institution

where changes were implemented, ASJ’s monitors found progress. For example, the payroll for all police officers used to be managed from a single Excel spreadsheet on a laptop with no password protection. Now, at ASJ’s suggestion, the security sector uses human resources management software with far better security. The Health Ministry has completely overhauled the way it purchases and distributes medicines, reducing theft and loss. Overall, ASJ saw the scores of their seven target institutions rise by an average of 26% in just three years, a substantial improvement in transparency and best practices.

ASJ has thus found that cooperating with and supporting the government can be extremely useful for rooting out corruption, strengthening institutions, and, ultimately, offering more and better services to those who need it. Even so, some civil society organizations criticize ASJ for this approach because of discomfort with cooperating in any way with an institution where corruption is rampant. Critics argue that ASJ’s work legitimizes government actions in other areas that are still clearly corrupt. Proponents of this approach, including many ally organizations in Honduras, acknowledges the dangers of close association with government authorities, but see this as a healthy tension as they work to maintain a balance between protecting their organizational integrity and working with government institutions where positive change seems possible.

In the process, ASJ prioritizes its apolitical stance and stays away from party politics and political ideologies. When advocating for change, ASJ has held meetings with as many as ten different Honduran political parties, including both minority parties and major players. ASJ is driven not by the desire to see a particular ideology win out, but instead by the dream of seeing schools educating children, hospitals treating patients, and courts ensuring justice for all, regardless of income or status. ASJ has been involved in this work for 20 years, through administrations of different political colors. Whichever party is in power, ASJ makes the effort to work with them.

The impact of structural change

The impact of all this work has been significant. Corruption has been called out, high-ranking officials, including a former first lady, have been arrested and jailed, more than a dozen drug traffickers or elites, including a former president, were extradited to the United States, and corrupt and non-functioning institutions are increasingly efficient and well-regulated. Among the most striking impacts is the dramatic transformation of the National Police, including the dismissal of more than 5,100 police officers, the training of new officers, a detailed rewriting of the laws

and regulations, and day-to-day accountability that now infuses this institution. This has been a major achievement, but it is only one example of the transformation that ASJ has seen in Honduran public institutions.

These reforms positively impact the Honduran public. ASJ's neighborhood-specific interventions model the change that is possible; however, they also transform individual lives, showing people that they can and should expect more from their governing bodies, and that everyone can participate in demanding change.

In summary, in all its work, ASJ takes seriously the calls of Biblical prophets to fight for justice for the oppressed and to root out corruption wherever they find it in Honduran government institutions. In its mission to fight against corruption and for justice, ASJ has learned that a brave commitment to their work can bring about real change, particularly when this work is rooted in careful investigations, indisputable research, and close relationships with the people involved. ASJ has found success through pressuring government to implement reforms via the media, legal action, and social movements; but the most significant transformation has come when ASJ supported the government in that change, working with government officials to propose, implement, and oversee reforms.

ASJ's theory of change is based on the practicalities of what has worked for it and the doors that circumstances and God's providence have opened. The Christian faith on which ASJ is founded motivates it to act on behalf of the poor with a commitment to challenging oppressors and seeking justice. Partnering with citizens, civil society organizations, churches, and the government, it forms powerful coalitions for positive change in Honduras. To convey in greater detail how this theory of change functions, we transition now to a case of study of ASJ's work in public education.

Case Study: ASJ and Honduran Public Education

Education in crisis

In 2009 Honduras descended into chaos and anarchy when a constitutional crisis surrounded the removal of the president from office. One political faction had managed to remove president Manuel (Mel) Zelaya and send him into exile. They accused him of political malfeasance. Zelaya's supporters, on the other hand, saw this as a coup and swarmed the

streets in protest. The country was at an impasse, on the brink of violence, and imperiled by a deeply divided citizenry.

Wanting to do something positive, ASJ called a meeting of some thirty NGO, church, and civic leaders who were concerned about the well-being of the country. This coalition, which came to be called Transformemos Honduras (Let's Transform Honduras), met several times in 2009. They decided not to take sides in the political conflict, but to focus their immediate attention and efforts on the nation's health and education sectors, both of which were highly corrupt and failing. Following ASJ's lead, Transformemos Honduras (TH) started with some research to learn more about the character of the problems and their underlying causes.

What they found was a failed education system due to embedded corruption that had built up over decades. Among their key findings:

Limited class days: In 2009, due to political turmoil, students in Honduran primary and secondary schools attended classes only 90 days, less than half the 200 days required by Honduran law⁵. Unfortunately, the whole decade from 2001 to 2010 was not much better; average school attendance was only 125 days a year. Schools closed due to teacher strikes, late teacher arrivals on Mondays, early departures on Fridays, fumigation campaigns, and any other excuse that seemed somewhat reasonable. One-day holidays turned into week-long holidays (Cerna 2014, "Solo 95..." 2007).

Frequent teacher strikes: During the ten years prior to 2011, teachers went on strike for weeks or months every year. In 2005 teachers went on strike 34 different times, for all sorts of reasons. In addition to reducing the number of school days, these strikes were also a great opportunity for corruption. Marlon Escoto, secretary of Education from 2012-2017 says that strikes were one of the preferred methods of corruption for union leaders. They claimed to be using union dues as strike funds, but they were really pocketing a lot of money during these strikes (Escoto 2018).

Ghost teachers: When TH went to confirm the presence of teachers in the different districts, they found that many 'teachers' drew salaries, but never showed up to work. About 80,000 teachers were being paid, but TH studies showed that around 25% of these were "ghosts," who collected a salary without showing up to work.

Politicized/clientelist hiring: Hiring decisions for administrators and teachers in the system often

⁵ Primary schools in Honduras cover grades 1-9, while secondary schools cover grades 10-12.

revolved around bribes, family connections, and even sexual favors. Oftentimes decisions were political. Political parties and teachers' unions had developed a tense but symbiotic relationship since the educational system had been nationalized in the late 1950s. Members of Congress appointed loyalists to well-paid district leadership roles, making them "clients" of the politicians. In return, the teachers helped keep that politician elected.

Over time, political leaders formed strong alliances with the leaders of the teachers' unions. Honduran professor and independent researcher Edwin Medina says that if there were ten teaching positions to be distributed, union leaders and politicians would negotiate so that each would get to name five teachers. Demand was high for such life-long, well-paid positions, and aspiring teachers often paid \$5,000 to get one, equivalent to a year's salary at minimum wage (Medina 2018). Supposedly, according to the 1997 law governing teachers in public schools (the *Estatuto del Docente Hondureño*), hiring decisions were based on merit, determined especially by a competitive examination and interview process called a "concurso" (competition). But this process was secretive and easy to manipulate, and no significant hindrance to corrupt hiring practices.

In the symbiotic relationship that developed over time, politicians wrote laws and established rules that supported unions, and unions provided field support for favored political leaders. Two examples of political support for union leaders are the law requiring all teachers to affiliate with a teachers' union and the rule requiring the government to deduct union dues from teacher salaries and distribute them directly to the unions. One example of how the teachers helped their political patrons is that polling stations were commonly set up in schools, with teachers managing the polls and the ballot boxes. There was thus ample opportunity for teachers to ensure that votes from their district went the right way.

Low test scores: International standardized tests are rare in Honduras, but in 1997 Honduran students participated in a test overseen by UNESCO. Honduras came in last out of 11 Latin American countries. On a similar test in 2013 Honduras came in 10th out of 15 countries. The apparent gain was a sign of hope, but was small comfort when national testing showed that "for the sixth grade ... from 2012 through 2016, 90% or more of the evaluated students were graded as 'needs improvement' or 'unsatisfactory'" (Educación 2017).

Governance/management failings: Marlon Escoto was named secretary of Education in 2012, a position he held for five years. It was unusual for someone to serve five years in this position. Prior to Escoto's tenure (and since), secretaries came and went at a pace of one per year, making it virtually impossible to exercise any reasonable authority or continuity. Similar to what TH had found in its own research, Escoto likewise discovered that the ministry had hardly any relevant information about the system. They didn't know how many students were enrolled, how many schools existed, or how many teachers had been appointed, let alone who those teachers were by name and how much they were paid. There were no systems of evaluation for either curriculum or teachers. In general, there was virtually no oversight or evaluation for anything that happened in local schools (Escoto 2018).⁶

Real Change Begins

After Transformemos Honduras formed in 2009, ASJ played a key leadership role by dedicating a budget and staff time to the work. Other TH participants included leaders from Christian NGOs like Aldea Global, Caritas, Compassion, Mopawi, and World Vision. Together, they pooled their knowledge about Honduran public education and helped plan strategy. They also put the grassroots networks of their separate organizations in the service of what became a social movement to end corruption and bring about change in both education and health.

Based on the information already gathered, TH wrote three reports, one each on class days, ghost teachers, and the politicized hiring process. Confronted with how serious the systemic failings and corruption were, TH participants worried about associating their names with the reports. Anticipating reprisals, especially from the teachers' unions, TH nevertheless went public with the findings. The press made a big deal about them and they generated much public discussion. Thankfully, the feared mobs outside the NGO program centers never materialized. It's not clear why, but speculation among TH leaders is that the unions were caught off guard. Or perhaps they simply didn't feel threatened by this upstart social movement when they were confident that their relationships with corrupt government officials were secure.

Unfortunately, the government didn't react much either. TH's coordinator, Blanca Munguia (Munguia 2018), says they brought the reports to the authorities, including José Alejandro Ventura, the secretary of Education. But Ventura was not interested in change,

⁶ The ungovernability of the education sector is likewise lamented in a 2009 World Bank study (World Bank. 2009, 154-57).

likely because he was implicated in the corruption being reported.⁷

Settling in for the long haul, TH⁸ employed a three-pronged strategy. First, they continued their research, taking advantage of Honduran transparency laws to request information on teacher payrolls from department offices.⁹ Then it began to build a social movement, training parents to collect information about teachers and class days in their local schools. Furthermore, it studied education law to see where the law was good, but not followed, and where the law needed to be changed. TH also used every reasonable opportunity, especially popular media channels, to publicize that the system was deeply flawed and steeped in corruption. All of this together, the research, media presentations, and the broad base of support combined to keep pressure on the authorities to act. One school TH learned about, the Bello Oriente school in Tegucigalpa, was paying 63 teachers, but only 36 of these ‘teachers’ ever showed up at the school. TH repeated this fact often in media presentations, and the pressure on government authorities kept building.

TH researched hiring practices with the intent to verify that people being hired to teach were indeed those who, as required by law, had scored highest on the test. Again, it found, in direct violation of the law, that hired teachers often had low test scores. It also found other anomalies: Some successful candidates had been part of the selection committees and then chose themselves for the positions. Others with low scores happened to be close relatives of members of the selection committee. All these findings were duly reported to local and national authorities and publicized in local and national media.

Though secretary of Education Ventura was not interested in fighting corruption, he nevertheless seemed to feel the need to respond in some way to the pressure. His response was to review and update the education law. There were two main laws in Honduras at the time, the 1966 law that centralized the system, and the 1997 law that covered teachers, their hiring, salaries, promotion, union membership, and other human resource types of issues. Ventura invited stakeholders, including TH to participate in discussions about the law, and got a new law, the *Ley Fundamental de Educación*, passed at the end of 2011. TH hoped the new law would improve the structure and

transparency of the hiring process, that hiring would henceforth be based on merit, and that any opportunities for corruption in hiring would be closed. But the new law did not include many provisions that TH/ASJ wanted, and to this day they continue to advocate for changes to the law.

It was in 2012 that things finally started to improve. In response to TH pressure, President Porfirio (Pepe) Lobo dismissed Ventura and replaced him with Marlon Escoto. Escoto was not politically affiliated, but he was committed to fighting corruption, and very interested in working with TH. For the next five years, TH and ASJ worked closely with Escoto and members of his team to fight corruption and set up new systems that would efficiently and effectively provide quality education to Honduran children and youth. With the support of the Honduran president and TH, Escoto proceeded to make major changes, including the following:

A digital system: Early in his tenure, with TH technical support, Escoto developed and implemented a digital information system called the “*Sistema de Administración de los Recursos Humanos Docentes*” (Administrative System of Faculty Human Resources) through which all teachers had to register if they wanted to get paid. It soon became evident that some teachers held multiple positions, sometimes in locations so far from each other that it would be impossible to teach in one school in the morning and get to the other in the afternoon. For such anomalies, indicated teachers had to visit the central office to explain. Naturally, many could not explain, and were thus released from the positions they were neglecting.

As a result, the payroll shrank. Escoto says there were some 80,000 teachers on the payroll when he took office. Several years later the payroll had been reduced to fewer than 55,000 teachers. Some 25,000 “ghost” teachers had been dismissed (Escoto 2018).

Union power declines: In a huge change for unions, the government no longer withheld and distributed union dues, depriving them of millions of dollars. Teachers could now pay union dues voluntarily, but the majority chose not to. As a result, teachers’ strikes diminished and, by 2015, ended altogether.

The end of strikes and the increased discipline in the system overall allowed the achievement of the 200-

⁷ Ventura is currently on house arrest for charges of corruption related to a corruption case in which he was implicated while serving in a different government post.

⁸ It’s not easy to separate Transformemos Honduras from the Asociación for a more Just Society, mostly because ASJ plays a leading role in TH. Much of what TH is and does is heavily influenced by ASJ, its values, and its strategies.

⁹ Access to Public Information laws were an important part of ASJ’s strategy. While the laws were on the books when ASJ started this work, they were seldom, if ever, used, and it took nearly a year and persistent pressure before their first information request was filled. Even as responses later became more expedited, requests were frequently returned incomplete. Nonetheless, without ASJ’s insistence, it is unlikely that this valuable tool would be in use at all.

day school year, for the first time in 2013, and then every year since. Carlos Hernández, executive director of ASJ, was cited in a local newspaper, saying that “In 2013 the goal of imparting 200 days of class was finally achieved, thanks to the disciplinary measures adopted by the minister of Education Marlon Escoto” (Cerna 2018).

Merit-based hiring: The final major change was that the Ministry of Education got serious about following objective, competitive hiring procedures, both for teachers and departmental directors, thus greatly reducing corrupt hiring practices.

Unfortunately, there have been problems of implementation for the new competitions. For teachers, the ministry has not yet been able to develop an adequate test, so no competition has taken place since 2012. Teachers hired since 2012 are all interim hires who will have the opportunity to remain in a position of a similar level when the competition finally takes place. A test was given in late 2017, but it was nullified when 94% of the applicants failed, showing that something was clearly wrong with the test itself. One explanation is that there had not been a test for five years, and, without telling the candidates, the ministry gave a new kind of test, one that assessed not only knowledge, as had been the norm, but also teaching skills. A new test was initially planned for December 2018, but as of March 2019, it had been put on hold again in anticipation of a more rigorous analysis of the need for additional teachers (“Invalidan Concurso...” 2018).

Competitions for departmental directors ran into problems too, including problems of quality, internal governmental turf wars, and corruption. The first new competition was held in 2016, but, like the 2017 teacher exam, was nullified when hardly anyone passed. Two government ministries (education and civil service) then began squabbling about which ministry should administer the competition. Finally, with those problems resolved and a new test scheduled, TH director, Blanca Munguía mistakenly received a text message intended for a select, politically affiliated group of candidates. It told them to show up a day or two early for the test so that they could be given answers to the exam. ASJ scoped out the situation, and after witnessing obvious violations at the hotel where selected candidates had been called to prep for the exam, shared what they had uncovered with Escoto and the president. On the day of the exam, over one hundred candidates were seated and ready to take it when a top-ranking official, presumably the president or someone under his command, called the administrator of the exam and told her to cancel it. With ASJ’s involvement and

oversight, the hiring process was re-initiated a few weeks later, and this time resulted in the successful and significantly more transparent selection of departmental directors. After all stages of the hiring process, which included the exam, candidate resumes, psychiatric exams, and interviews, close to 25% of the candidates were approved for placement.¹⁰

A review of TH/ASJ strategies used in education

A lot has happened in public education since 2010 and TH and ASJ have been central players throughout. Marlon Escoto himself says candidly that reforms would not have happened without TH/ASJ involvement (Escoto 2018). Exactly which of TH/ASJ’s strategies were most influential is hard to say, so it may be useful to review the multiple types of TH/ASJ engagement.

Research and communication: Seeing research as crucial to advocacy, TH/ASJ obtained pertinent, irrefutable, and abundant information, and then ensured that it got to the right people. Oftentimes that meant that TH/ASJ first shared its findings with the authorities. If the authorities chose to act on it, well and good. If they did not act, then TH/ASJ put on pressure, through media campaigns that included press conferences, TV interviews, and their own online publication, *Revistazo*.¹¹

Relationship building, grassroots empowerment, and social movements: TH has been a powerful vehicle for empowering local citizens to know their rights and to hold their local governments, including their schools, accountable. This has recently evolved into a follow-up program called Comunidades Fuertes (CF) (Strong Communities), a social support program located in four of Honduras’ most violent communities. CF embraces youth who may be attracted to gang activity and offers counseling to families that have been impacted by violence. In the process of supporting people, it also continues to train people in communities on their civil rights and the role they can play as monitors of educational practice in their local schools. These empowered citizens keep their local schools on track, monitoring especially the presence of teachers and principals in the schools.

In recent years, however, in response to student weakness on standardized test scores, CF is training local teams of monitors to assess the quality of education. Teachers being present in the class is a good start, but a second step is to assess how teachers use the day and to what extent it includes effective teaching.

¹⁰ Much more detail is contained in the ASJ-TH Spanish-language report on the process; see ASJ-TH 2016.

¹¹ See <http://www.revistazo.biz/web2/>

Monitors thus trained take their positions in the hallway outside the classroom and count the minutes of different activities taking place inside, from 'students copying from the blackboard' to 'teacher lecturing' to 'teacher talking on her cellphone,' etc. These results are compiled, written up in reports, and presented to school principals and district directors. In most cases principals take the reports seriously and develop improvement plans to address the shortcomings, which local teams then monitor throughout the next year.

Dolores Martinez, coordinator of CF, tells of a principal in one school who rarely showed up, which was reported to the district director. The result was an improvement plan that required her to be at school every day. Dolores says that the principal was not happy with CF's intervention, but she does now come to school every day, even if she still leaves earlier than she should (Martinez 2018). ASJ does not have plans to extend this program to the whole country on their own, but they are sharing the program with other organizations in the hope that they develop their own CF programs in communities throughout the country.

Relationship building at high levels: Readers of this article may have noticed multiple reference to meetings with ministers of Education and with the President himself. Over the years and in all their work, ASJ, and now also TH, have built a rich network of relationships with leaders in all areas of Honduran life; government, business, media, international organizations, and civil society. It has established a reputation as a serious organization that does its research and pursues its mission with passion, persistence, and integrity. That's why when ASJ learned of the corruption in the department director competition, they went straight to the president and got the exam cancelled.

Citizens' voices and legal action: One helpful program sponsored by ASJ is 'Asistencia Legal Anti-Corrupción' (ALAC) (Anti-Corruption Legal Assistance). This program allows people to anonymously report corruption through an email address, telephone hotline, or cellphone app called 'Dilo Aquí' ("Say it here"). The program began in 2016 and had fielded some 800 complaints by the middle of 2018. Two full-time ASJ staff are assigned to this program. One recent complaint reported a teacher who was appointed to a position by his father, even though he scored an unacceptably low grade on the exam. ALAC staff

informed the Ministry of Education, which investigated the situation and deposed the teacher (Rivera Toledo 2018).

Proposals and support: In TH/ASJ's collaborative support of the Ministry of Education, ASJ staff helped develop the online system the ministry uses to gather information about teachers and students. It also provided guidance on how to manage the competitions for teachers and departmental directors, including helping to write the tests and evaluate the results. As ASJ human resources expert Jimena Garcia says, "we help them in everything they want us to help them with" (Garcia 2018). Former secretary of Education Rutilia Calderón requested TH assistance in writing education's strategic plan. She says that the most important part of what TH and ASJ offer is their recommendations and technical assistance. During her year as secretary, she preferred working with them over any other civil society organization, because instead of just denouncing failure, they contribute ideas and recommendations for how problems can be resolved (Calderón 2018).

Monitoring/oversight: After the initial baseline study, ASJ did the first follow-up audit/evaluation during the years 2015/16. The report, which was presented to the new secretary of Education, Marcial Solís, showed some improvement in hiring practices, but some backsliding in acquisitions/contracts and information/data gathering.¹² Vice minister of Education, Javier Menocal, said the ministry was not happy with the results, and that they planned to take the evaluation seriously and commit to doing a better job. He also noted his appreciation for ASJ and his intention to work closely with them to make the necessary changes (Menocal 2018). The second follow-up evaluation was being completed as this article was being written.

Lessons Learned

Among the lessons from ASJ's experience in public education are the importance of solid research, good relationships at the grassroots and in the government, strategic use of the media, and collaborative support. Here are some additional lessons gleaned from ASJ's experience thus far.

¹² The baseline study measured purchases and contracts and human resources, while the first evaluation added statistics management as a third element of study with its own indicators. Between the first baseline score in (2014-2015) and the second (2015-2016), the score for purchases and contracts decreased slightly, from 27% to 25%, after the Ministry failed to provide ASJ with documents supporting contracts for construction and remodeling of school buildings. The score for human resources increased from 47% to 62% (15%), while statistics management was evaluated at 57%. The average of these three areas is 48%.

Faith: As mentioned previously, faith is a central motivating factor for ASJ. The verse Micah 6:8 “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” is ubiquitous in the daily life of ASJ, from murals on the office walls to web pages. Likewise, it is faith that motivates ASJ staff in the midst of danger. When threatened by violence, they remind themselves of I John 4:18, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” ASJ leaders emphasize how important it is to be brave in following Christ’s example as they work not for their own interests, but for the well-being of the most vulnerable.

Fairness and consistency: ASJ’s reputation for integrity has been built over two decades by adhering to standards of justice and applying them fairly. Onan Calix, a current leader of the largest teachers’ union, said that he originally thought ASJ was their enemy, but then ASJ helped his union address a major injustice in the way the government was treating teachers who by law were supposedly exempt from retaking the application test. ASJ supported them and they won the case, which showed Calix that ASJ was a neutral player in service of justice for all (Calix 2018).

Impartiality and nonpartisanship: In Honduras’ hyper-partisan political environment, ASJ is often criticized for working too closely with the government. For example, Edwin Moya, a member of TH and longstanding, influential practitioner in the Honduran education sector, believes that ASJ is too closely affiliated with the current government. He argues that Hondurans are coming to see it as an ally of the ruling party. The fact that this is more perception than reality doesn’t matter to Moya, because he fears that over time the perception will undermine TH/ASJ’s influence (Moya 2018). Moya believes TH/ASJ should continue with its research and advocacy, but that working directly with the government crosses the line from advocacy to tacit acceptance, threatening the organizations’ credibility. Taking a more supportive position, Jorge Galeano, Executive Director of World Vision Honduras and a member of the TH leadership group, says that ASJ is neither friends nor enemies with the government, and that, “following the metaphor of the sun, ASJ should be close enough to stay warm, but not so close that they get burned” (Galeano 2018). As ASJ works closely with the Ministry of Education, they daily live the “healthy tension” that this balancing act requires.

Work with those who will work with you: ASJ president, Kurt Ver Beek says the standard bell curve (see figure 5) helps explain with whom ASJ works. Ver Beek argues that every government agency has a few

honorable champions and a few incorrigible villains, while the vast majority of government employees fall somewhere in the middle, influenced by risk/reward calculations on doing either wrong or right. ASJ works to identify and eliminate the most corrupt people in an institution, and enlist the bravest and most transparent in leading reform, thus changing the cost-benefit structures for the entire institution. For example, ASJ wanted to work with secretary of Education Ventura in 2010, but was not successful. When Marlon Escoto was appointed, TH/ASJ enjoyed a productive working relationship and witnessed many significant reforms, as it did with his successor, Rutíia Calderón (Ver Beek, 2018-2).

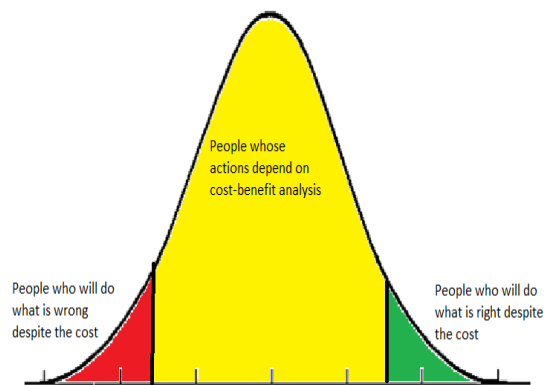


Figure 5: ASJ works to shift the cost-benefit structure in institutions by implementing reforms that reward good behavior and hold consequences for bad behavior

Competent staff: When ASJ offers recommendations and technical assistance, they come with experts and experienced staff in such areas as human resources, digital systems, teacher evaluation, statistical analysis, legal matters, test-making, and accounting.

Fully Honduran: Of ASJ’s 130 staff members, all are Honduran except for Kurt Ver Beek, who volunteers his time as board president, and a handful of people in communications positions. This Honduran identity is vital when ASJ calls out Honduran officials for corrupt practices, because it is other Hondurans who are calling them out, not foreigners. Furthermore, Honduran staff are knowledgeable about the history, culture, and context of Honduran politics, allowing them to plan more effective interventions based on Honduran reality, and giving them a greater personal stake in the outcome. This also influences ASJ’s longevity in the country, because staff are likely to stay in Honduras for the long term.

Civil society: Through its work with Transformemos Honduras, ASJ stays connected with Honduran civil

society. By working with other civil society leaders in this coalition, ASJ enjoys the benefit of ideas that come to the table, as well as the support of other organizations that lend their support to TH/ASJ efforts.

External funding: Much of ASJ's funding comes from sources external to Honduras, which means that no Honduran business, foundation, or person can be accused of using ASJ as a supporter of their own personal interests. ASJ does not take money from the Honduran government, a policy important enough to be enshrined in their institutional imperatives. In order to stay sustainable as an organization, ASJ seeks out a diversity of funders, which in 2018 included the U.S. State Department, Millennium Challenge Account, Transparency International, the International Development Bank, German and Canadian foreign aid funds, and a variety of Christian foundations. In addition, U.S. partner organization AJS works with over 1,000 individual donors per year. The facts that funders are so diverse, and that ASJ is so obviously led by Hondurans, have protected ASJ from charges of foreign meddling in Honduras' internal affairs.

Conclusion

In the past eight years the educational system has undergone some amazing progress, though much remains to be done. Student test scores improved initially, but are still too low, which is why TH is now focusing on teaching quality. Textbooks are scarce and school buildings are often pitifully inadequate. Purchasing practices and data gathering at the ministry are still weak. The two key education laws are not as strong as they should be, and some sections are contradictory. Fair competitions for aspiring teachers are anticipated, but as of April 2019 had not yet taken place. There is always the possibility that the system will slide back into its old, corrupt ways.

And yet, recall that ASJ's mission is to make the government work, especially for the benefit of Honduras' most vulnerable citizens, so we must acknowledge the revolutionary changes that have come about between 2010 and 2019. More than two million students depend on the Honduran public education system, which in 2010 was infested with corruption and barely functioning. In 2010, more than 25% of paid teachers never showed up; in 2019 that figure is less than 1%. Students who attended class only 125 days in 2010 attended for over 200 days in 2018. Test scores improved as Honduras moved from dead last among Latin American nations to 10th out of 15, and there is promise for more improvement in the future. In 2018, hiring is much less susceptible to longstanding corrupt practices. Community members are increasingly empowered to hold their local schools accountable. At all levels, from ministry officials to teachers in rural

schools, a culture of evaluation and oversight is taking root. Transparency at all levels is expanding.

ASJ's work in public education is representative of their unique sense of mission. Many organizations, Christian and secular, do excellent work improving the well-being and opportunities of small pockets of individuals and communities. Such interventions typically run parallel to public systems that serve the vast majority of the nation's citizens. Hundreds of people are helped through a one-time medical brigade, while millions suffer without access to quality hospitals. Volunteer teams build wells, giving a few communities access to running water, while the country's water grid, serving millions, lies in shambles. Private schools provide excellent education for a few fortunate children, while public schools languish. ASJ appreciates the work of all these groups, while they have taken the path of working to impact the lives of millions.

This case study illustrates the power of a theory of change that combines persistent pressure and oversight with an openness to suggest and help implement reforms. It illustrates that, even in country wracked by corruption, it is possible to bring about macro-level, structural change that bends toward a Kingdom-inspired arc of justice. While difficult, dangerous, and time-consuming, this work is also rewarding and redemptive. ASJ staff view this work as consistent with their commitment to be faithful to God's call to work for justice. It is a model other Christians committed to Kingdom living can learn from.

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