

COURT ADMINISTRATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT (CACM)

NEWSLETTER

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The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” — Theodore Parker

ABOUT THE CACM PROJECT

Nigeria’s criminal justice system comprises institutions and processes that have been designed to punish offenders and keep the society safe. Over the last 15 years, reform-oriented Administration of Criminal Justice legislation enacted at federal and state levels extended new protections to offenders, victims and witnesses. The laws also introduced measures to improve the efficiency, timeliness and transparency in the administration of criminal justice.

Unfortunately, the intended reforms have yet to be realized: the criminal justice system remains laden by the problems that necessitated the passage of the new laws: poor case management and scheduling and notification systems, weak coordination between criminal justice agencies, inefficient management of evidence and poor court systems continue to delay criminal processes, causing an overflow in court dockets and congestion in custodial centers.

To address these challenges, the United States Department of State issued the Public and Private

Development Centre (PPDC) a Federal Award to implement a Case Management and Court Administration (CACM) Project. The project is being implemented by PPDC through a Cooperative Agreement with the International Bureau for Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL). The Federal Award articulates four objectives or paths to resolving systemic failures and delays the administration of criminal justice:

- i. Improved capacity, efficiency, and accountability in Nigeria’s courts through enhanced case management
- ii. Improved control, preservation, and storage of evidence within the Nigerian criminal justice system
- iii. Improved scheduling systems for court sessions and hearings in the Nigerian criminal justice system
- iv. Improved court administration processes within the Nigerian criminal justice system

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE CACM PROJECT?

The CACM project furthers INL’s programme for expanding access to justice in Nigeria, and is being implemented as a pilot in Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau States - contiguous states that share a landmass of 99,872.59km² in North Central Nigeria. The project started in February 2022 and will end in January 2024.



THE CACM SCOPE AND COVERAGE

About 14.9m people live in the project catchment area, serviced by a judicial system and a Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) in each state, state commands of the Nigerian Correctional Service and the Nigerian Police Force. Under the CACM project, PPDC will work to expand access to criminal justice in each state, focusing on the project's core objectives.

The project targets select courts in each state, though other criminal justice institutions will also benefit from interventions that improve their efficiency in criminal proceedings in the courts.

Altogether, the project anticipates 985 direct beneficiaries, comprising judges, magistrates, court registrars and administrative staff, public prosecutors and police investigators. It anticipates an indirect beneficiary count of **3,940** court users, victims of crime, witnesses, suspects and defendants.

The courts are largely inefficient, poorly coordinated with other criminal justice agencies. Weak capacity and the absence of necessary equipment and technology, further compound the challenge justice dispensation.

CACM Project Secures Key Stakeholder Buy-in

The project kicked off with advocacy visits to Chief Judges, Attorneys-General, Correctional Services, Nigerian Police Force and the Nigerian Bar Association amongst others in the three states. The aim of these visits were to familiarise stakeholders with the project, secure their buy-in, and encourage ownership, including through the constitution of State Project Steering Committees.

The goals were achieved: the Chief Judges and Attorneys-General in the three states commended the project for its timeliness and for aligning with the states' blueprints for automating court services. Following the advocacy and sensitization visits, the Chief Judges demonstrated their commitment by inaugurating State Programme Steering Committees (SPSCs). Each State SPSC is headed by a very senior state High Court Judge and has a representative of the criminal justice agencies in each state. At their inauguration, the SPSCs were orientated on the project and their roles in achieving its objectives.

Chief Judges Positive about Impact of CACM Project

"I am grateful and excited about the Court Administration and Case Management Project. Court administration and case management are part of the areas we consider developing to improve service delivery of the Plateau State Judiciary."

- Hon. Justice Mann, CJ Plateau State

"I am optimistic that automated case management/scheduling will no doubt remove unnecessary and frivolous delays currently experienced in the litigation process"

*- Hon. Justice Aisha Bashir Aliyu,
CJ Nasarawa State*

"I am very passionate about this project and have been looking forward to this kind of solution for the judiciary"

*- Justice Muhammad Tukur Muazu Aliyu,
A.g CJ Kaduna State*

Project Baseline Assessments Commenced

Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states all have ACJLs that establish time protocols for conducting various processes within the criminal justice system. However, lingering skills, capacity, infrastructure, and coordination gaps continue to impede timely and efficient criminal justice administration.



To address these gaps, a team of independent expert assessors undertook baseline/ needs assessments of extant case management systems, and of practices relating to the storage, control and preservation of evidence, case scheduling, notification, and court administration in the states. The goals were to evaluate the state of functionality of the systems and determine capacity and infrastructural requirements for resolving identified gaps. Preliminary findings from the assessment indicates the following:

- Stakeholders showed high levels of willingness. They have high expectations about the proposed benefits of the programme as conveyed through the project's objectives, and therefore engaged actively
- Courts generate volumes of paper records but lack a standard records management policy. There is no standard policy for evidence management, no case file repository, infrastructure and e-archiving system.
- Courts and the DPPs in all the three states deploy manual CMS systems, which limit their capacity to track and monitor cases as they progress through the criminal trial process. This, in turn, limits performance management and the capacity to identify cases that have fallen through the cracks due to the loss of case data and poor case filing systems.
- The manual nature of case management in the courts also impedes efficient case scheduling and notifications to parties. Clerks and Bailiffs do not efficiently dispatch hearing notices due to poor logistics and coordination. There were times where Correctional Officers brought suspects to court only to be told the court had rescheduled the hearing.

What is Next?

Having concluded the needs assessment, the stage is now set for the design of and implementation of IT Solutions. The design will be conducted in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and will include solutions to;

- Ensure there is an adequate governance structure with standard operating procedures for the interventions that CACM will support.

- Automate case and evidence management systems in select courts, alongside case scheduling and notification systems.
- Support development of evidence management infrastructure



Nasarawa State Steering Committee Members with the National officers

To ensure successful implementation, the governments of the pilot states must:

- Provide a supportive legal and policy framework;
- Commit to expanding the benefits to courts and other agencies that are not part of this pilot.
- Make budgetary provisions for equipment and infrastructure maintenance.



Cross section at the inception meeting of the Nasarawa State steering Committee



Kaduna State Steering Committee Members at the inauguration meeting



Speech by the Ag. CJ Kaduna state at the Inception meeting



Plateau State Steering Committee Members at the inauguration meeting



CACM project team during advocacy visit to the Commissioner of police Plateau State

**ABOUT
PPDC**

Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC) is a non-governmental organisation and social enterprise driven by the desire to have a more transparent and accountable government and to increase citizens' participation in governance processes. Our programs are designed to promote values and initiatives which drive institutional, behavioural and systemic change in our society.

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