

## **CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT: UPDATE ON JUSTICE SECTOR REFORMS BY THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF THE FEDERATION AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE LATEEF O. FAGBEMI SAN.**

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you all to this significant public engagement session organized to update citizens on the milestones achieved by this Ministry in the outgoing year and to receive invaluable feedback from all stakeholders for future improvements.

Today's event underscores the unwavering commitment of the Federal Ministry of Justice towards fostering transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in the administration of justice in Nigeria. It also highlights our collaborative spirit, as we work with stakeholders, through the Administration of Criminal Justice and Reforms Department (ACJR&D) and the Federal Justice Sector Reform Coordinating Committee (FJSRCC), of the Federal Ministry of Justice to deliver impactful reforms that address the needs and concerns of Nigerians.

The justice sector has made remarkable progress in recent years, driven by the dedication and hard work of the departments and units of the Ministry, partners, and stakeholders. Permit me to highlight some of these achievements:

### **1. Development and adoption of the National Policy on Justice, 2024 – 2028**

The National Policy on Justice, 2024 – 2028 was developed in collaboration with stakeholders to address the challenges militating against effective administration of justice in Nigeria. The policy, which is a precursor of the 2017 - 2023 Policy, outlines 11 objectives and identifies 20 thematic areas for reforming the justice system. It also provides a broad framework for effective collaboration between federal and state justice institutions through an effective mechanism for resolving cross-institutional and cross-sector challenges.

The 11 objectives outlined by the Policy includes:

- 1) Promote and protect human rights and access to justice for all, especially the poor, weak and vulnerable.
- 2) Ensure Fair and speedy dispensation of justice and effective

enforcement of court decisions.

- 3) Promote correctional and restorative justice and alternative dispute resolutions;
- 4) Uphold the independence of the judiciary, ensuring its autonomy, integrity, and efficiency in dispensing justice.
- 5) Strengthen the capacity and infrastructure of justice sector institutions to improve service delivery and professionalism.
- 6) Recognize and maintain the plural character of the Nigerian legal system, while promoting harmony among its components.
- 7) Engender synergy and cooperation across the justice sector nationally and at both Federal and State levels.
- 8) Promote openness, transparency and accountability in the justice sector and its capacity to curb corrupt practices and abuse of office.
- 9) Integrate technology and innovative solutions to modernize the justice system, enhancing efficiency and transparency.
- 10) Mainstream the role of the justice system in enhancing national security, supporting fair, credible and violence free elections, and facilitating economic growth.
- 11) Encourage compliance with Nigeria's treaty obligations and promote international cooperation.

Towards the realization of the above objectives, the policy identified 20 thematic areas of focus as provided below:

*1) Nine of the themes focus on strengthening the processes of delivering justice and protecting the rights of citizens*

THEME 1: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS	Ensure all people enjoy their fundamental rights as provided by the constitution
THEME 2: ACCESS TO JUSTICE	Guarantee equal opportunity for all to seek and obtain legal remedies.
THEME 3: JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN	Protect children's rights and ensure appropriate responses to child-related legal matters.

THEME 4: TRADITIONAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS	Recognize and integrate the values and benefits of traditional justice.
THEME 5: FAIR AND SPEEDY DISPENSATION OF JUSTICE	Deliver just outcomes efficiently and without undue delay.
THEME 7: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE	Foster reconciliation and repair harm caused by criminal conduct to promote peaceful coexistence in our communities.
THEME 8: ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)	Provide accessible and efficient avenues for resolving disputes outside of court.
THEME 6: DETENTION AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICE	Manage detention and rehabilitation of offenders humanely and effectively through appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.
THEME 12: OPENNESS, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	Ensure the justice system is open to public scrutiny and accountable for its actions.

2) *Three* others seek to strengthen the justice institutions and promote effective collaboration between federal and states

THEME 10: INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY	Uphold an independent and impartial judiciary.
THEME 9: LEGAL PLURALISM	Acknowledge the co-existence of various legal systems within the national framework.
THEME 11: SYNERGY AND COOPERATION ACROSS THE JUSTICE SECTOR	Promote collaboration among all actors within the justice system.

3) another *three* that are concerned with capacity and infrastructural development of the justice sector

THEME 13: CAPACITY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES	Equip the justice system with adequate resources to function effectively.
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THEME 14: LEGAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION	Foster a competent, professional, and ethical workforce in the sector
THEME 15: APPLICATION OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE	Utilize technology to enhance efficiency in justice service delivery and accessibility by the citizens

4) *Three Themes* extend the support of the justice system to other spheres of national development

THEME 16: JUSTICE AND NATIONAL SECURITY	Ensure national security while upholding fundamental rights.
THEME 17: COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES	Support a just and predictable environment for economic development.
THEME 18: SUPPORTING FAIR, CREDIBLE AND VIOLENCE-FREE ELECTORAL PROCESSES	Promote the use of the justice system to safeguard fair and peaceful elections.

5) *Finally, two themes* that deals with the role of the justice system in ensuring that Nigeria continues to play an influential and responsible role in the comity of nations.

THEME 19: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE	Uphold Nigeria’s international commitments to secure the environment using legal frameworks.
THEME 20: COMPLIANCE WITH TREATY OBLIGATIONS	Uphold Nigeria’s international commitments.

The Policy on Justice was validated and adopted by all stakeholders at the National Summit on Justice held on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024.

## **2. The National Policy on Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution, 2024.**

In an effort to enhance the practice of arbitration of niger, promote Nigeria as an arbitration hub in Africa, create an enabling environment for foreign direct investment in Nigeria, thereby promote the development of our national economy, the Ministry, in

collaboration with stakeholders, developed the National Policy on Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution, 2024. The Policy seeks to stimulate economic growth by attracting foreign investment, strengthening professional capacities, developing critical arbitration infrastructure, and establishing clear, structured guidelines for government agencies in negotiating and participating in arbitral proceedings. The objective of the Policy is to transform Nigeria into a competitive, internationally recognized arbitration hub with transparent, efficient, and globally compatible dispute resolution mechanisms.

The Policy has also been approved by the Federal Executive Council for national implementation in July, 2024.

### **3. Implementation of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015**

The ACJA, 2015 seeks to reform the administration of criminal justice through speedy dispensation of justice, protection of human rights, accountability, and oversight between and amongst criminal justice institutions. Since its enactment, the Ministry has been leading efforts to ensure its effective implementation to ensure citizens access justice and the protection of their rights.

The Ministry, through various platforms, supported states to replicate the Act, through the adoption of their ACJL. Today, I am happy to report that the 36 states of the federation now have their states ACJLs, which, to a very large extent, replicates and further strengthen the provisions of the ACJA for effective implementation at the state level.

#### **a. Capacity Building**

In furtherance of this, the Ministry, through the Federal Justice Sector Reform Coordinating Committee (FJSRCC), has been supporting states to implement the state ACJLs through capacity building of the criminal justice administration stakeholders in the states. Between December 2023 and 2024, capacity building has been undertaken in 12 states, particularly as it relates to the implementation of sections 29, 33 and 34 of the ACJA, 2015, Police Act, 2020 and the ACJL of the various states.

Section 29 of the ACJA mandates that the Inspector General of Police and heads of authorized agencies must submit quarterly reports to the Attorney General (AG) of

the Federation and respective states, detailing all arrests made with or without warrants in respect of federal offenses. These reports must comprehensively document suspect details including alleged offenses, arrest circumstances, personal particulars, physical descriptions, photographs, fingerprints, and distinguishing features. The Act further requires maintaining a register of arrests at each police station and authorizes the HAGF and AG to establish both electronic and manual databases of arrest records at federal and state levels.

Section 33 of the Act mandates the officer incharge of the Police stations and law enforcement agencies to, on the last working day of every month, submit to the Chief Magistrate in charge of the magisterial jurisdiction division where the police station is located, a report detailing all arrests made with or without warrants, including specific personal and arrest-related information such as alleged offenses, circumstances of arrest, suspect's details, and identification particulars of the suspects. The Attorney-General is obligated to make these reports available upon request to human rights organizations, and in cases where no report is submitted, the Magistrate must escalate the matter to the Chief Judge and state Attorney-General for appropriate action.

Section 34 of the Act mandates the magistrates to conduct monthly inspections of Police Stations and detention facilities within their territorial jurisdiction, with the provision that in the absence of a Chief Magistrate, any Magistrate designated by the Chief Judge can perform this duty. In the course of the visit, the magistrate is expected to;

- (i) Inspect the police detention register
- (ii) Inspect the cells
- (iii) Interview the suspects to know when they were arrested, the offense for which they were arrested, and whether they are humanely treated while they are in detention
- (iv) Grant bail in deserving cases where the magistrate where the magistrate has jurisdiction

These capacity building has been conducted in the following states:

1)	FCT	182 stakeholders
2)	Kano	185 stakeholders
3)	Nasarawa	137 stakeholders
4)	Ondo	65 stakeholders
5)	Borno	130 stakeholders
6)	Enugu	100 stakeholders
7)	Imo	202 stakeholders
8)	Adamawa	140 stakeholders
9)	Oyo	103 stakeholders
10)	Akwa-Ibom	140 stakeholders
11)	Kebbi	120 stakeholders
12)	Ebonyi	173 stakeholders

**Total stakeholders = 1623**

I am happy to report that in the above states, these provisions are now being effectively implemented. The Ministry would continue to expand the coverage of the capacity building on other states to ensure that these far-reaching provisions and reforms in the administration of criminal justice are implemented nationwide.

**b. ACJA forum on the effective implementation of ACJA/ACJL, 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2023**

This programme aimed to review the implementation of ACJA 2015 and develop draft National Minimum Standards for Uniformity across states and to aid the effective implementation of ACJA 2015 after 9 years of its passage into law.

**c. Review and development of National Minimum Standard (NMS) for ACJA/ACJLs implementation, July- September, 2024**

The review and development of National Minimum Standards aims to create a benchmark for the implementation of ACJA 2015 and also to set a baseline that ensures monitoring and Evaluation

**d. Validation of the National Minimum Standards on implementation of ACJA and inauguration of the National Working Group on ACJA/ACJLs implementation**

The inauguration of the technical working group was paramount to ensure that there are a group of technical experts monitoring the implementation of the NMS

**NEXT STEPS:**

- i. Gazzeting and signing off the National Minimum Standards (NMS) by the HAGF
- ii. Organize sensitization workshops on National Minimum Standards
- iii. Printing in 3 major Languages and pidgin English.

**4. Restorative Justice Framework:**

- Review and validation of Restorative Justice documents for the FCT.( the bill, policy, practice direction and training manual), 25<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> June, 2024

This activity aims to review and validate the legal framework for implementing Restorative Justice (RJ) in FCT. As Restorative Justice is an alternative approach to traditional justice system which focuses on punishment of the offenders rather than reintegration considering victim, offender and the community.

- Capacity-building workshops and sensitization sessions for stakeholders on restorative justice implementation in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Sept, 2024

This aims to sensitize stakeholders about the Restorative Justice (RJ) legal frameworks and equip them with necessary skills in the implementation of RJ in FCT

**NEXT STEPS:**

- i. Setting up of RJ Centre in FMOJ and ensure that the multi door Courthouse Centre is well equipped to meet the need of all clients and stakeholders.
- ii. Capacity Building for Facilitators on implementation of RJ to commence second quarter of 2025.

**5. Plea Bargaining Guidelines:**



- Signing off and Unveiling of Plea-Bargaining Guidelines for Federal Prosecutors December 2023.

This provides a comprehensive framework to guide plea bargaining practices for Federal Prosecutors and standardization, fairness and transparency of the process of plea bargaining.

- Need assessments on plea bargaining process conducted for prosecutors, the judiciary, and the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) in July,2024

The aims of this programme was to identify gaps and challenges in the implementation of Plea bargaining as Judiciary, Prosecutors, and NBA

- Capacity-building workshops and stakeholder’s sensitization for justice actors on plea bargaining in October, 2024

The fulcrum of this programme was to sensitize the Justice sector actors on plea bargaining.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

In-depth 5 months capacity building commencing from November 2024- May, 2025

#### **6. Non-Custodial Sentencing Initiatives,**

- Capacity-building workshops on non-custodial measures, Using the “Federal Capital Territory High Courts (Custodial and Non-Custodial Sentencing) Practice Directions, 2020”, (produced by the Ministry in collaboration with the FCT Judiciary) to enable all courts in the Federal Capital Territory that exercise criminal jurisdiction to award non-custodial sentences in line with the provisions of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, (ACJA), 2015 and Nigerian Correctional Service Act (NCSA), 2019. This is aimed at decongesting the Custodial Centres.

#### **7. Facilitation of Speedy dispensation of justice**

The Ministry built and furnished Courts in Kirikiri Prison in Lagos State and also installed a Virtual Court System, to fast track trials and decongest the Custodial Centres. I will be handing over the keys to two of the Court rooms to the Hon CJ Federal High court and one court room to the CJ Lagos State High court.

## **8. Justice Information Management System (JIMS),**

- This initiative aimed at addressing the inefficiencies in Nigeria’s criminal justice system through technological advancements. The purpose is to develop a Justice Information Management System that will incorporate case management and biometric technology to enhance coordination and transparency and efficiency among justice sector institutions.
- 2-day Strategic session with ICT Officers of MDAs on the development of JIMS, 16<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> December, 2024: this aims for MDAs to present status of database systems of their institutions, summary of their existing databases and operability and drafting of a comprehensive statistical data framework.

## **9. Child Justice Reform:**

- Review and Validation of Prosecution and Legal Aid Guidelines for Children in contact with the law. March 2024

Provided a legal framework for handling cases of children in contact with the law

- Capacity-building workshops on improving child justice measures across MDAs., April, 2024

This is to build the capacity of the MDAs to handle child justice issues effectively

- National workshop on child justice administration.

The focus of the meeting was to build the capacity of stakeholders on best practices in child justice administration.

### **NEXT STEP:**

- i. Signing off of the guidelines by the HAGF
- ii. Distribution of the guidelines to stakeholders
- iii. Conduct sensitization workshops for stakeholders on the availability of these legal instruments.

### **Support for Borstal Institutions,**

Reviewed the Borstal and Remand Centres Act 2004 and now the Children and youth Correctional Bill 2024 which is before the National Assembly now focuses on the development of a concept for upgrading skills acquisition centres at Borstal homes to focus on rehabilitation, reformation and reorientation

## **10. Justice Sector Synergy and Collaboration Building**

Networks of Justice Sector Reform Teams Conference held on 18th to 22nd November, 2024 in Ilorin Kwara State. In attendance were His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Kwara State; the Hon. Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice; the Deputy Governor of Kwara State; the Chief Judge of Kwara State; Judges from 10 states; representatives from State Judiciary; Police; ICPC; EFCC; National Assembly; Ministries of Justice at the Federal and state levels; Nigeria Correctional Service etc across 21 states of the Federation

The network is a platform for building synergy and collaboration between and among stakeholders at the federal and state levels. They provide a platform for peer review among justice sector reform teams at the federal and state levels. experience sharing, building consensus on justice sector reform initiatives, and promoting replication of best practices.

## **11. Ongoing Audit of Correctional Centres**

The Ministry is currently collaborating with the Ministry of Interior and Nigerian Correctional Service to conduct an audit of the Correctional Centres with a view to ascertain the number of inmates, the condition of the correctional centres, the number and different categories of inmates in the correctional centres. The first phase of this audit conducted in 9 states and the FCT, took place between 21st – 25th November, 2024, and it is hoped that when concluded, the outcome will assist the federal government in initiating and implementing appropriate policies and programmes that will enhance effective management of the correctional service.

## **Conclusion**

While these achievements are commendable, we must remain focused on addressing existing challenges. Today's engagement offers a unique opportunity for open dialogue, enabling us to collectively identify gaps, propose solutions, and prioritize actions for the next phase of justice sector reforms.

I encourage all participants to actively contribute to the discussions, whether during the Q&A session or through group presentations. Your insights are critical in shaping a justice system that meets the aspirations of every Nigerian.

As we continue on this reform journey, let me reaffirm our commitment to upholding the rule of law, ensuring equitable access to justice, and building a justice system that is fair, transparent, and responsive to the needs of all citizens. Together, we will foster a justice sector that inspires confidence and delivers on its mandate to serve the people.

Thank you for your attention, and may God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.