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## SUCCESS STORY

# Corruption Sentence Sparks Culture Shift among Public Servants in Sonora



*State Anti-Corruption System operators develop work plans to tackle impunity in public service during the Launch Session of the 100-Day Challenges in Sonora (February 10-11, 2020).*

***“Word has gotten out that OICs are doing their job and now public servants are taking their obligations seriously.”***

*-Omar Tiburcio, Director of the OIC of Sonora’s SAGARPA*

“In the past, at least at the local level, misuse of government resources went unpunished. Nothing ever really happened if you were found doing something you should not as a public servant,” says Ricardo García, President of Sonora’s Court of Administrative Justice (TJA for its acronym in Spanish). Historically, most corruption cases filed before the TJA failed to conclude with a sanction. This was largely the result of a limited understanding of the standards of proof by Internal Audit Units (OICs for its acronym in Spanish), the entities responsible for investigating and processing this type of cases in Court.

To address this pervasive impunity, USAID’s Transparency and Rapid Response Project (TRRP) worked in coordination with the entities that compose the State Anti-Corruption System of Sonora, including the TJA, the State Comptroller’s Office, and the State Supreme Audit Institution, to increase the resolution of corruption offenses by applying the 100-Day Challenge methodology. 100-Day Challenges assist in achieving ambitious, tangible, and relevant results by breaking down barriers of communication and inspiring coordination amongst institutions and their personnel to ultimately pursue systemic and sustainable change.

In the framework of the 100-Day Challenges, TJA judges and representatives of OICs met to discuss the standards needed to build a strong case. The OIC of Sonora’s Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development (*Secretaría de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural-SAGARPA*) had the opportunity to put its new legal strategies into action when a number of complaints about the misuse of a SAGARPA vehicle came to its attention via social media. Omar Tiburcio, Director of SAGARPA’s OIC noted, “There was no awareness among public servants about their responsibilities [to avoid utilizing government property for their personal benefit]. This is an issue that affects government entities across the state.”

In this particular case, as a result of an administrative process initiated before the TJA, the public servant was found guilty of misusing government resources (a vehicle) and was suspended from his position for 15 days. At first this may seem like a mere slap on this wrist, but it actually had a much larger impact.



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“The real punishment is not the 15-day suspension, but 15 days with no salary.” For a mid-level government employee, 15 days less pay makes a significant impact, according to Ricardo García.

For García, what followed was a sign of a much larger impact beyond this one particular public servant. “It was the first time we sentenced and applied a punishment for a serious administrative offense. This is a complete paradigm shift in Sonora. Although there is a statewide regulation regarding the use of government vehicles, there was very little control and misuse was rampant. Magically, after this sentence was issued, all of the [SAGARPA] vehicles are now parked where they were supposed to be at the time they are supposed to be there.”

That is why Ricardo García says “There is no small sentence. You can see the impact of this sentence in the day-to-day behavior of public servants.” He is also convinced that the best way to fight corruption is increase efficiency in public service and firmly believes that this sentence hit home with many government workers.

Clearly this is resonating at the local level. Omar Tiburcio is proud to say that reports of misuse of government vehicles have fallen drastically, and not just within SAGARPA. “Word has gotten out that OICs are doing their job and now public servants are taking their obligations seriously.” He also noted that through the process of reaching this resolution, the OIC’s relationship with the State Comptroller’s Office and TJA has improved significantly, particularly in their ability to coordinate actions and achieve results by working together.

“This type of sentence can transform efficiency in public service,” according to Ricardo García. Gaining the coordination of the system to apply the law in one seemingly small case has had a ripple effect on the culture of public servants in Sonora—an impact far greater than a 15-day suspension.