

ENGAGING CITIZENS THROUGH MEDIATION IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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FOREWORD

The Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON) and the World Bank are pleased to present this publication about the Access to Justice for the Poor Project implemented in Kaduna State, Nigeria, between 2012 and 2015. In that time, LACON made great strides in bringing legal aid services to the grassroots and increasing access to justice by the most poor and vulnerable in our society. I am extremely proud of our staff and partners for their commitment and dedication to serving the poor.

The Access to Justice Project offered LACON the opportunity to partner with the World Bank and learn best practices in representing clients in civil matters and community legal education. The Project helped to develop staff capacity through trainings in alternative dispute resolution and mediation, and by introducing paralegal training, all of which were novel in the Nigerian legal education. Through our partners and the use of media, we were also successful in raising awareness among the poor of their legal rights and entitlement to legal representation.

I take away three lessons from the project to inform our future activities. First, the capacity of our staff must be built and refreshed to ensure good service delivery. Second, there must also be a well-developed mechanism to bring awareness to the poor people that need the service through electronic and print media and by networking with civil society groups who specialize in advocacy, sensitization and training. Third, data systems and using data to find gaps, fill them, and promote and improve on good activities are critical to success.

This experience with the World Bank has strengthened my belief in the value of partnerships in bringing to fruition the vision and mission of LACON. We cannot work alone to achieve our mandate.

When I was appointed Director General of LACON in late December 2010, I could not have imagined how far we would come. My motivation and zeal to take on the twin roles of chief administrative officer and the chief legal officer was fueled by years in legal practice helping the poor. I hope that the example we at LACON are setting will encourage current and future lawyers to dedicate themselves to serving the vulnerable in our society.



Mrs. Joy Bob-Manuel
Director General
Legal Aid Council of Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GRIEVANCE REDRESS

From 2012 to 2015, the World Bank's Japanese Social Development Fund supported a project in Kaduna State, Nigeria, which aimed to enhance awareness of and access to legal aid services by the poor to enable them to effectively resolve civil disputes and enforce their rights. This pilot project was rooted in the belief that citizens lacked awareness of the redress services they are entitled to, and that there was unmet demand for mediation at the grassroots level. By strengthening the capacity of an existing institution—the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON)—the project hoped to yield an effective model for engaging the poor in exercising their rights and giving them a voice.

The poor experience a lack of voice and power in their relations with government institutions, as well as in economic transition which is seen as occurring without a sense of social justice. These experiences form part of the multidimensional nature of poverty. They are compounded by long-term exposure to poverty which leads to resignation and an almost fatalistic acceptance by the poor. Tackling poverty, therefore, means not only addressing material needs, but also psychological dimensions such as powerlessness and voicelessness.¹ These are some of the drivers of citizen engagement initiatives, and a key aspect of the feedback loop that social accountability interventions seek to create or improve between the poor and state and society actors.

Development thinking on citizen engagement and social accountability has evolved over the past several decades starting from concepts of 'participation' in the 1970s through the emergence of the rights-based approach to development, participatory development, and the "good governance" agenda in 1990s.² These have made social accountability and citizen participation fundamental aspects of development. Today, social accountability is regularly referred to as "citizen participation," "citizen demand," "voice," "transparency and accountability," or even "good governance."³

These trends have spurred the development of mechanisms for effective citizen engagement, particularly accountability-enhancing interventions such as citizens' score cards, information campaigns, social audits, and budget monitoring and corruption reporting. As Gauri has noted, these "all have the potential to improve accountability relationships in the social sectors both by empowering clients and by providing information to policymakers."⁴ However, they are only one part of effective citizen engagement.

While accountability-enhancing mechanisms can improve policy and even identify classes of individuals that have been excluded from a particular intervention, they do not in and of themselves provide redress to those

1 Naraya, Deepa; Patel, Raj; Schafft, Kai; Rademacher, Anne; Koch-Schulte, Sarah. 2000. *Voices of the poor: can anyone hear us?* New York : Oxford University Press.

<https://hubs.worldbank.org/docs/imagebank/pages/docprofile.aspx?nodeid=437850>

2 For further background on the development of citizen engagement, see Annex II of the World Bank's Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement for further background, available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/21113>.

3 O'Meally, Simon C. 2013. *Mapping context for social accountability: a resource paper*. Washington DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/01/17985823/mapping-context-social-accountability-resource-paper>, pp. ix.

4 Gauri, Varun. 2011. *Redressing grievances and complaints regarding basic service delivery*. Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 5699. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2011/06/14431762/redressing-grievances-complaints-regarding-basic-service-delivery>

individuals who *have already been* excluded. Here, grievance redress procedures go hand in hand with accountability-enhancing mechanisms to fill the gap at the individual beneficiary level.

Grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) can take many forms and, as with social accountability mechanisms in general, are highly dependent on the context in which an intervention takes place. Generally these should be locally based, formalized ways to accept and resolve complaints from affected individuals or groups.⁵ They can be legal or non-legal and take the form of “ex post reviews of service delivery transactions with particular end users.”⁶

Where possible and appropriate, development partners should endeavor to work with existing institutions to strengthen their capacity, rather than building new systems. According to a World Bank study of the use of GRMs in development projects:

When linked to existing country institutions, GRMs can have lasting impact that continues even once Bank engagement ends. Building and strengthening existing country systems for managing grievances allows for greater impact, improved sustainability and an increase in potential value to the Borrower and beneficiaries.⁷

Beyond benefiting affected individuals and communities, GRMs also improve development project outcomes at lower cost, help identify systemic issues, and promote accountability.⁸ They serve as additional useful channels of information for policy makers and implementers, and together with other accountability-enhancing mechanisms, they can contribute to raising public awareness of rights and entitlements. This is especially important where there is a lack of rights consciousness and affected individuals may not know their rights have been violated or that there are avenues for redress.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT THROUGH LEGAL AID IN KADUNA STATE

Legal aid services are just one of many forms that GRMs can take. With this project, the World Bank and the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON) were interested in determining whether expanding the poor’s awareness of their rights and access to constitutionally-guaranteed legal aid services at the local level would prove effective at redressing grievances in Kaduna state.

LACON was established by the Legal Aid Act of 1976 as a parastatal organization under the Federal Ministry of Justice mandated with providing free legal services in criminal matters to indigent Nigerians, defined as those earning below the national minimum wage. In 2011, Nigeria passed a new Legal Aid Act which expanded LACON’s remit to include civil matters. This expansion has meant that anyone earning below the minimum wage—which includes the staggering 58 million Nigerians living in poverty today⁹—are eligible for free legal services in both criminal and civil matters from LACON. At the time of the expansion of the mandate, LACON was present in all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja and had been covering about 7,600 cases

5 NCAO Advisory Note “A Guide to Designing and Implementing Grievance Mechanisms for Development Projects.”

6 Gauri, pp3.

7 Brown, Marie; Jenkins, Bruce; Leon, Patricia; Seyedian, Aaron; Inamdar, Amar. 2014. Global review of grievance redress mechanisms in World Bank projects. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/01/20182297/global-review-grievance-redress-mechanisms-world-bank-projects>, pp. 2.

8 Ibid.

9 World Bank. 2014. *Nigeria economic report*. Nigeria economic report; no. 2. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
<https://hubs.worldbank.org/docs/imagebank/pages/docprofile.aspx?nodeid=19883231>

per year, of which 80 percent were primarily related to criminal matters and pre-trial detention. The expansion of LACON's mandate butted up against a lack of manpower and capacity.

Recognizing that a single office in each state was insufficient to serve the most needy in both criminal and civil matters, the World Bank partnered with LACON to test expanding and decentralizing legal aid services to local government areas (LGAs) in Kaduna State. Kaduna was chosen because it suffers from higher than average poverty (estimated at 70 percent) and therefore had a high potential of achieving meaningful results among LACON's target population. Alongside opening more legal clinics at local level, the project focused on providing training in mediation to all of LACON's lawyers and a number of their paralegals to build internal capacity. Further, LACON built ties with existing mediators (e.g. traditional and religious leaders, NGOs) and offered them training in mediation and specific areas of the law. This formed the core of their strategy to partner with other (informal) mediators in the community to further expand awareness of and access to mediation services at grassroots level.

The large number of cases handled at the clinic level (from 36 in 2011 to over 2,300 in 2015 in Kaduna State alone), people reached through awareness raising (800,000), and staff and partners trained (6,200) showed that there was more than sufficient demand at local level and highlights the effectiveness of LACON's outreach to poor clients with information about their rights and, particularly, their constitutional entitlement to free legal aid services. Meeting such high demand could not have been achieved without the dedicated corps of staff whose primary motivation is to help the poor despite facing pervasive challenges in their day-to-day work.¹⁰

The success of the model in generating demand and effectively mediating disputes—including several class-action type disputes against government institutions—opens avenues for the future expansion of legal aid services in Nigeria and provides practical lessons for client and partner outreach and staff motivation and retention. Some of these lessons are outlined in this publication with the intention of informing next steps in LACON's organizational development and—to the extent possible—informing future development projects on grievance redress and alternative dispute resolution through existing institutions like LACON.

10 For further details see section "Giving the Poor and Vulnerable a Voice."

LEGAL AID CLINICS IN KADUNA STATE



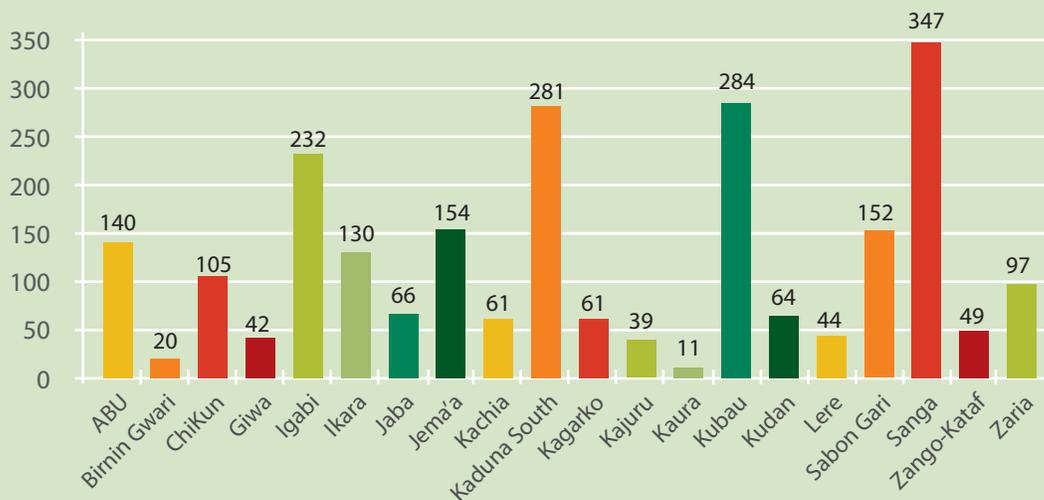
★ Legal Aid Clinic ○ Senatorial Center
 Maintained after project closing by: ★ NGO ★ LGAs ★ ABU ★ LACON

THE KADUNA MODEL

Over the course of two years, 20 legal aid clinics were opened to test demand for legal aid services in 20 LGAs in Kaduna State, including one clinic at the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) run by law school students with support from LACON. In 2011, LACON had received 36 cases statewide. By the time the project closed in November 2015 LACON received over 2,300 cases—or 70 cases per month per clinic statewide—primarily to do with civil matters, though also including some criminal cases. The Kaduna project showed there is a need for mediation services and alternative dispute resolutions at local level in addition to existing mediators such as traditional and religious leaders.

Though funding presents the biggest challenge to decentralizing legal services across Nigeria’s states, the *Kaduna Model* has shown that LGAs are willing to sustain local clinics once demand has been established. Of the 20 clinics opened during the project, more than two-thirds will continue to offer services.¹¹ Seven LGAs have agreed to cover their clinic’s monthly costs, while an additional seven will be maintained by LACON, ABU, and a local NGO (the Peace Committee)ABU, and a local NGO (the Peace Committee).

Graph 1. Cases by LGA Clinic, Kaduna State



11 Some clinics were closed when the project ended due to lack of funding at Local Government Level to maintain their operating costs.



“I feel confident that the problems in our community can be resolved.”

**Sani Abdullahi,
Peace Committee**

We created our Peace Committee about three years ago to give our community peace. Before we created the Committee our people used to take daggers and weapons and kill or wound people and make disturbances. Through the Committee we have gotten relief when the youth acts up and brought peace to the people.

Through the LACON project we received training in the land tenure system and I received further training on how to mediate between people. After I came back I called the others to my house and taught them what I learned. The training has encouraged us. Even I feel confident that the problems in our community can be resolved. We understand many things now because this program expanded our awareness. We are very happy because we gained so many tools to mediate between people.

Our people come to the legal aid office instead of the court or the police because the office does not collect any money and only sacrifices for clients. We are keeping this office open so the community can continue being peaceful through mediation.

Mediation is a very good thing. If you go to the court your own relative might cut you out. This office is trying to join people and ensure relationships aren't destroyed. One mediation I did was very dangerous and risky—it was a potential religious crisis. There was a Muslim man and a Christian man who had a business dispute. The Christian man gave the Muslim man some property to sell. The Muslim man sold the property but then refused to give the Christian man his money. I approached them and asked them to come to my office. I called upon them not to make any crisis and mediated an agreement where the Christian man agreed to be paid back in instalments. Now the Muslim man has finished paying the money and they are still in business and have a cordial relationship. Without the mediation anything might have happened because each man had his brothers and this could have caused a religious crisis in our community.

The Committee also mediates issues between farmers and the Fulani—the herders—whose cows are destroying crops when they leave their grazing zone and encroach on peoples' farms. There are family issues too, cases where sometimes the wife complains about the husband and we call the husband to come to our office. We advise them to go and live peacefully with their families and they usually accept it. There's not one case where people have refused to accept our advice.

Before our people didn't understand the purpose of the Committee, but now they do and they're unhappy when our office is closed. Our plan is to develop more offices so local areas with no police or courts will have an office to resolve their misunderstandings. We are hoping that even our children will continue what we are doing because mediation is so important.

Besides building clinic capacity, the success of the Kaduna Model lies primarily in the concerted effort made at outreach to local communities. The project made use of radio adverts and broadcasts, billboards, flyers, street theatre, and direct outreach by staff and NGO partners to reach over 800,000 people. The majority of the clients learned about LACON by word of mouth from family or friends (who had often heard of LACON on the radio) and directly via the radio jingles and broadcasts which were conducted in multiple languages as spoken in Kaduna State.



“Creating awareness through drama.”

**Danjuma Sani and Alh. Musa Boza,
Munji Mungani Drama Association Giwa**

Our group is a mobilization group created over 20 years ago with more than 25 members ranging from 10 to over 50 years of age. We create awareness among communities of health, human rights, and other things. We gather and mobilize them through drama, songs, seminars and workshops.

Our purpose through this project was to create awareness among the communities about conflict resolution. We received training from the project several times on legal rights and the essence of conflict resolution. We took this knowledge and stepped it down to our communities. We taught them that when there’s a misunderstanding it’s better to sit and resolve it than to take the law into your own hands. And we told them if you have a problem there are places where you can go to get help, like LACON.

The drama we wrote for LACON is about two farmers who are neighbors. Sometimes a conflict will be small, but if you allow it, it will become a problem for the entire community. That’s how violence starts, so you have to arrest things at the beginning. In our drama, one farmer encroaches on the other’s farm and takes some land. Instead of sitting together and consulting they start fighting which results in injuries. The head council member sees this and calls them. They go to the king’s palace and the Emir tells them they are neighbors and they have intermarried so it’s better for them to sit and consult than to kill each other. He settles them and asks them to shake hands, then he tells them to begin to help others. If two people help three people then it multiplies and everyone is better off.

When the drama was ready, we went to three LGAs first to sample, and then we did the performance twice in each LGA, at the council place and in a public place like a market. The communities welcomed us because they were very interested in seeing the drama. When we do a drama we first get to know how the people live in the community so that we can communicate in a way that they will accept our message.

Through this program LACON has been able to solve so many cases concerning marriage and land disputes between Fulani and farmers, for example. We want this work of LACON to continue because people learning a lot and really appreciating all of the effort.

LACON also built ties with traditional leadership and other service providers, recognizing their existing role in mediating disputes in communities. The project enlisted the assistance of a local NGO, the Civil Rights Congress, to conduct outreach to traditional leadership about the project before the clinics were established. LACON also invited traditional leaders, religious leaders, and other service providers to attend trainings on effective mediation and legal issues, such as land rights, that further built their capacity to mediate disputes and raised their awareness of LACON and the services it could provide.

The final linchpin in the success of the Kaduna Model was the dedication of the staff themselves. Each clinic was staffed by one lawyer and some had an additional paralegal or administrative staff and/or a volunteer from the National Youth Service Corps. Though greatly underpaid in comparison to their counterparts in the private legal sector, LACON's lawyers evinced a commitment to their clients and a determination to overcome pervasive obstacles. A survey of LACON staff across the country showed that their primary motivation for joining and remaining in the organization—despite challenges—is a deep-seated commitment to helping the poor. About 89 percent of staff survey respondents named this as their primary reason for joining LACON; about 60 percent of respondents named it as the main reason to remain at LACON.¹²

This commitment to the poor was clearly evident to the clients. In a survey of 100 clients conducted at project closing in 6 LGAs, 96 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of service they received and 97 percent said they would recommend LACON to others.

¹² For further details see section “LACON Staff – Serving The Poor With Passion And Commitment.”

GIVING THE POOR AND VULNERABLE A VOICE

Accessing justice in Nigeria is often difficult, particularly for the poor and vulnerable. The police are widely known to require payment in exchange for investigating a claim and will often turn against the victim in favor of a bribe.¹³ This situation was common to many of LACON's clients who had given up hope that their issues might be resolved (see case study Poor People Can Now Have Hope).

Furthermore, Nigerians lack trust in the courts. The 2015 Afrobarometer survey found that about one quarter of Nigerians (24 percent) do not trust the courts at all and only 9 percent trust them a lot. Nevertheless, 30 percent of Nigerians had had contact with the courts in the previous 12 months, but 12 percent of them found it difficult to get necessary assistance and 12 percent were asked to pay bribes, give gifts, or do favors for court officials. Generally speaking, Nigerians tend to avoid courts even when they believe they have a legitimate case because lawyers are too expensive (18 percent of respondents cited this as the number one reason they would not take a case to court).¹⁴

In order to bridge this gap in accessing justice and increase trust in grievance redress mechanisms and services, LACON employed a two-way approach: strong and varied outreach strategy which included media engagement through radio, TV, and print to reach the poor and vulnerable, in combination with relationship-building with existing mediators, such as traditional leaders and civil society organization to strengthen structures to address grievances which are already in place.

LACON's outreach strategy turned out a diverse set of clients and case types. The LGA clinics successfully resolved cases ranging from financial and business disputes to matrimonial issues and even some class actions, exhibiting the breadth and depth of LACON staff's skills and the quality of the training they received in ADR. While women proved far less likely to bring forward cases, religion did not seem to play a prohibitive role in women or men accessing LACON's services.

All clients were indigent Nigerians earning below the minimum wage.¹⁵ Case registers showed that the majority (61 percent) of the 2,379 clients were male while women made up only 25 percent of clients (14 percent of clients' genders were not recorded). Though the vast majority were married, widowed clients were over 7 times more likely to be women and divorced clients were 1.5 times more likely to be women. Specialized outreach and awareness activities, accompanied with further research on local cultural contexts will be needed in future to encourage particularly disadvantaged groups, such as women, to exercise their rights.

Graph 2. Cases by Year and Gender



13 See Human Rights Watch. 2010. "Everyone's in on the Game": Corruption and Human Rights Abuses by the Nigeria Police Force. New York, NY. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria0810webwcover.pdfs>

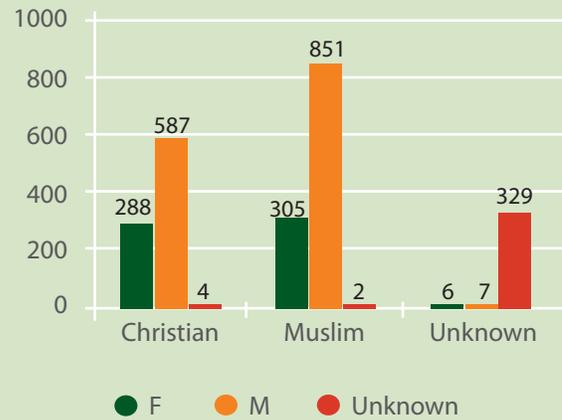
14 See Afrobarometer. 2015. Summary of Results: Afrobarometer Round 6 Survey in Nigeria, 2015. Available at: http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/nig_r6_sor_en.pdf

15 ₦18,000 or approximately US\$63 per month at the time of writing.

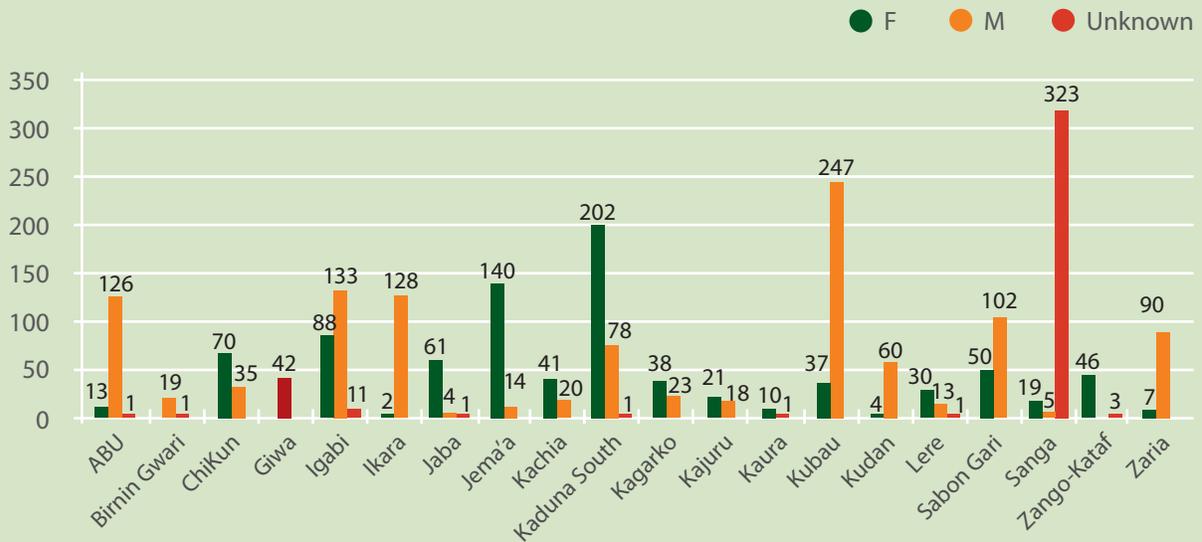
Most LGAs had one religion predominating over the other. Centers in the north of Kaduna state predictably recorded the majority of cases coming from Muslim clients, while centers in the south recorded more cases coming from Christian clients, roughly following the religious divide in the state. Muslim men were much more likely to bring cases, a finding that merits further research.

In about 2,000 cases where the client's religion was recorded, at least 37 percent were brought by Christians and 49 percent were brought by Muslims. Interestingly, Christian and Muslim women were almost equally likely to bring cases (about 12 percent) while Muslim men brought 36 percent of cases and Christian men brought 25 percent. This suggests that religion alone did not necessarily play a prohibitive role in women reaching LACON for services as women of both faiths were equally (un)likely to seek out services.

Graph 3. Clients by Gender and Religion



Graph 4. Cases by LGA and Religion



The average age of clients was 37.8 years and the majority were between 25 and 50 years old. A substantial number of male youth (defined as those aged 18 to 35) accessed LACON's services. However, at the youngest end of the spectrum—clients in their teens—women outnumbered men with cases involving family and matrimonial issues such as broken marriage engagements and pregnancy out of wedlock and resultant child maintenance. Given the limited number of cases filed in this area, it is not possible to determine whether this can be regarded as a sign of change or increased self-confidence among the younger generation of women.



“We were able to calm down speaking in this office.”

**Rabia Simon, Client,
with Evelyn Okoron, Paralegal**

Last month I put money in my bank account, but when I wanted to withdraw money to buy a textbook the bank told me that my balance was ₦5,500. This surprised me because it should have been around ₦200,000. I came to the office and asked Rabia Simon, Client, with Evelyn Okoron, Paralegal and the staff what to do. Then I went to speak to my husband. He said that he withdrew the money, but he didn't tell me why. I was so angry! How could he take that money? How could he not tell me? We came here for mediation. I liked the process of talking. We were able to calm down while speaking in this office, and we reached an agreement that he would pay the money in instalments by January. Now everything is forgotten. We are still married and I am happy now. I have forgiven my husband. And if I ever have another problem I will bring it back here.

Resolution was speedy for completed cases. Forty-two percent were resolved on the same day the person brought the case to LACON, while an additional six percent were resolved in the second day. In total, 89 percent of cases were resolved within the first month, and 99 percent within one year. A survey commissioned at the end of the project further found that the majority of respondents had been attended to on their first or second visit to the clinic.¹⁶ Prompt attention to new clients and resolution of cases is key to fostering citizen trust and satisfaction. The high number of cases resolved within a few weeks also suggests that citizens' feelings of frustration or resignation over unresolved disputes is actually the result of relatively minor, solvable cases. Providing redress mechanisms to address minor grievances can help prevent escalation and support building and maintaining stable and peaceful communities.



LACON established a legal aid clinic in Ahmadu Bello University to train students and provide clients with mediation services.

¹⁶ Practical Sampling International was commissioned to conduct a random survey of the Kaduna state population to determine their level of awareness about LACON and dispute resolution in general. The results were statistically significant for the whole population of Kaduna State. PSI further conducted a client satisfaction survey with 100 random clients of LACON. Results available on request.



“Poor people can now have hope.”

Adejo Ugbaje, Client

I am a veterinarian and I had a customer who failed to pay me for products I supplied for over one month. He told me to do whatever I wanted, that he would not pay me. Knowing this is a very corrupt society, taking him to the police would have been in vain, so I decided to let it go.

I have been to police stations on cases like this before and my experience was terrible. They asked for a 10 percent share, and at the end of the day they took 50%. I made up my mind never to go to the police again.

My father said he heard on the radio there's a place I could go, the Legal Aid Council. When I came in they gave me a form to fill, they interviewed me, and they asked me for the person's address. They took the call notice to him and he paid about 60 percent of the money into my account right away. He said the remaining payment had already been made, but I told them that was not true, so they called him in for mediation. He came with a lawyer, still insisting that he had made the full payment. He brought his bank statement which did not correspond with mine, and at the end of the day he agreed to pay the money completely.

Honestly, the service here cannot be compared to any other service in settling disputes from my experience. I've been to the police stations several times and I've been settled by a religious leader one time, the settlement here was the best. The person I brought here, we are friends today!

When he paid I asked the people in the office: what will be your share? Because that is the tradition here, if you go to the police station they ask you for a share. But the LACON lawyers said they don't want anything, that this was their job. I begged them to take part of the money and they refused. I couldn't believe it. I asked myself, am I in Nigeria? Because stories like this we read in papers about countries like China, America and the rest. I didn't know such things could happen in Nigeria.

I have been advertising it to all my friends and relatives and people close to me. There is a place in Nigeria where there is justice for everybody! People don't believe me. If there's any way they can be encouraged to continue with this work it will go a long way toward making Nigeria a better place. The poor have no say in this country, but with people like these lawyers here, poor people can have hope.

A few clinics handled a number of group actions against employers which partly explains the spike in case numbers at some clinic locations. Igabi, for example, handled a case from over 30 defendants against Kaduna North Local Government for unpaid back wages and wrongful dismissal and another case of 18 defendants against a private employer for back wages. Sanga handled a staggering 322 cases against the Primary Education Board, also over employment matters. This is a promising example of how LACON could support citizen engagement and grievance redress in large scale development projects, and how legal aid case data can suggest improvements for government service delivery.



“For 11 years I was hopeless.”

**Patrick Idibia Ola, Client,
with Japhet Samson,
National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) lawyer**

The first case I brought was against my boss who owed me about ₦500,000 for about 4 years of work. As he is a big man I couldn't fight him with the police or the courts. In the past I have been to the chief, I have been to the police station, I have been to a lawyer. I know how much I paid and nothing has ever been done. When my company pushed us out three years back we went to the Human Rights Commission but they didn't do anything. We went to the Nigerian Labor Congress but they wanted 25 percent.

One good night I heard on the radio the advice to come to the Legal Aid Council if you are hopeless. I did not believe it. I called the number and they said, yes, this is the sort of thing that we handle here. I made my complaint and I paid nothing. It's wonderful in Nigeria for something to happen without paying anything.

They opened the file for me and processed the case. They called the man and he immediately paid half the money. It took 2 to 3 months to settle the case, but I have now received all of my money. After they brought him here and we settled my boss wanted to sack me, but my lawyer told him we should be one family and continue to work together. Now, my boss loves me and respects me, he has even given me a promotion.

After the first case, I thought, can I bring something that is long back? I decided to bring another case about my father's death benefit. He was on duty in Zaria about 11 years ago when he died. They told us to bring the death certificate and police report and necessary documents to the corporation to receive the death benefit. They said we should come back in some days for the benefit, but they started turning and told me to go to Lagos. Nothing ever came out of it. I gave up. We lost hope 10 years back.

The lawyers here referred me to the Zaria office to file the case. LACON has more than exceeded my expectation, through mediation we agreed on the final amount they owed—almost three times the original amount—and which they are going to pay. For 11 years I was hopeless, but they have resurrected my hope.

I tell my friends and family to come here. Even I didn't believe before. In Nigeria nothing is done without money—it's impossible to go to the police or court without paying. The police would have wanted up to half or 25 percent, even 50 I didn't give to the lawyers at LAC. I don't know how to express my joy.

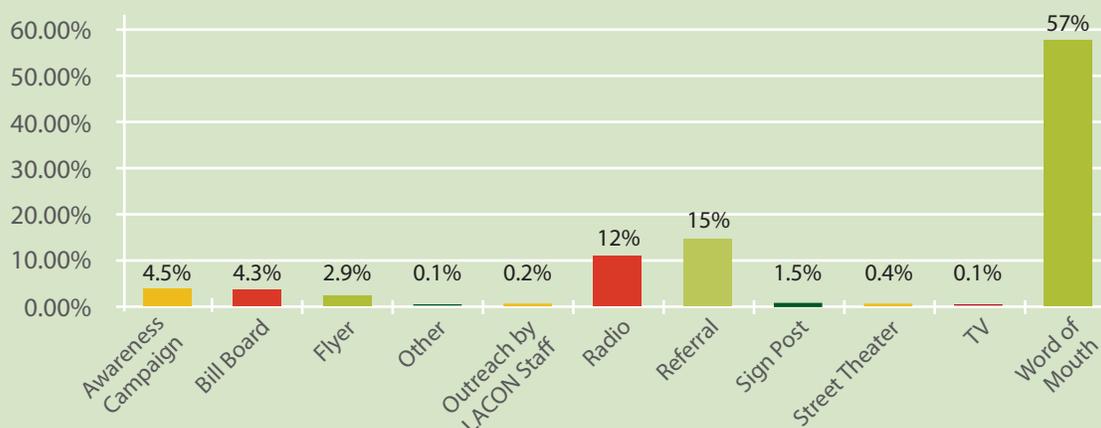
To exercise one's rights, either as an individual or a group, requires knowledge of those rights and where to seek (legal) assistance. Setting up a clinic alone will not suffice, as the Kaduna Model has shown. Only after awareness and outreach campaigns were initiated did citizens become aware of legal aid clinics nearby.¹⁷

¹⁷ While the productivity of the legal aid clinics in Kaduna State steadily increased over time, a significant “jump” in number of incoming cases was observed when massive outreach and awareness campaigns were initiated in 2013 (and continued until project closure in November 2015): 2012 – 7.2 cases/clinic; 2013 – 40.25 cases/clinic; 2014 – 46.1 cases/clinic; 2015 – 70.1 cases/clinic.

Awareness raising is highly dependent on local context, therefore testing the effectiveness of different communication strategies is critical. The Kaduna Model employed a variety of communications strategies, including jingles, radio broadcasts, print media, press conferences, road shows, billboards and street signs to reach the different communities in Kaduna.

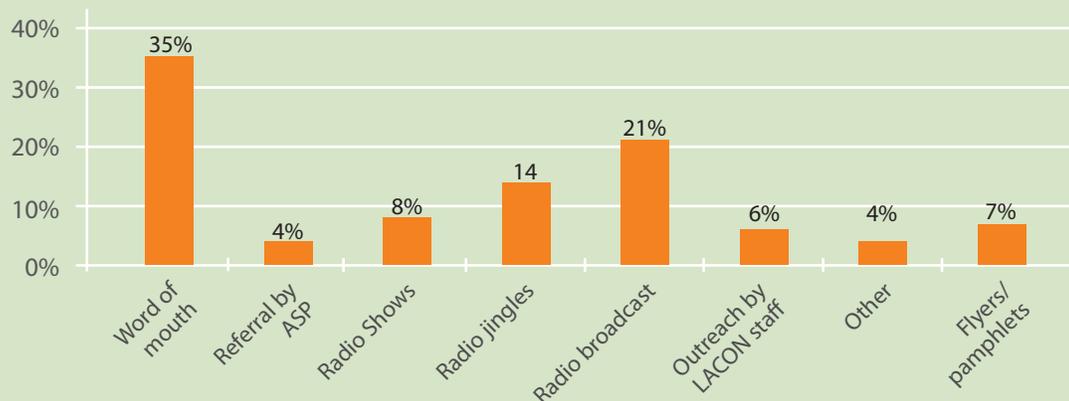
According to the clinics' case registers, the majority of clients (57 percent) heard of LACON through word of mouth. However, how the original person learned of LACON was not recorded. Anecdotal evidence in a few cases, and the results of an endline survey by PSI,¹⁸ point to the original person having heard it on the radio. The PSI survey found that 35 percent of clients surveyed had heard of LACON through word of mouth while 43 percent had heard about it on the radio.

Graph 5. How Clients Heard of LACON (Case Register)



Source: LACON Case Registers, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Graph 6. How General Population Heard of LACON



Source: PSI Endline Survey (representative sample of 100 clients who benefitted from LACON services)

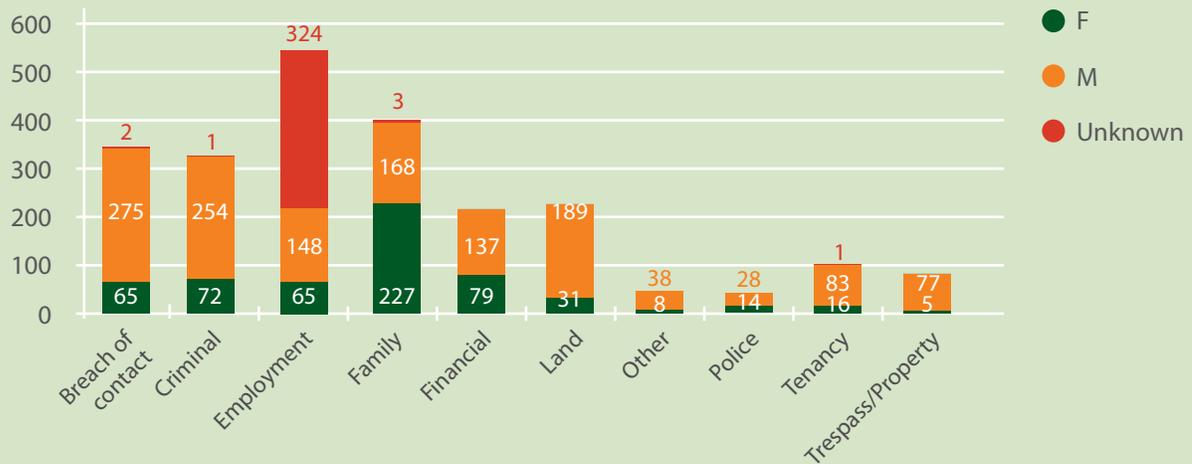
¹⁸ The project contracted Practical Sampling International to conduct a perception and user survey shortly before project closure. The survey employed a clustered, stratified multi stage area probability sampling technique to yield a nationally representative sample of 1,313 members of the general public and gauge their level of knowledge and trust in LACON. PSI further carried out random sampling of 100 LACON clients to gauge the success of different outreach strategies and the clients' satisfaction with services received.

In the 1,617 cases where the origin of the client was recorded, about 50 percent resided outside the LGA where the clinic was located. This suggests that clients travelled to clinic locations nearer to their homes, but not necessarily in their LGA of residence, including from outside of Kaduna state where there were no local level clinics. Distance and travel cost matter more than LGA of residence and might matter as much as knowledge about rights if the services are beyond (physical) reach. Enabling citizens to raise their voice against injustice therefore requires strategic decisions about locations, as the Kaduna example has shown. Physical distance to services can become too high a hurdle even for citizens that have learned about and wish to exercise their rights.

Equipped with knowledge and with legal aid clinics in reach, the poor and vulnerable in Kaduna State brought a variety of case types to LACON's clinics: breach of contract/business disputes; criminal; employment; family; financial; land; police; tenancy; trespass/property, among others.¹⁹ The vast majority of cases were employment related, reflecting the three class actions noted above. In line with the low number of female applicants noted above, men vastly outnumbered women in all case types except for one: women made up the majority of clients in family cases.

Despite the variety in cases, all have a severe impact on citizens. The poor are less likely to be able to rely on savings or social security systems when financial disputes arise, and loss of employment, loss of land, or damage to property often means a loss of the only source of income or livelihood. Reliable access to quality and timely dispute resolution services can be critical for preventing a downward slide into poverty. Such grievance redress mechanisms can also be an effective tool on the ground in larger development interventions to support citizens in graduating out of poverty by raising their voice to seek entitlements and exercise their rights.

Graph 7. Cases by Gender



¹⁹ Criminal cases include: pre-trial detention cases (50 percent of all criminal cases) and minor criminal matters such as defamation and libel (30 percent of all criminal cases) and assault (14 percent of all criminal cases), among others that were often settled out of court. Family cases included matrimonial issues such as divorce and domestic violence (50 percent of family cases), child custody and child maintenance issues (18 percent of family cases), inheritance matters (10 percent of family cases), and other family disputes. Employment cases primarily related to wrongful terminations and back salary or benefits issues, with a very small number of pensions claims. Financial matters were primarily loan and debt issues between individuals or between individuals and banks, loan associations, or savings groups. Police matters referred to wrongful arrests, fundamental human rights violations, and other police violations. Trespass and property issues referred to encroachment upon farmland by grazing cattle and resultant losses of property, as well as other losses of property.

“I thought he would kill me so I ran for my life.”

Anonymous

I went to the Legal Aid Council for assistance because I have a marital problem. My husband has been maltreating me since we married. Shortly after our wedding he beat me without reason, since then we have been living together on and off. He doesn't take care of me financially. He doesn't clothe me. At every little thing he will grow angry and start beating me. Even when I was pregnant, a baby died in my womb from the beating. He has suffocated me and used a knife on me. I thought he would kill me so I ran for my life. I left the house for good last year with our child.

He will not listen to anyone. Not his own father, not my father, not his pastor, not the police. So I had no option. I ran away with the child. He then came and beat up my family and abducted the child. Later my in-laws brought the child back. But recently, he threatened to beat me and abduct the child again.

I've gone to the police two or three times. When I went the first time, when I lost a child, they arrested him. My father said it was a family matter and pleaded with him to go see his pastor. But instead he disobeyed his pastor. He has no respect for anyone. He has run away with our child twice. The second time I went to the police they wrote me a letter that he should bring back the child. That's when my in-laws brought the child to my parents. The police are aware of our case but they say it's a court case, a legal case, so I will not go back to the police because they can't help me.

I also went to the customary court last year. The case went on and on and later they said it could not be resolved there, it would need to be resolved in the high court for which I don't have the money. They said I had to hire a lawyer, which would cost me so much.

Then I heard about legal aid through the radio. I heard that the services were free so I came to the office. My lawyer, she invited my husband for mediation, but he will not come. My hope is that because up to date he's still maltreating me, even if he says he just wants to see the child, I will be granted a divorce. Every day he's coming to beat up my family and threatening our lives. Each time I see his call my mind is not at peace.

I want a divorce so I can take custody of the child. Even his family are in support. I don't know why he will not come to the mediation.

The client's lawyer confirmed that LAC is filing divorce and custody papers with the court in light of the husband's unwillingness to engage in mediation.

OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS – BUILDING TIES WITH EXISTING MEDIATORS

Effective citizen engagement is highly dependent on local context, therefore for LACON to succeed in establishing itself within communities and alongside existing mediation structures it was important that it built ties with those at local level whom citizens already trusted to resolve their disputes. Formal legal mediation for civil matters was rare in Kaduna before LACON established its clinics, and communities naturally turned to traditional leaders, religious leaders, civil society groups, and even family members to resolve disputes informally. It was important for LACON to not only build ties with these mediators but also to ensure their work was complementary, not competitive.

LACON was highly sensitive to the fact that these existing mediators might not welcome the legal aid centers and might consider this an intrusion on their space as community leaders and natural mediators. Thus, first and foremost, LACON focused on carefully developing relationships through regular engagement with traditional, religious and community leaders, as well as civil society groups. This strategy paid off as these groups welcomed LACON's involvement in the community, as well as the training they provided on mediation and rights issues (see case study on the Bajju Traditional Council).

Meetings and trainings took place not only at project inauguration but throughout the project's lifecycle. LACON perceived its role as complementary; the organization was well aware that neither it nor informal mediators alone had the resources to resolve all disputes. Rather, LACON positioned itself to step in when disputes could not be satisfactorily resolved through informal systems or to address unmet need beyond the capacity of the informal mediators. LACON also had the unique ability to provide free legal services in the rare cases where court attention was required (e.g. unsuccessful mediations leading to divorce proceedings). LACON's goal, therefore, was not to be in competition with existing mediators, but to support them by building their knowledge and capacity to resolve disputes through inclusive workshops and trainings and by providing services when necessary.

Building these synergies with existing mediators required careful outreach to avoid tensions. It was especially important to secure the buy-in of traditional leaders who were most likely to feel antagonized by the establishment of clinics in their communities, but also most likely to succeed in encouraging the community to make use of LACON's services. As it was previously only present at state capital level, LACON lacked existing ties to traditional leaders and communities. To advise LACON on potential pitfalls and best ways forward, the project established a Project Steering Committee (PSC), which consisted of representatives from civil society, the State and Federal Ministries of Justice, the State Magistrate, and the Nigeria Youth Service Corps. Through the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), an NGO member of the PSC, the project was able to capitalize on existing ties to traditional leaders and secure their support (see case study on the Civil Rights Congress).



“Successfully managing relationships with traditional leaders.”

**Nasir Abbas,
Civil Rights Congress**

The Civil Rights Congress is an NGO that addresses issues of human rights. We are not lawyers, but primarily advocates. We became involved with LACON around the 2011 political crisis when we visited prisons and were able to bring out the indigent by paying their fines and collaborating with LACON which provided free lawyers. When this project was launched, the Congress was invited to be part of the Project Steering Committee

The project has helped to rekindle addressing issues through ADR and mediation. If you look at the traditional rulers who were doing it, to some degree it had subsided. The coming of the project has reawakened the citizenry, particularly the downtrodden as to why they should not be going to court and rather should address issues using mediation. The project has empowered people and created institutional capacity through workshops. Cumulatively almost 4,000 citizens were trained in mediation.

Our organization received support from the project for advocacy to the traditional rulers. It was important to forge relationships with the traditional institutions because we were conscious that LACON was dabbling into a terrain traditional rulers have been in already.

We were very successful in liaising with the traditional rulers. For example, the Emir of Zaria ensured the project itself permeated and gained the acceptance of his people by making sure his District Heads were invited to a discussion at his palace with the project team. This interface helped ensure the project was understood and trickled down to the community. There was a synergy between what the office was doing and what the traditional institutions were doing. They weren't in conflict because right at the initial stage of the interface the traditional rulers helped create an enabling environment for the clinics to flourish and were given the mandate to go and transmit information about legal aid to their people.

I live in an enclave where the majority of people's education level is quite low. The project has been worthwhile because it raised awareness of fundamental rights and told people in communities like mine that they have an alternative to going to court. The court system here is something else—it involves a lot of money to be able to address your issues in court.

It was important that the existing informal mediators understood the value and comparative advantage in certain cases of LACON's services and how they could work together to resolve disputes. They were invited to trainings on the principles of alternative dispute resolution and on legal issues affecting their communities, such as land rights, to build their capacity as mediators and to inform their communities. As a result of these trainings, traditional leaders and NGOs have taken on more mediations in their communities, referred clients to LACON's clinics, and in the instance of Kubau a local NGO took on responsibility for the clinic to ensure that it continued to provide services after the project ended (see case study on the Peace Committee).



“It is herculean task to make people understand the laws and issues involved.”

**Maxwell Bature,
Secretary, Bajju Traditional Council**

This project was extended to the Bajju Traditional Council by invitation of LACON. We received first-class training on issues that relate to land matters, conflict mediation, and leadership. I benefited immensely and others did too.

Land is very important to our people, but there are certain things we did not know about the land laws of the country. During the program we were enlightened on the laws and we brought that knowledge back to our people who were in conflict with the government over a forest that we manage.

We also learned that when there is a dispute there are ways we, as leaders of the people in the community, can help solve such problems. Rather than a leader using his influence to enforce power, we can settle issues through mediation so no one is aggrieved and everyone leaves happily. As a leader you have to be very careful because the arbitration process is very difficult. You have to be careful and thoughtful in mediating so you are not being accused of taking a side. We were all trained on how to go about these issues, and I came to know there are better benefits in the mediation processes than in going to court.

Using this training we conducted a very important mediation this year. In 2011, after the election there was a serious crisis in which people were killed and property destroyed. There was no Bajju candidate contesting the election, but the war came to our community anyway and it surprised us. We saw ourselves as enemies. But with time we were able to bring the warring factions – the Hausa, Fulani, and Bajju – under one roof in our palace. Initially when we came together we were trying to fight inside the hall, throwing accusations here and there about killings and abuses. But as the mediation took place we came to understand ourselves and agreed to forgive each other of the past. An agreement was signed and we sent a copy to the government and publicized it.

Now, there is relative peace being enjoyed in our place. Some of the people who left during the war are yet to return, because they still have that mindset from the conflict. They refused to come and partake in the mediation. We will try our best to make sure we reach them wherever they are and try to persuade them to come back. Before we lived as brothers and sisters irrespective of our differences in tribe and religion. We will try to convince them to come back home to live as brothers and sisters again. As leaders in the community, we will make sure that we play our role effectively so that the skills we gained during the training do not develop wings and fly away.

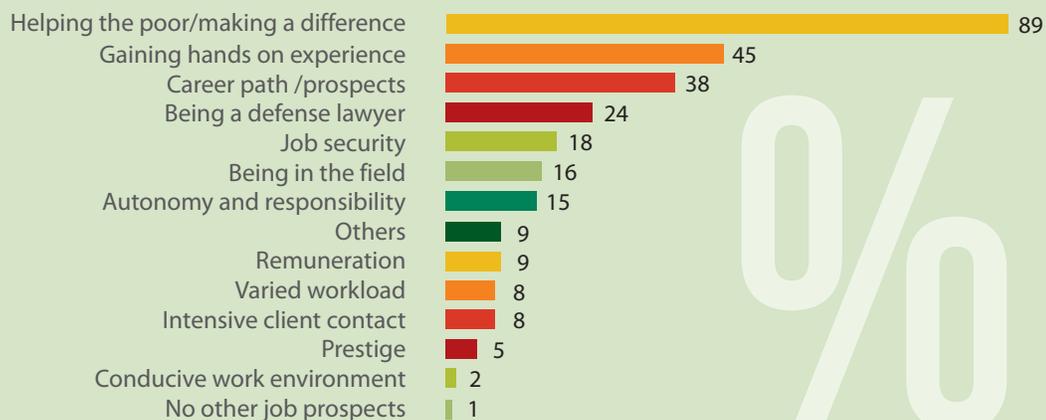
LACON STAFF — SERVING THE POOR WITH PASSION AND COMMITMENT

While physical location and a service structure well-embedded in the local context are important, it is the front-line service provider that lies at the heart of legal assistance to the poor and vulnerable. Staff are the face of LACON and must be able to engage respectfully with citizens who are often stressed and devastated, and who have usually tried other venues – such as police, community, traditional or religious leaders—in vain before they approach formal state services. They do this for a low salary, particularly when compared to their private legal sector colleagues, and in an environment that is often challenging and characterized by scarce government resources.

Legal aid lawyers seem to be a special “breed” ready to pick up a hardship job for relatively little money. The Kaduna Model may reveal some interesting insights into their motivation, challenges and how organizations like LACON, despite (budget) constraints, can help their staff to provide quality legal aid services to those in need.

Interviews and survey²⁰ responses clearly show that LACON’s staff are largely motivated by their desire to give back. Helping the poor was cited as their primary reason for joining LACON by 89 percent of staff surveyed, and almost 60 percent said this is the reason they remain at LACON despite the challenges they face.²¹ Clearly, lack of staff motivation or commitment to LACON’s mandate are not issues the organizations faces.

Graph 8. All Staff Reported Motivation



20 The survey consisted of ten questions administered via email using Survey Monkey. Of the 362 staff whose email addresses were available, 88 responded to the survey (a 24% response rate). Of the 88 who responded, 54 were female and 34 were male. Twenty-seven respondents were administrative and support staff (including paralegals), 10 were heads of their department or unit, and 51 were lawyers. On average, staff who responded to the survey were 37 years old. Results available on request.

21 Staff, in small numbers, also said they stay at LACON because they take pride in their work, appreciate their colleagues and supervisors, and believing in the mission and prestige of LACON.



“To see that justice is done and all rights are protected.”

**Shina Ebemeibiyemi,
State Coordinator, Kwara State**

I joined LACON in 2005 in the Lagos office and I was promoted to State Coordinator in Kwara State about 5 years ago. I'm from Kwara originally and it makes the work easier because if you are not a native you will either have cultural problems or a language barrier or both.

After university, when I was deciding on a job I had four opportunities. Because of my activist experience in university, I knew that most people or the indigent are being treated unequally and that is why I opted to join LACON. That is what is pushing me and motivating me, to see that justice is done and all our rights are protected.

The juniors that have joined me since, I've I tried to make that their watchword. If they are considering the "peanuts" we're given on a monthly basis they will not want to work. I tell them this is not a place of milk and honey but it's a place where you need to sacrifice. They should put it in their heart that they are in this world to be their brother's keeper and to ensure that the rights of their brothers are not being infringed upon. I remind them that their own family may be in other states in prison without access to free legal services so that whatever they are doing they should do well and give the quality legal services they would give their own people. That is part of the orientation I give to them and that is what is really working. That is what is pushing them to say "I will not allow you to cheat this person, this person's right must not be infringed upon." So that is what is really pushing them, not the money, there is no money here.

Honestly, I believe that if LACON is properly funded, and more qualified lawyers that have the interest of the masses at heart are employed, the sky is the limit. We still have some states where the citizens do not know their rights. I know with time and further encouragement we will all be encouraged and try to sensitize the systems. At least in Kwara State most citizens now know their rights.



LACON Director General and staff visit Kaduna South legal aid clinic.

Furthermore, across the organization, staff pitch in to help meet the needs of clients regardless of their title or official role confirming high levels of motivation among LACON's whole workforce. Staff were asked to rate how much time they spend on tasks such as client consultations, mediations, representation, and administration. Across all staff types, respondents reported spending time assisting clients ranging from small amounts (by administrative staff) to the majority of their time (by lawyers). Even State Coordinators and Zonal Directors²² continue to represent clients though their role is primarily to oversee other lawyers. In this vein, expanding some of the initiatives from the project, such as trainings in mediation for paralegals to strengthen their role in facilitating the lawyers' work, are options currently being considered by LACON's leadership.



The Work of a Paralegal

**Jang Yop,
Paralegal, Abuja**

"I have been with LACON about 22 years. I started out as a secretary and now I am a paralegal. In that time I have been to only one training, as a secretary. LACON has been growing since I joined. When I started things were so slow and people didn't know about legal aid. But now that there has been awareness raising so many more people know about legal aid. We need to continue to receive training so that we can help the clients that are coming to our offices.

Most of the clients we see are very poor. Some will come in without having eaten and we often given them money from our own pockets for transport since they have to travel far to get to the office.

When the client comes in to the office we welcome them and ask them about their problem. With civil cases we paralegals interview them, open a file, and write an application for assistance. This is tendered to the director who then assigns a lawyer to the case. The civil problems we see are cases of child abuse, marital issues, landlord cases, employment, and contract cases as well.

Sometimes paralegals also go with the lawyers to the prisons to see those people that have been there for many years without trial who need legal assistance. Last month, for example, we went to Kefi and got about 134 cases just from that prison".

Another top motivation for staff to join LACON was furthering their own growth and careers. In the staff survey, gaining hands on experience was cited by 45 percent of respondents while career path/prospects was cited by 38 percent. This was supported by in-person interviews conducted with staff throughout the organization who had worked there as long as two decades. These staff were dedicated professionals who valued the skills and experience they gained from devoting themselves to LACON's mission.

²² LACON has one State Coordinator for each of the 36 states and one Zonal Director for each of the six geopolitical zones in the country.



“It is not about the money, it’s about standing up for what is right.”

**Abdul Fattah Adewale Bakre,
Zonal Director of South East Zone, Enugu State**

I joined LACON 22 years ago from private practice and have now worked in at least five different offices. I’ve been a Zonal Director since 2005 and I was a State Coordinator before for 12 years.

I see the work of LACON as a means of giving back to society. As a Muslim standing up for justice for me is an act of religious obligation. From my own experience my happiest moments are when clients of ours say thank you. More often than not I’ve come to realize that for some of the people I’ve worked for if I hadn’t stepped out for them they would probably still be languishing in prison. Work is not always about money, money will come in its due course. I derive passion in standing up for what is right, standing up for justice and putting smiles on the faces of people.

LACON has been reduced to operating from the capital city of each state and very few local governments. That is why the Kaduna project is the best thing that could have happened to LACON. The decentralization caused an upsurge in the number of requests for legal aid. More people were able to access our services readily because they were brought closer to them. Because of the poverty level, the cost of them coming to the state capital to access our services and return regularly to interface with us is prohibitive. It takes a lot of courage to assert one’s rights and to do so you have to bear expenses and responsibilities, so they will rather keep quiet. If we could have similar decentralization in other states in the country you would see an upsurge in cases there as well.

We are also happy that the project offered training to all lawyers in LACON. It had been long since we had that kind of training. When I started I was pushing my officers to file fundamental human rights violation applications for inmates that had been in custody over 5 years. They were reluctant until they came for the workshop. After the workshop I saw from their reports they had done them and it was a huge success with inmates being set free by the courts. It gladdens my heart that soon after the training by the project, officers stepped it up.

The paralegals training also made us see an improvement in our customer relationship. Before when you asked clients who is handling their case they could only describe them. But now it’s compulsory that when a client comes in you must introduce yourself to him or her. Now, the relationship between us and our clients is less formal and that is one of the greatest impacts. The clients have more confidence in us and we’re able to get their trust more readily than before.

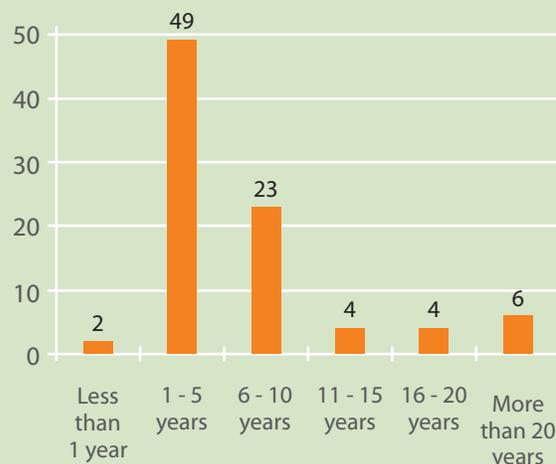
LACON is a young organization—slightly more than half of staff have only be there 1-5 years. However, it has a core team of experienced lawyers in managerial positions who have been there over 10 years. Most respondents to the survey (72) had been with LACON for 1-10 years, while the majority (49) have been there only 1-5 years.²³ This further suggests that many staff see their time at LACON as an opportunity to build their legal skills and experience before moving on to other, likely more lucrative, employment.

²³ The survey received a response rate of 24 percent of staff.

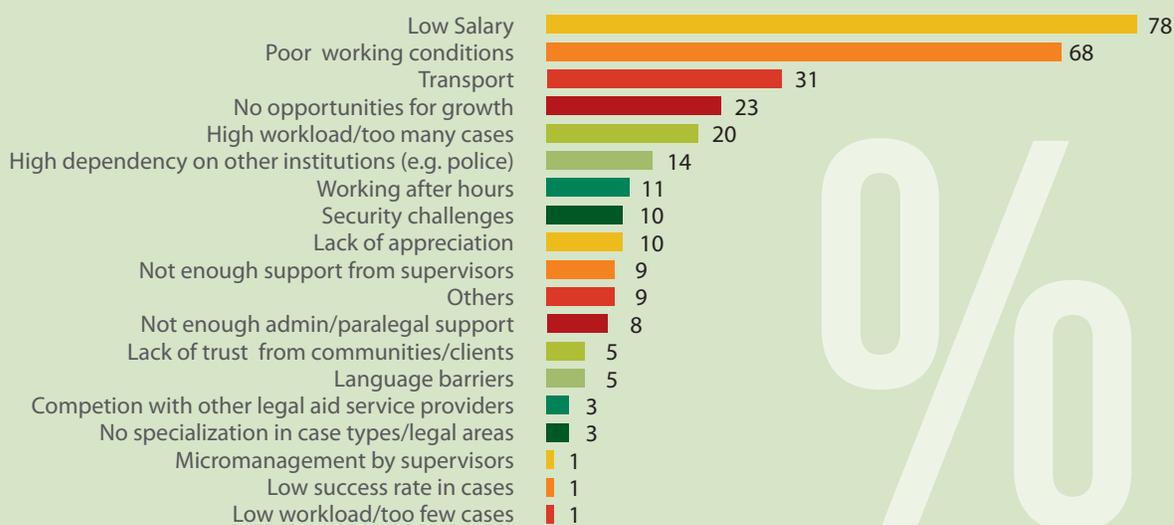
For LACON as an organization this presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Being an attractive employer to the young and educated and therefore being able to pick and choose employees from a large pool of candidates would be desirable. However, the relatively high turnover of staff also comes at a price: training and onboarding must be repeated more often; more pressure is put on senior staff to turn commitment, motivation and eagerness into quality service provision on the ground; and few staff maintain institutional knowledge.

In addition to challenges faced by LACON as a whole, its staff also face numerous challenges on the ground that impact their daily work. These may also have a negative impact on motivation in the long-run. In conversations with staff, challenges such as low salary, poor working conditions, lack of transport, and isolation were noted. This was further supported by survey respondents reporting low salary (78 percent) and poor working conditions/environment (68 percent) as their top challenges.

Graph 9. Years Worked at LACON



Graph 10. LACON Staff Challenges



Though identified as challenges, staff also acknowledged that these are unlikely to change in the near future. As a parastatal organization, LACON adheres to the civil service pay scales which in Nigeria—as in most countries—differ from what private legal practitioners are able to earn. Constraints on LACON’s budget also have an immediate effect on its capacity to provide a conducive working environment with, for example, sufficient space, administrative support, IT infrastructure, and materials. Both front-line service providers and clients subsequently suffer from these shortcomings.

LACON leadership has taken steps to improve these hardships. In interviews, staff were generally understanding of the pay scale and budget limitations faced by LACON. In this context, they particularly noted their appreciation of the trainings they received under the Kaduna project, both for lawyers and paralegals, as well as the implementation of stipends to cover some transport costs. Even staff that have been with LACON for decades have only attended one or two trainings in that time, so increasing access to these opportunities would be highly valued by staff. By securing additional (donor) funds and training internal trainers, LACON and other similar organizations can continue to provide such opportunities to show their understanding and appreciation of their workforce.



“Legal aid is the voice for the voiceless.”

**Jummai Musa,
Lawyer, Igabi LGA, Kaduna State**

I joined LACON in 2012 for this project and I have worked since in the Igabi clinic. We have so many indigent Nigerians that have been pressurized. Things that belong to them have been taken and they can't afford the costs of getting a lawyer. These are people who can't afford three square meals. People are out there that are really in need of these services, so many of them. I think legal aid is a very important part of the legal system. We've seen people that will come in crying and at the end of the day they go back home smiling. If legal aid were not there, what would be their hope? Legal aid is the voice for the voiceless.

When I joined LACON I was the only staff in Igabi with some NYSC volunteers who changed every year. We would meet many clients in the morning when we arrived at the office due to the radio jingles and other awareness raising. Sometimes they even called us at 4am!

Land cases are the most prevalent, followed by labor issues and then matrimonial issues. Out of every 10 cases, 6 have to do with these three issues. I handled a labor dispute where 74 people went without pay at the local government for over 13 months. It was a challenging case and for 6 months we tried mediation until ultimately we had to take the case to court where we are still fighting today.

Another case that really touched me was a wife whose husband would beat her when he got very angry. I brought them together for mediation to see if they could resolve their differences. She did not want to go, she only wanted the violence to stop. After I brought them together to discuss they told me that no one had ever sat them down to advise them like that. They came to an agreement and until today they are staying happily together. I've learned that in mediation you have to be a neutral person, most of these matrimonial issues you just have to be a counselor and help them to understand each other.

Since I joined LACON, whenever I appear in court there is respect. They see you as someone that is really doing the right thing. And then the encouragement you get from the office—from teamwork. Whenever you have problems you can call your superior at any time and say I'm having challenges on this case and they will put you through. You get respect from both your clients and the police, you even see some judges recommending clients to you. It's quite encouraging if a judge will do that.

LACON has exposed me to so many things, but seeing so many types of cases, going for trainings, they built me up and I think I owe them a lot and I have to put in my best. You feel sometimes that you are being drilled, but I found out that I'm learning a lot. So what more do I need? The pressure is there but it is helping you become somebody and be someone tomorrow.

LACON's success in Kaduna is due also to the dedication of its staff, who were few in number in each of the LGA offices and coped with an increasing workload from about 7 cases per clinic per month in 2012 to about 70 cases per clinic per month in 2015. Offices in Kaduna were staffed with anywhere from one lawyer to three or four staff including lawyers, administrative assistants, paralegals, and volunteers depending on the size of the communities they served. Given high demand and limited budget for staffing, LACON made use of one-year volunteers through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)²⁴ who had already earned a law degree. This allowed the offices to function at a higher capacity by providing an additional lawyer, in some instances, to conduct mediations and at the very least an additional set of hands to support the office in the time consuming delivery of call notices for mediations. The downside of using NYSC volunteers was the yearly turnover of the program. Interestingly, a number of NYSC volunteers chose to stay beyond their term of service and continue to volunteer for free in some of LACON's clinics.



Solving Staffing Challenges Through NYSC Volunteers

Ahmad Nasir, Sabon Gari & ABU Volunteer

"In life we should have a means to achieve justice. I'm from a poor family and since I have experienced the pain the poor feel, I was motivated to read law and to volunteer with LACON. After I finished my service year in Sabon Gari, I chose to continue volunteering for free in the ABU clinic where I have been training students since 2013. You know, a small dispute can generate crisis, but with the application of the ADR we can make people aware that things should be handled in a gentle manner, not through quarrelling. I think the government could tap into this program to address some of the violence and crisis here which starts with very small disputes."

**Samson Japhet,
Kaduna South Volunteer (pictured on page 9)**

"After my year of service I decided to stay because of the hope and belief I have in the work we are doing. I have always wanted to help poor and needy people. It is hard work, we have many clients and it is my job to serve all of the call notices for mediation. But I love the work. I came from Maiduguri, where the insurgency is happening, and I think that if there was an office like this there it would be very good. There are a lot of conflicts between people that could benefit from this meditation and I would be happy to volunteer there."

²⁴ The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was set up by the Nigerian government in 1973 to involve the country's graduates in the development of the country. Graduates of universities and polytechnics are required to serve for one year in areas far from their city of origin.

CONCLUSION

Tackling poverty means ensuring citizens have a voice and avenues for redress. Effective engagement starts at the grassroots level. It depends on adequate information reaching beneficiaries about their rights and entitlements and their avenues for recourse, and strong, fair institutions that collaborate to collect, assess, and resolve disputes. Furthermore, long-lasting development impact can be enhanced by relying on and strengthening the capacity of existing institutions to meet citizens' needs.

In Nigeria, the Kaduna Model provides a strong, context-specific example for engaging citizens at the grassroots to resolve disputes that might otherwise make them feel powerless, and to do so before they escalate and cause further harm whether in the form of conflict or increased vulnerability to poverty. Outreach and awareness raising under the Kaduna Model helped poor citizens to learn about their rights and feel empowered to exercise them. For a number of clients, the resolution of their grievances yielded not only psychological benefits but also material ones. Both are critical aspects in the prevention and resolution of poverty.

The Kaduna Model presents an opportunity for addressing conflicts in the areas of land, property, and business. From a donor perspective, this is attractive because these are the types of conflicts which may arise in the course of development interventions and can negatively influence development outcomes.

This project showed there is unmet demand at the grassroots level for mediation services. Clients praised the professionalism and fairness of lawyers offering a venue for formal mediation and found it more worthwhile (and accessible and affordable) than resorting to courts. This is particularly encouraging in light of Nigerians' generally negative feelings toward courts and their propensity to avoid them even when they have legitimate disputes.

Further, LACON is now able to provide training in mediation and legal rights across the country, as a corps of trainers was established to ensure the organization maintains the ability to share its knowledge with future staff and beyond. Collaboration with existing traditional, religious and community service providers in the field of mediation and providing support to strengthen their skills is particularly important in parts of the country where decentralization efforts may not be feasible.

Though it is a semi-governmental institution, people trust LACON—as evidenced by a 2100 percent increase in cases over three years. In a country like Nigeria where there is a high degree of mistrust of government institutions, LACON's example can be informative for other institutions. This also makes LACON highly useful to other agencies and projects seeking an avenue for fostering trust in citizens and encouraging their involvement in social accountability. LACON's presence on the ground (in Kaduna) and relative stability of government funding are certainly comparative advantages, as are its religious and gender neutrality.

Beyond budget issues and the existence of demand on the ground, the future of LACON and a continuation of quality service provision is dependent largely on having a motivated work force committed to helping the poor, often for little pay. Thus, outreach and awareness for these types of services may also need to target those young adults who consider a career in the legal field beyond the usual roles of judge, prosecutor, or private practitioner. An ancillary consequence of the project was increasing support for and awareness of legal aid as a valuable career field amongst law students at Ahmadu Bello University, in addition to offering hands-on experience in an academic environment and free services to the community.



“Law is seen as an elicited profession where you go to make money.”

**Mahmud Yusuf,
Network for University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI)**

The way law is taught in Nigeria doesn't prepare you for being a lawyer—there isn't sufficient practical experience. Law is not linked to a social justice dimension, so there is no culture of community service. Law is just seen as an elicited profession where you go to make money without thinking about giving back to society.

When I heard about this project I was really excited. We identified the legal aid clinic at the Ahmadu Bello University – started by students in 2006 in response to the crisis in Kaduna – as one that could be part of the LACON project. Before people didn't know about the clinic, students had to go out looking for cases. Now, people are walking in. Awareness has been created about legal aid. A lot of people know about LACON and that they're entitled to free services.

Because of the interest this project generated in the clinic, it has now become part of the faculty and the Dean has made clinical education compulsory for all students. This project is something that if fully implemented across Nigeria could go a long way toward ensuring a community service spirit grows among future lawyers.

In just three years, LACON's focus grew from purely criminal matters to include civil mediation, in response to the Legal Aid Act of 2011. LACON had to cope with an increasing workload while ensuring quality service, establish collaboration across institutional boundaries, and maintain a motivated workforce. The organization has been largely successful in meeting demand generated by the added mandate and helping maintain peaceful communities in Nigeria.

It rests now with LACON and its partners in government, civil society and donors to show the added value of mediation as a grievance redress mechanism in development projects. Mediation has the power to keep or rebuild peaceful relationships in communities and to encourage resilient communities where the poor feel that their voices are heard, acknowledged and treated in a just and fair manner. Further research on perceptions of public mediation and alternative dispute resolution per specific (vulnerable) groups and areas would need to be conducted to ensure a similar success story as in Kaduna State. Lessons learnt from Kaduna State, such as the mix of massive awareness campaigns and media tools, the pairing with other non-governmental service providers, and addressing internal capacity issues in an open dialogue with staff across hierarchies, are highly valuable for future decentralization efforts of mediation/alternative dispute resolution across Nigeria.



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