

Investing in pro bono – a case study from Brazil - Pro Bono Committee, May 2018

Tuesday 15 May 2018

Flavia Regina de Souza Oliveira

Mattos Filho, Sao Paulo

flavia@mattosfilho.com.br

While Brazil is Latin America's largest country and the region's leading economy, it still has an extremely high level of social inequality. Although in the last decade the country has progressed in the implementation of social public policies, this great inequality has a direct impact on access to justice, defined by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as the 'right of persons, regardless of sex, race, age, sexual identity, political ideology or religious beliefs, to obtain a response satisfactory to their legal need'.

Given this scenario, Mattos Filho, Veiga Filho, Marrey Jr and Quiroga Advogados decided to step forward and announce two joint initiatives: the creation of a practice exclusively dedicated to pro bono services and a not-for-profit organisation aimed at promoting access to quality legal education.

In 2016, alongside the firm's growth strategy, its pro bono programme (created in 1999) was reformulated to hire a lawyer exclusively dedicated to its management and the establishment of new areas of focus: strengthening of civil society organisations, promoting and defending human rights and improving local public administration. The firm aims to produce, encourage and spread legal knowledge and increasingly invest in strategic legal services of public interest and social impact.

A practice which is 100 per cent dedicated to pro bono, the first of its kind in Brazil's legal market, will enable more structured and impactful work. There will be a team of professionals exclusively dedicated to providing free legal services in addition to the pro bono hours by the firm's lawyers in other practice areas. Besides the development of pro bono, the new practice will offer a career to professionals who have a strong connection to human rights and public interest law. They will have the same career plan and benefits offered to other associates.

Along the same lines, the firm's partners incorporated a not for profit organisation called 'Mattos Filho, Veiga Filho, Marrey Jr e Quiroga Institute' (the 'Institute'). Their aim is to promote and enhance pro bono activities in the country; grant scholarships to private law schools to diversify the profile of law professionals; develop new methodologies to disseminate legal knowledge; and support initiatives by civil societies towards diversity and citizenship.

For its financial sustainability, an investment fund will be set up, managed independently and autonomously from the firm, with capital being raised through financial contributions from its partners and other professionals. As a result, 20 per cent annual earnings from investments will be converted to donations to the Institute, while granting each investor the option to increase this percentage. In addition, partners may offer direct donations.

These two initiatives show maturity regarding the contribution that a leading law firm can give to Brazilian society by promoting and enhancing pro bono and creating an institute dedicated to broadening legal education. For that to be possible, the firms have been forging stronger ties with national and international bodies in order to be close to the legal demands of the organisations and individuals eligible for its programmes.

Even though social inequality is a result of various aspects related to the country's development and history, the private sector can provide a great contribution to reverse this situation by investing human and financial resources in areas that usually do not find financing support. With these initiatives, Mattos Filho, Veiga Filho, Marrey Jr e Quiroga Advogados demonstrates a deep comprehension that social changes need investments with a long-term perspective in order to make human rights and access to justice not only a legal provision but also a reality.