

RULE OF LAW AND ANTI-CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

The Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption (RoLAC)

Programme is working to strengthen the application of law and curb corruption in Nigeria.

RoLAC focuses on:

- reforming the criminal justice system
- ensuring women, children and people with disabilities have access to justice
- improving the performance of anti-corruption agencies and how they work together
- enhancing the voice of Nigerians in curbing corruption.

We work at the federal level and in five focal states: Adamawa, Anambra, Edo, Kano and Lagos.

The six-year programme (2017–23) is funded by the European Union and implemented by the British Council.

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INCREASING POLICE COMPLIANCE WITH THE ADMINISTRATION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE LAW



WHY THIS CASE STUDY?

The Administration of Criminal Justice Act (or Law at the state level) regulates criminal procedure in Nigeria. It repeals the former and now outdated legislation, which contained inadequacies and resulted in abuse and delay in the administration of criminal justice. This case study illustrates how increased awareness of the Administration of Criminal Justice Law (ACJL) inspired attitudinal and behavioural change amongst police officers in Adamawa and Kano. This change has led to an improvement in the quality of policing and restored public confidence in the police.

BACKGROUND

In October 2020, the public expressed their widespread dissatisfaction with the police through protests that soon became violent. Routine violation of human rights, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings brought the Nigerian police to a new low in the public eye.



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Whilst these abuses are systemic, RoLAC discovered there was a lack of understanding of the administration of justice (including the provisions of the ACJL) and the requirements for the fair treatment of suspects among police officers. This made the police more malleable to private interests and individual interpretations of legal requirements.

The Nigerian Police has been unable to address these challenges by strengthening accountability for abuse and has enabled a culture of impunity that seriously impacted police community relations.



APPROACH

Recognising that public distrust in the police threatened reform initiatives, RoLAC worked with divisional police formations to promote ACJ awareness among police officers; and improve compliance.

Forty Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) in Adamawa and Kano were trained on the ACJ Laws in their states. The training focused on the law and reform-oriented provisions that strengthened the protection for human rights and due process.

The DPOs were asked to cascade the training to subordinates in their divisions and follow-up to ensure compliance with the ACJ provisions.

RoLAC supported field visits to monitor and observe how the DPOs implemented ACJ laws in their stations. The monitors also observed the impact that compliance had on public trust and police community relations. Five divisional police stations were selected in each state for the exercise.

RESULTS

Increased compliance with laws and respect for human rights

In Adamawa and Kano, the ACJL had just been passed and most police officers were unaware of its requirements. The training changed that and immediately increased compliance with several provisions of the law. Police officers respected and facilitated the right to bail for suspects, pre-trial detention time was reduced, civil complaints were turned away and no longer criminalised, and conditions in detention cells improved considerably.

Improved public confidence in police

The police became more professional in their responsibilities, and helped to facilitate the peaceful resolution of criminal complaints, which greatly improved public confidence and encouraged cordiality between the police and members of the community. This, in turn, improved crime reporting and intelligence.

Police-community relation groups resolve disputes

Some divisions constituted police-community relation groups. These groups resolve disputes between members of the community and hold regular peace building meetings between the police and the community.

Collaboration between the police and community reduced crime

Crime and deviance were reported to have reduced in all the communities. This came from the strong message of zero tolerance for crime that collaboration between the community and the police sent to the public. In one instance in Fagge in Kano State, the community teamed up with the police to subdue a criminal gang that threatened to overwhelm the police.

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The Police have changed their modus operandi. Police officers and men have been trained and they now inform arrested persons of the reason for their arrest; they also abstain from unnecessary restraining of arrested persons; avoid arresting innocent persons to compel the appearance of suspected persons; and generally, treat arrested persons with dignity and respect in accordance with the law. ”

Alhaji Bashir Haruna Kassim, Chairman, Police-Community Relations Committee, Fagge Division, Kano



LESSONS LEARNED

Police officers were inspired by good leadership

Leadership is a precondition for motivating ACJL compliance. DPOs in the participating police stations provided the leadership that became the inspiration for implementing the ACJL provisions at each station. Officers had someone to look to for guidance and felt more motivated to comply with the law. This would not have been possible if the DPOs had not raised the bar on accountability and scrutiny following their training.

New skills improve professionalism

New skills can motivate police officers to be more professional and to improve ways of working or engaging with communities. In this case, new skills altered the dynamics and previously fraught relationships between the demand for police services and the police officers supplying those services. Because trained police officers understood their roles better and were mentored to perform them, they become less antagonistic towards the public. Their services became more community-focused, considering the public as important stakeholders in the security landscape whom they could partner with to improve safety and security.

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The skills my officers and I have acquired over the past five to six years have not only made us better, they have also given us a sense of direction and improved our relationship with the community. ”

CSP Abubakar Hammam, Divisional Police Officer, Fagge Police Division, Kano



Find out more

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