

**WORKING**  
FOR THE  
**VOICELESS**

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

**JOY SHEILA BOB-MANUEL**

# Working for the Voiceless

---

An Autobiography

By

**Joy Sheila Bob-Manuel (Mrs.)**

## ***DEDICATION***

***This book is dedicated to the poor, vulnerable and voiceless and to the founder of Legal Aid in Nigeria, Late Chief Chimezie Ikeazor, SAN.***

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, contact calm storm publishing.*

This is an authorised free edition from [www.obooko.com](http://www.obooko.com)

Cover page design by  
Kosuni Harrison Igoni

First E-book publication rights  
© 2021 CALM STORM Publishing

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to have had a father who believed that education was the gateway to a better life in Nigeria and forced his children to realize that fact and provided the conducive environment for us to get Educated: to my late mother who defied her challenges in her life to make a career in the police force which further reinforced father's love to see us succeed through education: to my dear husband whose career in an oil marketing company gave me the opportunity of traveling round Nigeria and meeting hard working career women who inspired me and strengthened my resolve to birth my dream of affecting my generation through my careers of teaching to legal practice.

I am grateful to God for his mercies in giving me healthy and intelligent kids, Aso, Alaiyi, Kaine and Ibinabo, my earthly treasures who did not disappoint my husband and I because they believed in studying hard in school to achieve their careers in life, I am grateful and honored to have had a mentor like Hon. Justice Mary Peter-Odili JSC who showed me the way to carry myself to succeed and so has graciously written the foreword.

My special love and warmth goes to the helpers that I met in my path to success and I have taken time to briefly discuss my time with them in this book but a special mention to Chief Mrs. Veronica Lott, my sister, my friend; To my adopted daughter Dr. Mrs. Ayima Lott-J a great achiever; I acknowledge His Excellency Dr. Goodluck Jonathan GCFR for accepting the

recommendation of the honorable HAGF M. Adoke SAN, at that time made to him about me for his approval of my appointment as Director General, I am very grateful to his predecessor HAGF A. Malami SAN who Supported my retention as Director General when there was a clamor for a change of baton in most Agencies and Department , but under his watch he worked with us all until our tenures expired my gratitude goes to my special staff; Mrs. Kume Verr who was more of a daughter and loyalty personified; Ms. Jessica Mamven who is adept at combining her duties as a legal officer, to being a curator of the Council's legal work for press briefing and in spite of so much official work she made out private time to help me to type this manuscript as well as get very important materials from the archives, such as my speeches and relevant official photographs. My thanks also goes to Mr. Sylvester Akubo who used his professional secretarial skills to arrange and rearrange the manuscript: Thanks to Mrs. Jane Francis Bianeyin who inspired me so much to write my memoirs, I recall that she called me one day to say " DG MA , in spite of some disappointment you experienced in the course of your work, some of us appreciate you and the work you did in the council," she went ahead to chronicle my work in the council, which inspired me to put a lot of it in this book: Thanks to the book editors Mr. Samuel Ogabidu and Dr. Maurice Ogbonnaya and finally the great journalist and prolific writer, Carlton Lindsay Barrett for making a difference by transforming a technical book to a readable version, that will capture the attention of the audience.

***TABLE OF CONTENTS***

DEDICATION.....ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....iv

FOREWORD.....x

PROLOGUE.....xii

CHAPTER 1.....1

    FATHER.....7

    FIRST BLOOM.....14

    BOUQUETS.....20

    LAW, ANOTHER PHASE.....20

CHAPTER 2.....22

    GROUNDINGS.....27

    GRACE AND INSIGHT.....31

CHAPTER 3.....47

CHAPTER 4.....59

THE LEGAL AID ACT 2011 .....	61
ESTABLISHMENT OF LEGAL AID COUNCIL .....	63
A TRUE STORY.....	67
CHAPTER 5.....	70
WORKING WITH WORLD BANK EXPERTS .....	76
DETAIL OF IMPORTANCE OF WORLD BANK PROJECT..	79
CHAPTER 6.....	87
A VISIT TO FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE.....	93
The Reform of Prison Continued .....	93
TRAINING TAILORED TO PROFESSIONALISM .....	96
GETTING CONTINUOUS TRAINING FROM LEGAL AID SOUTH AFRICA .....	98
CHAPTER 7.....	102
MORE PROFOUND REFORMS .....	107
CHAPTER 8.....	114



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION.....	114
RELATIONSHIP WITH NIGERIAN CORRECTIONAL SERVICE	121
RELATIONSHIP WITH NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE.....	127
RELATIONSHIP WITH COURTS .....	130
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNING BOARD .....	133
CHAPTER 9.....	139
MORE ON RELATIONSHIPS .....	141
RELATIONSHIP WITH STAFF .....	152
CHAPTER 10.....	166
EARLY LIFE EDUCATION .....	168
PROVIDENCE AT WORK .....	175
POLICY FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION.....	177
BECOMING AND DOING .....	179
THE CIVIL SERVANT AND THE POLITICAL APPOINTEE	182
THE POLITICAL APPOINTEE.....	186

REFERENCES.....208

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS...209

## ***FOREWORD***

In attempting to write a Foreword to the Biography and memoir of a comrade in activities related to the social well-being of young persons and women in particular dovetailing into the generality of the human person - MRS. JOY BOB-MANUEL, formerly the Director - General of the Legal Aid Council, I will at first remark that the matter affects me with nostalgia. This is because when the inspirer of the Legal Aid Council, Chief Chimezie Ikeazor SAN was mooting the idea, he came to the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus where I was a third year student in the Faculty of Law. He came with a lot of fanfare, flamboyance, panache and elegance, which did not diminish the profundity and import of the project for the care for the poor that he came to sell.

What I am labouring to say is that the concept and aspirations of Legal Aid were ingrained in my subconscious early in the build up to my legal career. Therefore, for Mrs. Bob-Manuel, with whom I have related intimately more as a senior sister in the legal Profession to a younger one, to head that organisation is an achievement I am proud to bask in the glory of. I have known her capacity and ability to perform excellently in whatever assignment that faced her. She has participated at various levels, whether as a member or official in the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Boards of Inquiry of State Government and many others.

Mrs. Bob-Manuel is a lady who deploys her all in whatever she is doing including family affairs. I must confess to being handicapped to properly put in writing what should be recorded on the author as being one so well gifted by God with diverse talents which she does not hesitate to put into practice with excellent results. The best I can say is that her writing of this memoir is not only timely but well advised. This is because the life and times of Joy Bob-Manuel are inspirational and role modeling altogether and should not be kept hidden since there is a lot to be learned from her life, achievements and modus operandi.

I am highly honoured to be asked to participate in the production of this historical document and while I plead for understanding in not meeting the usual standard of PREFACES, I take solace in the fact that it is easily seen that what the head cannot handle has not beclouded the feelings I harbour for JOY BOB-MANUEL as a person of honour, with the fear of God, and love for humanity, and an epitome of womanhood. I commend the book to all and sundry as a piece of history, a learning process in progress that will showcase the example of a Great Nigerian.

I rest for now as tomorrow is another day.



MARY UKAEGO PETER-ODILI

President National Association of Women

Judges of Nigeria (NAWJN)

12-12-2018

## ***PROLOGUE***

This book is a modest effort at documenting the work of Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LAC). As one of LAC's Directors General, my motivation was to leave the place better than I met it. I leave history and prosperity to make their judgments on my modest contributions to LAC. The book has attempted to highlight the reforms that took place in order to improve and better position the agency to implementing its policies and attaining its mandate.

In this narrative, I was deliberately modest on my life because I did not want to reduce the importance of the noble cause and tireless efforts of one of the pioneer fathers, Late Chief Chimezie Ikeazor SAN, OFN, in getting Government to establishing the Legal Aid Council for the sake of the poor and vulnerable citizens that cannot afford the services of private practitioners. I will live with good memories of listening to him tell me about his life journey and achievements and how he got LAC established. Meeting him was serendipity. Indeed, it was a great honour. What I admired was his tenacity at offering good advice to both the Director General and the Management. He found time to attend all the activities we invited him to until his demise. He personally endorsed, to me, a book

entitled, 'Legal Aid for the Poor in Nigeria'. I treasured and used the book as one of my guides throughout my tenure as Director General.

This present book has been written to also encourage other Chief Executives Officers to know that they do not have too much time to make their mark in the sands of time. Therefore, they need to explode from the bloc and hit the ground running and do their best.

My humble but honest advice to the staff that have "Become," is that they should continue to move in the direction of progress; show passion towards their job; quickly acquire the required knowledge and be knowledgeable in all the relevant; topical; contemporary issues; and know that service to the poor and vulnerable is service to humanity and it pleases God.

*Intentionally left blank*

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **IN THE BEGINNING**

*“Though thy beginning was small, yet your latter end would greatly increase” Job 8:7*

My father and mother both come from Calabar in Eastern Nigeria but gave birth to the five of us in Ibadan, the ancient city of rusty roofs and seven hills over five decade ago. Apart from its mysterious hills, the city held the unique fascination of being the administrative centre of the old Western Region.

Our home always came alive during the holidays because my four brothers and I often jostled unnecessarily for identity and space since there was often no clear or definite reason for it. As the fourth child and the only female, I usually felt that my siblings believed they had a duty to make me comfortable. Often their protectiveness made me feel special but that feeling was always short-lived as one or two of them would smack me for one flimsy reason or another and threaten me not to report to our parents. So sometimes I would sulk, in sorrow at my inability to retaliate or to report the infraction to mummy whose usual support always soothed my bruised ego. As children, none of us



took these things to heart because the next minute we would be seen playing together. “But why am I recalling these anecdotes so clearly?” I ask myself as I look back at that infantile scenario of over fifty something years ago.

But the time I dreaded most was when my three older brothers returned to their boarding schools and I had to fend for myself and my junior brother.

We had been born into a great period of transformation which would later impact our lives. The British colonial masters amalgamated Nigeria in 1914 and divided the country into three regions for ease of administration. This produced the colony of Nigeria and the Northern and Southern Provinces. On April 1, 1939, Southern Nigeria was divided into two provinces, the Western and Eastern Provinces, which came to be known as Regions. The Western Region housed the Yoruba ethnic group but from 1947 – 1963 the Western Region had extended to accommodate the Urhobos, Western Ijaws, Isoko, Edo and other ethnic groups.

In 1963, the Mid-Western region was carved out of Western region and the regions became four: The Northern, Midwestern, Western and Eastern regions. In 1967, the Military administration of General Yakubu Gowon dissolved the Regions and replaced them with states. The first set of states was 12 with Ibadan still nestling in the heartland of Western State. Nine years later, Western State was divided into three states called Ondo, Ogun and Oyo, states. In no time, the states had grown to 19.

For a very long time, we lived with the same set of neighbours and bonded very well since they stayed upstairs and we, downstairs in the same building. By some strange coincidence, the older siblings of the other family often stayed in boarding schools and left the younger ones to care for themselves. They had just one boy and four girls while we were one girl and four boys.

The junior children of both families often played together until holiday brought the boarders back home and they regaled us with stories that were often funny, sometimes scary but always exciting and memorable. They often went to Sunday musical events, arranged for secondary school holiday makers by entertainers in the community halls near our houses. They often took their time to bathe and dress in fine clothes just as my junior brother and I watched them and wished they would take us along even though we knew that Father would never allow us accompany them. Father's response to our yearning was, "be patient and you would soon come of age and there would be less restrictions, but for now, you should read your books and become something in life." We often appeared pliable to Father's admonition but sometimes we sneaked out to go and watch the endless dancing competitions which excited us because our most senior brother always won a prize largely because he practised the dance steps regularly at home before each Sunday event. My junior brother and I knew what time to run back home because Father would be outside waiting for us to know how long we were outside. Although Father often reprimanded us it did not deter us from escorting them again the

following Sunday and participating in the heated conversation far into the night when they returned.

Sometimes, during the holiday, mother made us visit our maternal grandfather, to ensure we bonded with her extended family members. My grandfather worked as a miner in the old tin mines in Jos, in what was formerly Benue Plateau state of Nigeria, which was carved out of the Northern Region.

Our grandfather and his colleagues worked with the old colonial miners and after learning mining techniques bought up their equipment and became the first indigenous Nigerian miners that took over from their former masters. Grandpa later became the first chairman of indigenous miners.

I recall that during one of the visits, my grandfather encouraged my mother to join the Nigerian Police Force. Incidentally, his advice coincided with the time that the first batch of Nigerian women was being recruited into the Police Force. Their educational qualification ranged from secondary school attendees with Ordinary Level School Leaving Certificate and First School Leaving Certificate. With her First School Leaving Certificate, my mother was admitted into the Police force and through sheer tenacity; she excelled in police work and earned rapid promotions. She also worked with Colonial Police Officers and was always recounting tales of rigorous police training, various duties and transfers and speaking about her work and exposure to admirers.

The female Police recruits from the Southern part of Nigeria were trained at the Police College Ikeja. The college comprised of an Administrative Block, Staff Quarters, Dormitories,

Chapel, Mosque, Range for shooting practice, Parade Ground for Commandants weekly parade and other parades and a football field. She said each recruit was given a map to find their way. They were also quartered in Dormitories. Each dormitory had a Matron and cleaners. There was also a laundry man assigned to wash uniforms.

She learnt the rudiments of criminal law with regards to women and children, plus other criminal law and proceedings, she also learnt the law of evidence, and engaged in mock court trials, statement taking, report writing, search techniques, mock police station procedures, emergency operations covering fire incidents and road accidents, and took part in fatigue duties. Fatigue duty meant preparation for the commandants' parade when squads were inspected for a smart and clean turnout. Police women were assigned to welfare of juveniles in police custody; to any complaints from women, and attending to women in custody and taking children to juvenile courts for prosecution.

My mother's early years as a police recruit was under the supervision of Ann G. Turnbull, a female British Police Officer on secondment to Nigeria. Turnbull was a disciplinarian yet very innovative and was said to have greatly reformed the system with fair treatment for women police, assigning them as station writers, crime branch prosecutors in Juvenile Courts and Juvenile Welfare Police Station.

I recall that my mother worked in a Juvenile Court and I often heard her mention the Remand Home but my young mind could neither grasp the full import of "Remand" nor "Home" yet

providence had set out law for me, as a vocation, where the word “Remand” would remain both symbolic and significant in my professional daily pursuit. While in Lagos, my mother often stayed at Barracks Block 15, the Police Women Barracks in Falomo along Obalende road.

Looking back in time, perhaps Shakespeare’s words that an unseen hand often hews out our destiny, was preparing my infantile mind with the seed of passion for women and children when I eventually read law years later. Sadly, the strict orderly form of Juvenile Courts and Remand Homes has died and is no longer adhered to because these days, juveniles are housed with adult offenders and convicts in Prisons.

My mother worked hard through the years and took many courses within Nigeria and in England at West Riding Constabulary in Wakefield, Yorkshire England. She rose to the rank of a Deputy Commissioner of Police before retiring meritoriously after thirty five years from government service.

Since my mother took up a career in the Nigerian Police Force, the responsibility of raising the children fell onto my father’s lap. Again, providence intervened because my father had an arrangement with my mother to drop us off at any of the new stations she was transferred to during the holidays. Fortunately, most of her postings took her round the Western region and the states within. The arrangement turned out to be convenient for our parents and we bonded with mother just as we did with father. Eventually, she enjoyed both the joys of motherhood and the rigours of a tough but rewarding career.

## ***FATHER***

Our father was Arthur Williamson O’Dwyer of Calabar, the capital of Cross Rivers State. He attended Hope Waddell, Calabar for his secondary school education. He sat for the entrance to Yaba Higher College (now called Yaba College of Technology) and gained admission. He later obtained a diploma in Civil Engineering. He was one of the first six Nigerians to be accepted into the Public Works Department (PWD, now Federal Ministry of Works) in Nigeria at the time when it was controlled by the colonialists. After his training, he was transferred to a few other states in Nigeria to supervise road constructions and related projects. His professional duties took him to Calabar, the capital of Cross River State in old Eastern Nigeria and Jos in the former Benue Plateau State. After this, he was transferred to supervising the tarring of the road between Mamfe, Cameroun and Calabar solely on his own which was a testimony to his hard work. Subsequently, he was transferred to Lagos; and later, Ibadan. After working for a few more years, he resigned and went into private practice as a civil engineering contractor, specializing in building petrol stations for companies such as Mobil PLC. This led him to settling down in Ibadan city. It was also in Ibadan that he met his wife, got married and gave birth to his five children.

Father never spared the rod to ensure that he put us all on the right path. As children, we dreaded and feared his disciplinary measures and so automatically complied with his directives.

However, we soon realised that he wanted the best for us. He ensured we attended public schools because they were the best since they were of very high standards and had dedicated teachers whose performances were supervised and guided by education inspectors. The foundation for such high quality education had been laid by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the first premier of Western Region, in a way that the children of the rich and poor attended the same schools. At that time, only few private schools existed in Nigeria because the high standards of the public schools were complemented by many renowned missionary schools established by Missionaries who came to Nigeria for evangelisation and to build churches during the colonial era. Parents who desired high moral discipline and good religious education for their children and wards often sent them to such schools. My father constantly admonished us to strive to be graduates because right from the 70s, he had seen the need for hard work. He often embellished his admonition with a proverb: “When people are counting yams by the dozen it will look odd for a piece of cocoyam to want to belong to the yam category” which means if we do not get the best education we cannot be counted among the best.

Father often intertwined the stories of his family with the historical facts of colonialism and told us that Calabar was the first Capital of Nigeria. He spoke of his grandfather in glowing terms and said he was named after him because he was the first grandson. He said his grandfather was the Consular Clerk to the Consular General of the Bights of Benin and Biafra and after the formation of the Niger Protectorate he was appointed Clerk of

the Post Office of Calabar. He was then sent to Britain to study the British Postal Service. After returning to Nigeria, he became the Postmaster of the Postal Services in Calabar. He later rose to the post of Paymaster and, later Quartermaster of Southern Nigeria Regiment until he retired, voluntarily. After his retirement, he became a trading merchant and opened his first shop in Duke Town, Calabar. He also took up a career as an Auctioneer. Father's uncle was a representative of part of Calabar in the then Constituent Assembly that officially negotiated Nigerian's Independence along with Founding fathers such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, with the British Officials in England.

My father never got tired of taking us to great events such as football matches, and international boxing events at Liberty Stadium Ibadan. On one occasion, we saw the middle weight boxing championship contest between Dick Ihetu Tiger and Gene Fulmer. Tiger defeated Gene Fulmer and won that contest. He later won the Middleweight title in 1962. He also took us to watch the live performance of International Musicians like Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong, a black American jazz musician who came to perform in Nigeria. This early exposure fired our resolve to become accomplished in life.

It was a fact that being the only girl of the family, my brothers shielded me from the harsh realities of life. I was not allowed to cross the line and become a Tom boy even though we all shared the same paternity and environment.

Often the situation of being shielded can lead to isolation, and the development of low self-esteem, inferiority complex and



depression. Rather than cave in to this deficiency, I found solace in reading and literally burrowed myself into the never ending mysteries of knowledge and wisdom contained in the pages of books. I found a way out of my loneliness by reading children's story books, including teaching myself how to bake simple cakes and pancakes. I often took any of the foreign magazines in existence at that time that had recipes for making simple cakes. My father quickly noticed my penchant for baking and always bought the required ingredients for me. I was taught to use earthen or clay pots as oven by an elderly aunt who came in occasionally to do domestic chores. The local oven worked through the channelling of heat through sand.

One day, mother saw my devotion to baking. She was quite impressed and so bought an oven for me from a British policewoman who was returning to the UK. The oven appeared modern but was relatively small. Interestingly, it used firewood-generated-heat and it remained one of my prized possessions for many years.

By the time I completed my secondary school, which was and is still known as St Louis Grammar School, Ibadan, Oyo State I had become adept at baking and preparing other very specialized dishes that I learnt from a fine elderly lady, a British trained caterer, who was our neighbour and who schooled me at weekends and holidays. My father encouraged me to master this skill and said it would help me in my future married life. Much later, in life, cake-making and confectionary has earned more revenue for me because I found myself teaching others the skills

of baking and making birthday and wedding cakes for friends and relations during the holidays.

Sometimes, the divinity of God drives us in pre-ordained directions and inevitably shapes our destinies. For me, one such encounter was the training I got from Catholic Nuns from age ten to sixteen, the peak of my formative years.

The events leading up to it is instructive. My father's over protective nature led him to enrolling a cousin and me as Boarders in a Catholic Primary at Abeokuta, Ogun State. This primary school was run by Roman Catholic Church Nuns trained as teachers to bring up girls. From the preparatory school, we wrote the Common Entrance Examination to St Louis Grammar School, Ibadan, that was an all-girls Catholic Secondary school. Both of us gained admission. At St. Louis Grammar School, Ibadan, we were mentored by the revered Irish Nuns. The Nuns were mostly from the Republic of Ireland and had come to Nigeria and other African countries as missionaries. The most senior Nun was the principal. Few others were teachers. There were also some well-educated Nigerians, a Kenyan and about two British teachers who taught English and encouraged the prolific reading of children books. The French teacher was actually a French woman. The number of books a student could read formed part of the student's grade in English subject. It was compulsory for all the students to take both English and English Literature up to the School Certificate Level irrespective of being a student of Science or Arts. This regimented and structured pattern of studying developed the students' Intelligent Quotient and made studying and learning

mutually beneficial. I started out as a Science student but later diverted to Arts and eventually read Law.

Apart from academic work, the Nuns stayed in a Convent next to the school and so spent more time training the students on ethics, social relations and other virtues beyond the classroom. Every student had to be in the Boarding House, unless there were health or special reasons that earned them the permission to attend school as day students.

The Nuns supervised the Dormitories at night and took inventory of those in school and knew why any student was not in school. They did not neglect the corrective aspect of life rather they punished those that disobeyed school rules and regulations. On one occasion, one of my classmates and I took a Doll Baby to mass, in the school chapel. (Mass is a daily activity and the highest form of prayer in Catholicism). As the Mass was going on, we were playing baptism with the Baby Doll and were caught because we were not paying attention to Mass. We thought the School Principal would overlook it and forgive us but she did not. Rather, she invited our parents to school and reported our offence to them. She then suspended us for two weeks.

In the 60s, many Catholic Secondary Schools including my *alma mater* were not over populated. They mostly had one stream model with one class each per level and with few students per class. However, as student population increased there was a massive influx of students. We got maximum attention from our teachers not only in school but also in extracurricular activities. Apart from track and field events and

Volley ball, there was also another game called the Bat and Ball game, it was also compulsory to learn a musical instrument and attempt singing and drama. Everyone knew each other and also knew each other's parents and the family members that visited on visiting days. The model of school of our time really differs from what obtains today.

The training we got from the Catholic Primary School through Secondary School was comparable to that obtainable in any Girls Boarding School in the United Kingdom or Europe at that time. Apart from core learning subjects, emphasis was placed on teaching of morality, manners and ethical behaviour. It was a fully rounded education. Every student had to participate in the Catholic way of worship. Eventually, my cousin, just as many students eventually got baptised and confirmed as Catholics. I remained a Methodist because my father prevailed on me not to change my faith, from what he considered to be his family church. Those formative years moulded me to what I have become today just as they galvanized my first childhood friends.

I use the word best friend very carefully and cautiously because it is spiritual to have and sustain a best friend in life. Some persons are fortunate because they have sustained this type of innocent childhood friendship from then till old age. Unfortunately, I have not been so fortunate because my childhood friends veered in different directions when we were on the threshold of adulthood because after secondary school, we left for different schools to study for advanced level courses so as to secure admission into the universities. I went to Olivet

High School, Oyo (now Oyo State). At that time, the entrance examination was called Concessional Examination not Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB). At the institutions, the good secondary school friends were replaced by other good friends in the new schools only for us to part ways and go to different tertiary institutions.

In the south western state where I grew up, were three universities: Universities of Ibadan, Lagos and Ile Ife. I gained admission to the University of Lagos, while most of my friends gained admission to the Universities of Ibadan and Ile Ife. While at the different universities, we strove to sustain the bond of friendship by staying in touch and even introduced our new friends to each other and consequently expanded our circle of friends. Although it was unplanned, we somehow, managed to get married within one or two years after graduation and attended each other's weddings. After this, life took us away in different directions yet we have been striving to keep in touch.

### ***FIRST BLOOM***

For the compulsory National Service, I was posted to Oyo town in Western State. However, since I got married during my National Service and was entitled to joining my husband, I applied for reposting to Plateau State not only to join my husband but to complete my service. I later joined the Federal Service so that my spouse and I could easily get transfers due to the nature of his job. Somehow, and this is painful, it became difficult to track those friends with who one had shared the

pristine ideals of early life. Perhaps, apart from lack of personal self-will and commitment, poor communication structure accounts for the break in communication, which is a major lubricant for engendering friendship. Happily, the modern communication revolution has brought in internet, social media and ancillary platforms for tracking “lost” friends.

Many years after graduating, I had been invariably drawn to my *alma mater* during private and official tours. The school still sits elegantly atop a hill in Mokola, Ibadan but has become a shadow of itself. On each occasion, the gradual but steady ebb of this great school has continually depressed me. The great sports fields that formed world class athletes was excised by one of the various successive governments that built another school on it. It not only took away the sports field and its potentials for freeing up space for students athletic prowess, it has taken away the aesthetics. Intrusion of government into missionary Schools has dealt a devastating blow on the foundation of the culture of perfection in ethics and virtues that formed the character of Catholic and other missionary school. This desecration appears to have largely accounted for the departure of the foreign Nuns and the rapid fall in standard of education in this country. There have been unequivocal demands for return of Catholic Schools to the Catholics as well as other missionary schools to their original owners.

I cannot but commend the Nuns and other dedicated staff for grooming me and other vulnerable girls into confident women and professionals because they moulded my character and

impacted my life by placing attention on discipline, moral education and dedication for the girl-child.

My father valued education and did not allow any of us to remain content with secondary school education rather, he ensured we all fulfilled our educational capabilities.

I obtained a Bachelor of Science from the University of Lagos as my first degree. For graduates of the 70s and 80s, employment of their choice was always awaiting them. All they needed to do was make their choice. At that time, recruitment agents always besieged campuses of tertiary institutions to offer jobs to new graduates. They often ensured that at the end of the National Service Year, the preferred job was waiting for the graduate. This led to most graduates being employed as civil servants or in the private sector.

I got married to an illustrious son of Rivers State, Chief Awoye Kelly Bob-Manuel who is head of the Manuel War Canoe House, Abonnema, Rivers State. This made me a proud Rivers State woman not by birth but by marriage and he influenced my joining the Federal Civil Service. After extensive consultations with family members on the issue of transfers and about which job offered opportunities to go on transfer with one's spouse, I settled for the offer by the Federal Ministry of Education to teach in Federal Government Colleges. A job in the Federal Civil Service such as the Federal Ministry of Education afforded the opportunity for spouses to join each other on transfer.

This was an interesting experience because a lot of men who were fortunate to get jobs in oil servicing or exploration

companies had their wives teaching in Federal Government Colleges. There were usually two of such schools per state. In my case, my transfers were easy because whenever I applied to join my husband in another state the request was immediately granted. My husband was working with the then British Petroleum Company, that later became known as the African Petroleum PLC, after nationalisation by the then Federal Government.

This issue of allowing transfers was a good consideration given by the Federal Government because to married staff it ensured sanctity of marriages and good upbringing of children by both parents. This was highly appreciated and for the first ten years of my marital life I transferred to four states and taught Biology in Federal Government Colleges in Jos, Warri, Enugu and Port Harcourt thereby affording me the opportunity of meeting with many detribalized Nigerians. Till date, I enjoy tremendous goodwill. Sadly, this is gradually and quickly being eroded in the Nigeria of today.

A few years ago, reflections on my life as a young teacher and mother came to me through the lyrics of an American singer, Diana Ross:

*'... Do you know where you are going to? Do you like the things that life is showing you ...?'*

These lyrics challenged me to engage in very deep introspective reflection especially as my husband, who was a sales executive for his company was often away from home



while I had to contend with staying alone for weeks on end, taking my teaching profession very seriously especially as I had also acquired my professional teachers diploma this was combined with taking care of my own children as a task that had to be done. Gradually, my perspective on life began deepening. I had a wonderful career trajectory as I taught and shared relationships with various teachers that I met in all the four schools. The staff common room was not only an officially designated temporary rest place but also an information exchange centre for academic and non-academic issues and student concerns.

More than school-work, the staff room offered the platform for exchanges on the realities of life; and exposure to contemporary Nigerian social issues and politics. However, as I made efforts to interrogate the realities of life and living, a deeper voice continually resonated in me telling me that I ought to explore another career. A few other colleagues shared the same sentiment. We regarded the reward of long years of teaching resulting in the ultimate position of becoming Principals of the Federal Government Colleges as adequate but as it were, there were too many hardworking teachers across Nigeria from all the states and it was a matter of many competing for few positions.

This was where the lyrics I earlier mentioned continuously hit me, and I kept asking myself if I liked where I was going to in terms of my career or if I liked the things that life was showing me. These thoughts took a life of their own and marked a turning point in my life. I decided to read law as a professional

course. Since that decision was taken and given life, I have not regretted it. I must tell you that reading law was basically to detach myself from the civil service. Ironically, providence threw me back into the civil service and so I wondered if, just as the Northern politician who later became the Governor of Kaduna State, His Excellency Nasir El-Rufai described in the title of his autobiography, I was not another example of “THE ACCIDENTAL PUBLIC SERVANT.”

Let us go back in time. I completed my law studies just as my mother retired. You would recall that earlier in this narrative, I have related that she had joined the Nigeria Police Force and had a fulfilling career and ended up as a Deputy Commissioner of Police. She had spent the earlier part of her career learning the rudiments of criminal law to enable her work with women and juveniles not knowing that life would one day give her daughter tutelage of five years before qualifying as a lawyer to work with women and children. Here lies a caveat: One unfortunate aspect of being a pensioner in Nigeria is the poor remuneration offered pensioners. In my mother’s case, her retirement gratuity, at that time in the late 80s almost obliterated all the hard work she had put into the Service and transfers around Nigeria. She received a gratuity of about Thirty-Five Thousand Naira in the late 1980s, a paltry amount of money. This reinforced my determination to retire from the civil service to join the private sector.

I applied for and got admitted as a part-time law student in the Rivers State University of Science and Technology (UST) while teaching in Federal Government College Port Harcourt.

This came with a price because I had to reorganize my mind and my home as my children were very young and attending primary school. Somehow, things worked well and I finally concluded my law programme, successfully.

### ***BOUQUETS***

Looking back at that time encourages me to thank God, my husband and several other people who provided me with the required support. To mentor young people and assure them that their dreams are achievable, one must be able to find a balance and always have quality time with children in their formative years. I graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1991 and had to voluntarily retire from teaching in order to attend the Nigerian Law School. I was called to the Nigerian Bar in December 1992. There were very strong rules and regulations imposed on students by the Council of Legal Education at that time and when I enrolled, the Nigeria Law School had the reputation of being strict on issues of ethical behaviour of students hoping to be called to the bar and, I dare say I enjoyed the corruption-free standards.

### ***LAW, ANOTHER PHASE***

Within a few years, I transited from being an Educationist to being a practising Lawyer. At the usual end-of- school year ceremony in 1991, the Principal of the College where I last taught specially announced to the students, parents and teachers

that I had resigned to practice law. He then encouraged the students to emulate my culture of hard work and determination because having worked hard as a science teacher during the day; I had privately studied part-time to become a lawyer and consequently changed my career.

My change in career did not prevent a lot of educationists who were my colleagues from eventually attaining their dreams of becoming principals, vice principals or directors. I have since met many of them and have been happy for them. I recall attending a workshop for Directors-Generals and Chief Executive Officers of Departments and Agencies including Principals of Federal Government Colleges for a review of existing Public Procurement Laws, Procedures and Institutional Reforms and how to implement the laws, at the Sheraton Hotel, Lagos which brought me by providence to meet again with many of my former colleagues who were now principals, it was an unforgettable reunion. The truth is that I will always be happy and more fulfilled because I made the transition to becoming a lawyer. I believe that when one has a good relationship with the almighty God there are divine directions that lead one to knowing God's purpose, and invariably one's destiny. Following the divine directions of The Almighty has opened doors of opportunities for me to meet unique people, political and non-political personalities, and many other great people of Nigeria.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SECOND BLOOM**

*“When preparation meets opportunity, success is guaranteed.”\_unknown*

I started my law practice in 1993 in the chambers of late Barrister Collins Georgewill and Company. He was an intelligent, erudite lawyer who brought up many junior lawyers but sadly died in the prime of his life. The pages of this book will not permit me to say all that this law firm did for us, but it was a kind of breeding ground for many of us who would eventually serve the state as well as the Federal Government in more than average capacities.

Our principal Barrister Collins Georgewill Esq was a brilliant lawyer who was well grounded in the profession both in the law itself and in its professional ethics. He was always well prepared for both court and office matters and was well dressed at all times. He insisted that all lawyers under his tutelage should also dress well in fit and proper attire to illustrate good character. He believed in the ethics of the legal profession as well as that practicing lawyers should study to show themselves worthy of representing all who need their representation and that this was the key to a successful practice. He never spared a lazy lawyer and in mentoring advised lawyers who were not good in litigation to pursue other areas of law practice. He demanded

prompt court appearances and well endorsed files with explainable adjournments. The most important virtue to him was truthfulness and transparent transactions in all his dealings with clients. He abhorred shady characters who enjoyed cutting corners to arrive at predetermined results and did not hesitate to expose such unwholesome persons whenever they crossed his path, he led by example for our benefit and posterity. We all appreciate his example and pray that his soul will continue to rest in peace. I am very happy that I got such a disciplined background in the practice of law and attest that this helped me enormously when I started my own practice. His mentorship served me well in my service as the Chief Executive Officer of the Legal Aid Council, this great parastatal of the justice sector.

I had taught in several Federal Government Colleges for up to 12 years, during which I studied law as a part time student then I resigned to go to the Nigerian Law School, Victoria Island Lagos. Therefore when I joined Collins Georgewill & Co, I was older than most of the lawyers that I met in the firm. The experience I had acquired as a teacher was different from the experience I needed in the law profession. What I gained teaching for all those years included, but was not only, maturity, more wisdom and understanding about people of different backgrounds, tribe and religions. These acquired virtues enhanced my commitment to my duty to teach and mentor my students. This background plus my understanding of God's purpose in my life enabled me to start a new professional life in the legal profession. I understood that it was wisdom to learn sound legal practice from the very brilliant lawyers that I met in

chambers. They were grounded in the practice of advocacy through their ability to learn and put into practice what they learnt. We also cut our teeth in solicitors practice as taught to all of us by our principal, Collins Georgewill. At the time I started Rivers State still had rent tribunals that sat over matters concerning landlords and tenants, and we the ‘ new wigs’ were assigned to courts of lower jurisdiction to start court matters from the low rungs of the ladder. It was very interesting making persons with very little understanding of their legal rights to understand them. Some tenants felt they were right to owe rents and that landlords were meant to suffer losses. Lawyers found a way to settle issues between tenants and landlords especially when it was obvious that the tenant could not afford rents and had to pack out; it could be very emotional. My first years also exposed me to the issues of the old Eastern Nigeria abandoned properties, most of which happened in the old Rivers State. I am not qualified to discuss them in this book because I grew up in the old Western Region and was there during the Nigerian-Biafran War. However my senior in chambers Collins Georgewill was knowledgeable about the issues involved and handled a lot of matters on it, which exposed us to the political undertones. The rent tribunals were later dissolved and given to Magistrates to preside over amongst other matters.

There was something special about most of us lawyers that worked in the exalted Collins Georgewill and Company chambers as I will enumerate below. Apart from how these colleagues influenced my career, by exposing much about the practice of law to me, we also shared our experiences of daily

encounters in courts, and the funny attitudes of clients. Most clients would frown and feel unhappy if their lawyer spoke to the lawyer representing their opponent and sometimes expressed it in unforeseen manners. They didn't understand professional legal ethics which mandates lawyers not to be involved emotionally with their client's matters. There was a time a client called our senior in chambers to ask him to change the lawyer assigned to him because he was perceived to be too friendly with the opponent's lawyer.

As I have mentioned elsewhere the lawyers in these chambers were high achievers in their personal professional careers. One of them was Dr Tammy Danagogo, who now has a Ph.D. in Law, but pursued a political career spanning from 1999 to date and has attained many political positions in Rivers State. Starting off as the Local Government Chairman, of my local Government Area, Akuku-Toru he later became a State Commissioner before becoming Minister for Youth and Sports in the Federal Government and is, at the time of this being written, he was appointed the Secretary to the State Government of Rivers State. Another colleague was Miss Boma Jack who had earlier moonlighted in the chambers, while working as a law lecturer at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology. She was later appointed a Federal Minister of Culture and Tourism. Another was Mrs Thompson Adokeme who is now a Judge in the Bayelsa State Judiciary. Another star who rose from the ranks of those who served in the chambers is the Honourable Justice B.A. Georgewill, who is now a Justice of the Court of Appeal. He had a meteoric rise in his career after he



was appointed to the Bench from a successful private practice and I am proud of his achievements. Before the demise of our senior Collins Georgewill, most of the lawyers in the Chambers decided to go into their own law practice. I was not ready for mine at that time and decided to join the Chambers of B. A. Georgewill and Company for two years after which I started my private practice known as J. S. Bob-Manuel and Company in which I was the Managing Partner. I ran this practice until I was appointed Director-General of the Legal Aid Council.

I will always appreciate Justice B.A. Georgewill as my senior in the practice of law; though age is respected amongst lawyers there is seniority at the Bar. The Honourable Justice B. A. Georgewill's family members were very warm towards me and I enjoyed the friendly chats after work before I drove back home. I was invited to family celebrations. I especially enjoyed the wise counsel of his late mother especially on the vicissitudes of life and about the travails of her life as a young widow who had to work hard to fend for her young children in a bustling city like Lagos where she had relocated to marry her husband who worked there at that time, but died at the time when she needed him most.

Honourable Justice Georgewill is an identical twin; his twin brother is now a professor of medicine who has risen to become Vice Chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt. Their mother was full of tales of their interesting comradeship as they never allowed anyone in their immediate family to meddle in their affairs and would lock themselves in their room while they fought as if their lives depended on it. Everyone held his or her

breath in apprehension that they would hurt each other, but sooner or later they would emerge as friends again clinging to each other. When they were young they purposely gave people a hard time recognizing who was who but as the years went by this identification became easier.

### ***GROUNDINGS***

While in legal practice, I was an active member of two professional bodies: the Nigerian Bar Association, Rivers State Branch, as well as the female lawyers' professional group, the *Federacion Internacional De Abogadas* (FIDA). The female professional body gave me the opportunity to work with many poor and vulnerable women and children while being an active member of the Bar. I belonged to many committees, especially the Committee on Legal Education and Public Interest and at that time Hon. Nimi Walson-Jack Esq was the Chairman of this committee. This was a high point for me as it gave me a platform to understand human rights and give the poor, legal representation, advice and legal awareness by teaching them their rights as enshrined in the Constitution. I also took part in a programme known as 'Street Law', which was coordinated at that time by Honourable Nimi Walson Jack. I was fortunate to attend a capacity building course for three (3) weeks with support from a United States based donor agency, known as the Centre for Legal Education. The programme was in Los Angeles, California, in the United States of America and quite a

number of members of the Nigeria Bar Association, Rivers State branch benefited from it.

I will digress here to give a brief narrative of what transpired on my journey to the United States for the training programme on civic education, particularly on the Street Law education, with The Centre for Civic Education in California. At that time in the early 2000s the Centre had partnered with the Public Legal (Law-related) Education Committee of the Nigerian Bar Association, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, of which I was a member. This Public Legal Education Committee was to supervise some law faculties in Rivers State and in other universities in other parts of Nigeria in order to inculcate the teaching of street law education as part of the law faculty curriculum. This was basically for training of law lecturers on the skills needed to impart the education of street law to law students. This was essentially on how to get the ordinary men and women in the street to know their legal rights. In the process such lecturers and their students and some members of the Public Interest and Development Law Section Committee were sponsored for training in the United States. My being in this committee in that particular year, gave me the opportunity to be chosen to attend the training programme in Los Angeles with all expenses paid for the three weeks training which took place in a private university called Loyola University, in Los Angeles California. At that time, the summer vacations were being observed by the regular students and staff of that institution, although three weeks seems a short time for such a course of learning on how to give legal education to the poor

common people, the experience acquired helped me immensely later in my career in my capacity as the Director General of a parastatal that provides legal aid to the poor, and as I went around law faculties of some Nigerian Universities that ran Law Clinics, I was usually invited as a guest speaker at the law week celebrations and after the lectures, we (the guests) would be invited to see practical demonstrations of students running the law clinics. My years of acquired knowledge in this field of law helped me to give them advice where necessary as well as mentoring many of them. Although I am happy that I did not study abroad, I have enjoyed and appreciated the beauty and intellectual aura of two foreign Universities, both in the United States of America, Loyola University and Harvard Law School in Boston, which I was privileged to visit.

The Loyola University being a private university in a highly developed country had state-of-the-art infrastructural facilities from its lecture rooms to the law library created a very sobering, exciting and educative experience for me. I understood how our educational infrastructural system was lagging behind. This University had most of the dormitory halls and some faculty buildings donated by individuals as shown by plaques dedicated to them. In recent years as I visited some universities around Nigeria, I have noted that some philanthropists and industrialists have started donating buildings to tertiary institutions and that many private individuals are dotting the landscape in Nigeria with private universities, although it is still too little and expensive for the large population of qualified students that Nigeria produces yearly. It however got me thinking of how

many Africans are not philanthropic, it's about me, myself and I and having huge sums of stolen money put away in foreign bank accounts, sometimes lost forever in those banks outside Nigeria. They have the money that could have set up more schools but they prefer to send their children abroad to school.

The training was not for only foreigners but also for the citizens of the USA. There were teachers from their own vulnerable communities such as the original indigenes of the United States, known as the Red Indians and another teacher from Alaska's very vulnerable group. Another student was a teacher from Palestine, who was working for their institute of education. They all shared their peculiar experiences. While the Red Indian discussed their backwardness in education, the Palestinian shared his experiences of living and working in Gaza and their educational system amid the political situation that they found themselves with the nation of Israel. My training in Los Angeles was combined with well-planned visits to beautiful and interesting tourist sites in California and to the headquarters of the sponsors. The tour was rounded off with classical entertainments and visits to some of the beautiful beaches on the shores of the deep blue Pacific Ocean. Americans call this part of the United States the West Coast. It is where many celebrities live and where the legendary Hollywood is found. We were fortunate to go sight-seeing in Hollywood and what amazed me was that it's a very small area but looks big in films. We also built on the knowledge acquired by exchanging related personal stories from our different countries. It was indeed a wonderful and memorable time but I was very happy to return to Nigeria at

the end of the training as I was booked to fly back with Sabena Airlines.

### ***GRACE AND INSIGHT***

The story of my journey to Los Angeles cannot be completed, if I do not recount an interesting but unpleasant incident that is etched in my memory. I was booked on the now defunct Sabena Airlines belonging to the Belgian Government from Lagos to Belgium, then to Washington. I was enthralled about flying into Belgium because in the 70s and 80s as Nigerians we always spoke about “Belgian” cars. That was the general name by which we described used cars imported into Nigeria, which were sent through Antwerp. As I understand it not all the used cars originated from Belgium but they were transported from many areas in Europe to be shipped through Belgium. We only glimpsed a small part of the European country from the sky as the plane landed in the airport. Through the years I have learnt from my foreign trips to love the quiet picturesque European cities when compared to the hustle and bustle of American cities but American States and Cities have their place in human achievements. To most of the world America is God’s own country with mind boggling structures, very grand highways and freeways as well as bridges. However let’s go back to my story.

When my course was over I got back to Washington DC Airport, quite early on a Saturday morning. I was one of the first to line up to get cleared for boarding. However, when it got to

my turn, to my surprise I was asked to step aside because I had a Nigerian passport and therefore needed to go back to the Belgian Embassy in Washington on a Monday to get another transit visa to allow me to enter the Belgian airport. I was shocked and tried to convince the airline senior staff that I was going back to Nigeria after a training programme which meant that I had concluded one half of the journey and they should allow me to go back the way I came. It was a shouting match as the airline agent insisted that he was obeying orders and he could not change his mind. I was curious to know when this new law started as I had only spent three weeks in the USA. He replied that it was the Monday of that week. I insisted that it was unfair as I had exhausted my funds. I wondered aloud how I would go into Washington to start another process, and where do I start from. It would entail a trip into Washington City and if I must stay in a hotel there, it would be at least two more nights. All efforts to contact the organizers of the training in Los Angeles to get some consolation were futile. However as the argument proceeded another airline staff, an Ethiopian, came out of a side office and listened to me, he calmed me down and directed me to a seat in the waiting area to sit and wait, and he assured me that he would sort things out, explaining that I should be patient while others were being given their boarding passes and rushing to board Sabena Airlines. I watched helplessly as the line of passengers disappeared and the gates were finally closed. I became frightened with different bad scenarios of what could happen to me popping into my head but I kept going back to my new found helper and he kept on

assuring me that he was working on something for me. What happened next up until today could not have been conjured by any stretch of imagination and has given me more assurance that there is a divine being always present in our lives and one of the greatest beliefs of my life's experiences is that God can turn things around for our good and for his purpose. This showed me that his hands were really upon me, because about forty minutes after the passengers were called to board the Sabena flight, I saw several passengers rushing back to that same counter that had been closed for the night and just as quickly as when they closed the counter, they were re-opened when the lines started forming once more and then an announcement blasted forth through the speakers saying that the airplane was not able to fly to Belgium that night because it had problems with its engines. There was commotion as several passengers demanded that they must be placed on other airlines immediately as they had several important events to attend to early the next day. There were also several school children going to Europe for summer camps. It was catastrophic and I watched as if a movie was being played for all to see and in the midst of the agents trying to place passengers in other airlines again by re-issuing tickets so that they could travel that night, or early the next morning, my new found helper appeared and beckoned to me to come to the line. He said, 'Madam God loves you, we will book you on Swiss Airlines for a flight tomorrow with majority of the passengers and tonight you will be given a free hotel room and food until your flight tomorrow.' I was soon booked into a Marriot Hotel, somewhere near the airport and a unique reversal of my



situation unfolded before me. I spent the night praising God. Hitherto I had taken a lot for granted but I started recording some strange and very unique events in my life, and upon my return to Nigeria I went back into time to recall them and realised that a lot of unique things had happened to me that could only be the manifestation of the Hand of God.

Back to the story at hand; unfortunately that broken down, Sabena Aircraft marked the end of Sabena Airlines and Swiss Air took over the running of an Airline for Belgium at that time. The next day I boarded Swiss Air and I entered the famous Zurich Airport for the first time in my life. At that time I understood that passengers on Swiss Air could enter the city of Zurich unhindered without a visa but I was not one for such adventures especially with what I had been through. I was very anxious to get back home but was also very happy that as we were landing I saw the Swiss Alps.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the former First Lady of Rivers State, Honourable Justice Mary U. Peter-Odili CFR. JSC., the lovely and very cerebral wife of His Excellency, Sir Dr. Peter Odili, My special tribute goes to her for the exposure she gave me and others to experience what today looks common place but which was not so in the past. To a great extent women in our own part of the country were not allowed to be heard but could be seen. Words cannot describe how determined and effective she was in changing this attitude. She was very open and willing to carry other women along and mentored the women of the State in ways that go beyond what one can put down in writing with a few descriptive words. She commended hard work to all

of us and by her personal example taught us that it was better to be less dependent on our husbands and that whether formally educated or not it was good to learn entrepreneurial skills. She will always be appreciated for bringing the late Mrs Maria Shokenu who was a past Managing Director of the former Peoples Bank, to train women in a lot of entrepreneurial skills. This she accomplished with the support of her husband His Excellency the then Governor of Rivers State. Without his support, the women of Rivers State who participated in the trainings would not have been exposed to such immense and invaluable opportunities. This very kind gesture of then Rivers State Governor, who had a very special place for women despite very pressing state matters, was very commendable. The then First Lady believed in teaching women how to fish and not only to eat fish.

The members of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, FIDA had a special place in the heart of Hon, Justice Mary Peter-Odili CFR JSC when she was First Lady of Rivers State. She was the pioneer chairperson of the great professional body in Rivers State. She was like a proverbial Guardian Angel making sure that the ideals of the association never waned to the extent that she contributed to the FIDA office rents, and had time to give useful advice on how members should stay focused on representing the poor and vulnerable women and children. She ensured that the Rivers State chapter of FIDA was not left out of international programmes and always made a case for sponsorship from His Excellency for important international conferences. If this support had not been given by His

Excellency, the women would not have had such immense opportunities given to them. While Her Excellency was a strong voice for voiceless women, who in no small measure helped government articulate appropriate social and economic projects for women, if the Governor did not have the intention of running an inclusive government, the successes recorded would not have been achieved. The special nurturing of FIDA from that time as a group has yielded very high dividends for the Rivers State chapter's membership helping many members to attain respectable positions of leadership both nationally and internationally

I was particularly blessed by her because she treated me like one of her biological sisters and her mentoring skills were incomparable. She gave me and other members of FIDA the opportunity to represent her at several local women's functions when the exigencies of her office did not permit her to attend. This singular magnanimity afforded us the opportunity to improve on our delivery of speeches and to rid ourselves of stage fright when confronted with large audiences. These acquired skills came in handy when we were conducting workshops or counselling different women groups. We were indeed privileged to have this opportunity of a life time. We developed very healthy self-esteem and confidence. I must say that this experience taught me that mentoring is highly recommended for leadership roles.

It is important to have a period of preparation so that when opportunity comes, as it came for me, it makes one the proverbial round peg in the round hole. My first appointment

was as a non-executive member of the Rivers State Secondary School Board under the Chairmanship of Reverend Father Pius Kii (now Monsignor Pius Kii). It was through the recommendation of Her Excellency who was sincerely interested in the performance of the Boards and recommended women for positions of leadership of Executive status as well as ordinary membership at both the State and Local Government levels. I admired her ability to know most people by their names as well as to spot those with leadership abilities across the twenty three Local Government Areas. She was always abreast of what was necessary to be done for the progress of women in the State. I wish my readers could appreciate how we thoroughly enjoyed serving with her and wondered how she was able to combine all these good works as well as cope with her job as one of the justices of the Rivers State High Court. Need I reiterate that she is devoted to hard work and the proof is that today she is a Judge of the Supreme Court.

I was later appointed as a member of the Board of The Agency for Re-Orientation, Integrity Service and Ethics (ARISE) by His Excellency Sir Dr Peter Odili under the chairmanship of Professor G. O. M. Tasie. This prepared me in accountability and the understanding of the value of high morality in discharging duties that affect the public.

My motive for becoming a member of FIDA was due to and still remains “my passion for women and children” to the extent that during our time of serving at the FIDA Centre, we would most times contribute our own personal time and resources to get FIDA projects executed. This passion gave me yet another

opportunity when I was made the Secretary of the Caretaker Committee of the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) Rivers State Branch. This would not have happened if I was not counselling some women at the FIDA centre at that time when an emergency meeting was held to nominate me to become its caretaker secretary, which position had been zoned to FIDA as part of the resolution of a crisis in NCWS. I obtained a new type of experience in giving service on behalf of women and had many opportunities to visit Abuja at that time to represent the interests of women at the national level at meetings and workshops held at the association's Abuja Headquarters.

I advise the younger female lawyers of today who join our professional bodies to be passionate about Pro Bono work because there is always a reward for such selfless services. It has been observed that most young lawyers tend to put a price on everything. For example, when a call goes out for volunteers for awareness programmes in say a Local Government Area, more often than not, they want to be “mobilized”. Volunteering should be selfless and not based on the demand to know ‘what is in it for me’

The caretaker committee of the NCWS was put in place for a year in order that the National Executive should look into the immediate causes of the crisis in the Rivers State branch and conduct fresh elections. The caretaker committee chairman's post was given to the chairman of the female medical doctors association Dr Mrs Alasia whom I later became good friends with but is now late, while the post of the secretary was given to

female lawyers and at a later meeting as I have given the account previously, members of FIDA unanimously chose me to take it up. This opened up another dimension of life for me. For one year, we both worked hard to bring stability and order back to the association by first working out strategies to deal with myriad complex problems we discovered and calm down nerves while learning how to balance the dynamics of the different groups with women of different perspectives on life. A mixture of the poor, the rich, the educated and uneducated, the traders and the elite and privileged, all with a passion for women programmes were all in the same group. Each Local Government Area of the State also had NCWS branch associations with strong executives and members. They in turn sent members to the State for general meetings while their executives convened extended executive meetings. The truth is that these women groups were important mobilizers for different activities in both the Local Government Areas and States. Politicians learnt to relate with them and that ignoring them was to risk failure. I learnt a lot in relating to these diverse groups of women and began to understand how to balance human frailties. The women were hard working and were prepared at very short notice to assemble for important activities that society needed to do for either the Local Government Area or the State. Those of us who led the caretaker Committee were from the professional bodies and we concentrated on quality programs of advocacy and aid, such as educating them on medical issues, providing vaccinations for children, and offering legal education.

Service in the capacity of NCWS Caretaker Committee Secretary brought with it the additional bonus of visiting Abuja at that time once each quarter, which was a new experience for me. A unique opportunity was afforded us to represent Rivers State women at the national level at the NCWS quarterly meetings in the association's headquarters, with workshops and trainings on how to conduct national and state meetings to achieve cohesion and best results. I did not know then that this experience would prepare me to travel later on, to Abuja to attend to my private clients' company registrations at the Corporate Affairs Commission. Abuja was a distant place for many Nigerians in the nineties and the early 2000s, as mainly Federal Civil Servants who had been transferred to the new capital were found there. People preferred to stay in their comfort zones in the States and hardly came to this great capital city. It was a Civil Service town where private and national events took place, bringing many visitors who stayed in the many small hotels scattered round Abuja. They also left as quickly as they came, in droves, leaving the feeling of a ghost town especially at weekends. The opposite is what we see today. Everybody now wants to stay in Abuja even after successfully retiring as political appointees or Civil Servants, a lot of people stay back in Abuja, especially as it appears to be the most secure part of Nigeria.

The female lawyers' professional group FIDA, is about passion for women and children. We contributed from our own personal resources and made donations to get projects executed and offered free legal services. This was how we trained

ourselves to give Pro Bono services to the poor. Little did I know that I was equipping myself for the role of Director-General of such an important institution as the Legal Aid Council. I advise the younger lawyers who are in practice of today to be passionate about Pro Bono work because there is a reward for lawyers who give Pro Bono services, or who give passionate human rights services to the poor. For instance in one of the international bar association annual conferences in the USA that I attended, a young lawyer from China won an exalted prize of two hundred thousand dollars for giving pro bono services in that year in his country at the Access to Justice forum. The younger lawyers tend to put a price on everything. For example under my watch as Director – General of the Legal Aid Council there were pilot projects with development partners to decongest some prisons in Nigeria. Our staff lawyers had to partner with private practitioners. My experience is that in Nigeria, we need a change of mind-set on why we must represent the poor Pro Bono. As lawyers we should align ourselves with modern best practice of giving free legal services principally because it is the right thing to do and the idea of being given some remuneration for carrying out Pro Bono work must stop. If remuneration must be given, it should only be expenses for filing of papers and transportation.

I recall very early in my own office a friend of mine brought to me a pathetic case, of a disabled Miss X, she was partially deaf and dumb but in spite of it went to school up to University level, she was posted as National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member to a private company whose chief executive was the



owner and he was very good to her and tolerated her disability, she then had hope that life was treating her fairly after her service she was retained by this good man. After about two years working for him, this man fell ill and eventually died. After his burial the company was bequeathed to his eldest daughter who had been living abroad and very interestingly was a lawyer. After a few months she reorganized the office and retrenched some staff including this disabled young lady. While she had the right to take certain decisions she should have done so with a human face. The staff she retrenched had been working without salaries for almost two years during the travails of the chief executive officer's ill health and eventual death. All of them, including this disabled lady now demanded for their salaries and a severance package. The lady in charge refused to listen to them and also refused entreaties from her father's family and friends on behalf of these hitherto loyal staff. My client was the disabled lady and the salary meant a lot to her for her upkeep and when I heard her story I was moved to take up the matter legally on a Pro Bono basis. After giving the proper legal notices, the new owner refused to even meet with us for settlement. The only way out was to go to court. The court after hearing all arguments awarded favourable judgment to the disabled lady.

If most of the lawyers who are in private practice, take up one or two cases on behalf of poor Awaiting Trial Persons (ATPs) in prisons, their populations in prison will reduce. I dream of the time that there will be requirements nationally and internationally for Private Practitioners to show evidence of

doing Pro Bono work as a social responsibility. We have advised that a mechanism be put in place by the executive of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) to determine how to licence law practice based on the practitioner doing Pro Bono work each year in addition to paying practising fees. Representation of the poor has its guidelines and principles as enshrined in the United Nations Principles and Guidelines for Lawyers. They are to represent the poor in order to give back to society as privileged citizens.

There are rewards for those who work compassionately for the poor. I am a living example. I took part in many FIDA projects; one of such projects was from a grant given by the League of Women Voters in the United States of America, for members of FIDA Rivers State branch, to educate the poor and vulnerable women on their voting rights just before the 1999 democratic elections. It was a rewarding experience where my teaching skills were put into use. This was more preparation for my later role as DG. Another unique FIDA project was its partnership with a Women Development Unit of the Shell Petroleum Development Company in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. We were enlightened at a workshop to inform us as to what an oil venture was and the sharing formula between partners in the venture. We were told that although Nigeria had a larger share of the profit at that time because the oil companies were in direct contact with the local communities where the oil pipelines were situated, the anger of the communities concerning oil spills and environmental pollution were directed against them. They bore the brunt of youth restiveness and

communal protests when burst crude oil pipes resulted in devastating oil spills that ruined the fishing and farming activities causing socio-economic and environmental problems that still confront the Niger Delta communities up to now. This normally led to negotiation for compensation. Throughout the years the situation had been contentious and in the year under review, members of FIDA were asked to act as intermediaries to bring about peace especially for women groups in some Local Government Areas of Rivers State where the oil producers operated. This mediation was also duplicated by members of FIDA Rivers State with the neighbouring Bayelsa State's, FIDA members

The project was an eye opener to the FIDA members. We discovered that the important component of mediation is to act as unbiased umpires in any conflict between adversaries. However we discovered that there were many other internal problems created by all sides in these communities. One of these was that the women were not allowed to take a share in the compensatory sum. The men took all compensation paid by the companies, while the women, who in my opinion were the more hardworking partners, especially the fisherwomen, were short-changed. We enlightened the women on their legal rights and tried to mediate between them and the men on the issue of fair sharing of such monies. We also discovered that the oil prospecting companies did not provide good infrastructural development in these communities. Rather than build schools, health centres, roads and bridges, they were in the habit of building very poor quality local pit toilets. There was also no

potable water system for drinking or domestic use. In addition the youths were also not happy with both the oil companies and the elders, who they accused of not carrying them along in the sharing of the compensatory sums. The elders began to lose the respect of both the youth and women and so the normal traditional system of dispute resolution was inadvertently being eroded to the detriment of the peaceful existence of the communities.

We had to maintain a delicate balance in order to handle the situation that we found in reality. My opinion is that if a lot more had been done to quell the rumblings of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, from the onset, that is, if it had been taken very seriously the violence and unnecessary death toll caused by the militancy era would have been avoided. We travelled to many local areas in Rivers and Bayelsa States in very small boats fitted with outboard engines that were the main means of getting to riverine communities. These journeys did not occur without some terrible experiences, which were in fact not for the faint-hearted. On one such trip to Okrika Town in Rivers State, the young boat driver stopped us half way on the river and threatened us. He said we must pay extra money in addition to what we had paid earlier. We did not argue and quickly paid up. There was another occasion when the militant boys attempted to stop our meetings with the women in a Local Government Area that we visited. It was a frightening experience as we were held up in a hall in a remote riverine area and a lot of appeals were made before we were allowed to go back into the local boats that had conveyed us there to return to Port Harcourt. We now

appreciate all the efforts that have been made by the Federal and State governments through the years that has brought militancy to an end or at least reduced it, especially with the amnesty programme. I must admit that since those days there has been a lot of infrastructural development in most of these areas and a lot of roads and bridges have been constructed to link these communities, which was not so before. Readers of this work who visited the Niger Delta when many of the new roads were not in place and had to go through the turbulent waterways and the unpredictability of storms will readily acknowledge that it is more comfortable and safer to travel on land than on water.

## ***CHAPTER 3***

### **UNENDING PREPARATION**

People who have a discerning mind need not be told that the hand of God directs the activities of man. For those who are able to engender a robust relationship with God, the reality of life displays this rather frequently and so clearly that one is neither surprised nor ambushed. My belief and deep-rooted faith in God have helped me realise the truth that in life “the principal thing is to get wisdom and understanding.” In this regard, I have continued to seek God through his words in the Holy Bible. To give a firm bite to this pursuit, I undertook a structured course in Bible School and obtained a Diploma at the end of the study. Consequently, I realised that divinity holds the key to all human pursuit particularly through the various assignments, achievements and heights that God has made me attain. Clearly, I have come to the knowledge that God gives direction to those who diligently seek him in spirit and in truth. Far too many inexplicable yet miraculous events have established the divine presence of God in my life. In whatever position, profession or field one is one should work hard to acquire relevant or even seemingly irrelevant skills, obtain integrity and serve God Almighty diligently because he sees everything and always rewards our efforts.

My short stints of service at both FIDA and NCWS did prepare me, even if not adequately enough, for the call to serve at higher levels. I say not adequately enough not because the two places were not good, in fact both are places in which many people desire to serve. However, other things happened to make me to look back in retrospect and reassess my perception of life. In the early part of 2007, an invitation letter was sent to me by His Royal Highness; late Chief Lawrence Bob Manuel of the Manuel Royal House This letter came from a magazine known as “People, State and Resource (PSR).” The summary of its content was for me to be the recipient of an Honorary Award known as Grand Productivity Award 2007 in March 2007.

I was not very enthusiastic about the invitation but my husband encouraged me to honour it by saying that “life itself is a risk! “ and that the worst that could happen was that the event would not hold despite the money spent on transportation and hotel accommodation for my daughter and I. I therefore replied and assured the Publishers that I would attend the programme. My only daughter (who is also a lawyer) and I attended the event in Abuja. The event took place at the National Women’s Centre, Central Area, Abuja. We arrived at the venue with mixed feelings of trepidation, anxiety and excitement. Contrary to my fears the risk paid off because the event turned out to be sublime. It began with pomp and fanfare. There was a large crowd of awardees who had come with friends, well-wishers and family members from other parts of the country, various people wore “aso-ebi” or uniform. They came along with their relations and friends. When the announcer called my name to

step up to the podium he told everyone to give an additional round of applause “to this teacher turned lawyer.” Nothing prepared me for the accolades I received even though I had come with only one visitor, my daughter. The event was exciting. As I was about to receive my plaque the Managing Director of the Magazine said to me, “Madam, please mark it, One day, you would be given a post in the Federal Capital Abuja”. This spontaneous pronouncement turned out to be very prophetic because I was eventually given a political appointment. I believe it is the hand of God upon my life. Up till now I do not know who recommended me and why the letter of award was sent to the ancient riverine town of Abonnema in Rivers State.

At that time, in my opinion, it seemed that many states were isolated from the Federal Capital, and so while events were generally held in Abuja many Nigerians were often deprived of sharing in the joy of the events because satellite connections had not fully come into existence. Only few stations such as National Television Authority (NTA) were in existence although some private TV stations were just emerging. Many Nigerians would recall that only the very rich people had satellite televisions because they were very expensive to buy and install. Fortunately, this extreme disparity has been relieved by the proliferation of telecommunication and media outlets that avails many Nigerians the opportunity of enjoying domestic and international events. In a similar manner, telephone used to be the “preserve” of the affluent but following the revolution in information communication technology (ICT) in the late 80s,



many Nigerians began to have access to Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) phones. In the early part of the 2000s, I had the opportunity of travelling abroad. While abroad I rode on buses and trains and often saw adults and children communicate on their telephones. I was not only sad but often felt embarrassed that I did not own or use a digital phone. I often said silent prayers to God to make Nigeria be fortunate to join in this new technology. In 2000 or so, GSM came to Nigeria but the cost was prohibitive. The price of the chip which is the Subscriber Identification Module (SIM) was unaffordable just as the mobile phone. In 2001, many Nigerians started enjoying the GSM and it has changed the face of telecommunication in more ways than could ever be imagined. Happily, those outrageous prices have crashed. The situation is such that, some very poor people now own and use two, three or four phones. Sometimes, they have more phones than their bosses. This is intriguing and some might describe it as a contradiction.

I worked hard to transit from a teacher to becoming a lawyer and, as earlier stated, my tutelage and mentorship under Collins Georgewill Esq and Hon. Justice B A Georgewill (now His Lordship in the Court of Appeal) prepared me for setting up my own chambers at the appointed time. I started my first private office through the goodwill of a good friend, Honourable Justice Matilda Ayemieye (nee Abrakasa) now of the High Court of Bayelsa State but at the time I knew her she was also a Private Legal practitioner. She was God-sent, to put it mildly. At that time, she was using her family property as office and invited me

to take up a one-room-office in this family property. She did not collect rents from me. Lawyers know that exemption from rent when starting a law practice is one of the ways of mitigating cost. The second approach is to build up clientele by taking up matters from family members and those unable to afford to pay private lawyers' fees. Third, when a lawyer takes up such cases in court it exposes the lawyer to other clients especially if the case is well executed. Therefore, I am eternally grateful to this friend, her mother and her family, as I am also to the family of Hon. Justice B.A. Georgewill. I was welcomed by her family from the ancient town of Nembe, in Bayelsa State. Riverine towns in the Niger Delta region share a similar cultural background so the friendship that bonded us was warm and we interacted with each other's family without restraint. As I said before she turned out to be one of my God-sent helpers just as I equally played commendable roles in her life. God has demonstrated this love in her life because the promotions that came her way were beyond expectation. One of the promotions was her call to the bench as an Honourable Justice of the Bayelsa High Court. We met as FIDA members and discovered that we were also close neighbours in Port Harcourt. We often attended the meetings of professional bodies together and found that we had a lot in common. Most importantly, colleagues told us that we were more than averagely active in our professional associations yet remained focused on taking up advocacy and solicitors matters for our clients.

Any lawyer that does not have the benefit of an already established family law firm built up by a parent or family

member, will not find it easy building up a private firm and clientele, or getting staff, and relevant law books and law reports. I commend hard working lawyers who built up their law firms and offered tutelage to many new wigs. In Nigeria, the new wigs know that they need the platform of senior lawyers to learn, to be mentored and then to be announced to the justice sector. They, therefore, have to bear the necessary sacrifices and tolerate discomfiture such as lack of financial resources or a personal vehicle in order to attend to court matters especially outside of the cities when allowances are insufficient. Sometimes the parents of some new wigs are well established lawyers, but these are the privileged ones. Inability to get around the difficulties often drives many new lawyers to seek employment in government establishments. I thank Honourable Justice Matilda for assisting me in starting my private office in a room in her private family property with her family's permission, and when she was called to the Bayelsa Judiciary as Honourable Judge of its High Court she handed some of her uncompleted legal matters and case files over to me. She also handed over the solicitor's work of a small newly incorporated Stevedoring Maritime company where I was appointed a Non-Executive External Solicitor. Initially, she had served as the first External Company Secretary of the company as required by the Company and Allied Matters Act for a few years before taking up higher calling to the bench.

How can I ever forget to recount the sublime role of Mrs Veronica Lott in my life? We met in early 1991 when I became her close neighbour. At around that time her husband, Chief F.

O. Lott had just concluded his tenure as Attorney General of Rivers State just before Bayelsa State was carved out of the old Rivers State. Our journey of life together, as God ordained it, spanned about twenty-five years. During my tenure at NCWS, she always gave me good advice because she was an older member of the association. She was also a woman leader and mobilizer of Bayelsa State women especially in her community in Yenagoa Local Government Area. When state creation made her relocate to Bayelsa NCWS relied on her heavily for the mobilization of the Bayelsa women and getting interpreters for the various local languages, whenever both Rivers and Bayelsa States branches of FIDA jointly executed projects. One of such projects done in partnership with donor agencies was on peace building and was aimed at curtailing militancy in a non-confrontational manner. The importance of using women as peace builders cannot be over-emphasised. Women often deploy natural motherly affection in nuclear families to effectively dissuade youth from participating in militancy. Thus, she led the women of Bayelsa State for training in mediation skills for peace building at the time of the high point of militant confrontations in the Niger Delta region. The development partners who supported these projects preferred the women in these areas because they were in the position as mothers to bring about peace by calling the youths to order. We fostered stronger relationship in our common desire to contribute to peace building. She frequently visited Rivers State because her children were still schooling in the state and this fully strengthened our relationship. In addition, she shared with me,

various ways of performing optimally in my position as the caretaker NCWS Secretary because she had a richer experience as one of the association's oldest members. She was a quintessential and very passionate Niger Delta woman politician who knew all the political intrigues that had taken place in the Niger Delta from the military era onward.. She opened my eyes to grassroots politics and I discovered that the women were so organized that already they had a Niger Delta Women Group before I met her. They were already articulating the position of women in the polity with executives from all the states traversing all Niger Delta States for meetings in line with policies of their political parties at that time. I had never taken part in women politics or any type of politics and often avoided politics largely because I had to juggle my time between teaching, studying law at the university, and raising my children. Although, I did not from the onset of my working life actively participate in politics but I followed political developments in Nigeria passionately. I also took interest in the military interventions and the different efforts of returning Nigeria back to a civilian democratic government. Perhaps, I was, at best, an arm-chair politician until I joined the professional groups in 1993. She taught me very robust lessons and perspectives of life and grassroots politics. She changed my perception of politics and God used her as a mentor and a guardian angel for my eventual position as DG. The love we have for each other is mutual. I appreciate and value my relationship with her but give God the glory for everything, since no man can take His glory. Members of our individual

families call us sisters because we have shared many memorable times. Her children call me their second mum. Friendship involves commitment, patience, tolerance, sincerity and the fear of God. From my spiritual father, I learnt that in one's lifetime God gives just one true friend, and one must be very fortunate to be given a second friend. When I recall the journey of my life from primary school to the tertiary institutions and workplaces, it dawns on me that we have classmates we may never see or meet again just as we meet and make new sets of friends. Life has shown me that no matter how fond one has become of a friend, if life took you apart in different directions you may never meet again but if perchance that person crosses your path again, true friendship may have lost its meaning.

You would recall that I said that my friend, Hon. Justice Matilda recommended me to a Maritime Stevedoring Company and I was appointed its External Solicitor. I served in that capacity for ten years and was later appointed Director-General of a Federal parastatal. By providence, I had exited the private solicitor's work about six months before my new appointment. The Management and Board of the company had decided that some reforms were necessary after ten years and with their principal partners they made far reaching changes, one of which was to appoint a new External Company Secretary. The exposure I had at the Maritime Stevedoring Company equipped me with relatively wide and deep insight into another branch of law practice but God's purpose prevailed. It was a typical case of the biblical saying that if one door did not shut another door would not open. In other words, when God shuts a door, he

opens another door. About six months after I exited this company, my most illustrious appointment yet was announced.

The Stevedoring Maritime Company handled the administration of dock workers on behalf of the their principal company, so it exposed me to Company and Allied Matters laws as well as Labour Laws. In court, I took up labour matters instituted by workers against the company or vice versa and participated in mediatory settlements, which sometimes made it necessary for me to visit the big port of Onne in Rivers State. The board members of this company were high profile Nigerians and some of them were also board members of blue chip companies, purposely appointed by the principal partners of the smaller company in order to make use of their management experience. The Company Chairman, in particular, assisted me in no small measure to set up good board meetings with appropriate agenda for the meetings. He frequently taught me minute writing skills until I mastered them and earned commendations for hard work from other board members. This experience really enhanced my administrative skills when I became a Director-General since government establishments must hold both Management and Board meetings. I did not find it difficult to conduct such meetings because I had been prepared in my previous employment. In my time at the Legal Aid Council the Council's Secretariat provided good minutes of meetings that could stand public scrutiny anywhere in the world..

Another important legacy of preparation inherited from this same Stevedoring Maritime Services Company, that comes to

mind was that the Managing Director allowed me to accompany him with some of his management staff as well as some board members to face parliamentary hearings before the House of Representatives and Senate Committees on the Maritime Sector, I recall also being present once when the Senate Committee on Maritime Matters was conducting public hearings in the National Assembly for all Maritime Operators in Nigeria, especially those who had applied for concession of some of Nigeria's Sea Ports. The exposure was a profound experience for me as I watched proceedings of a public hearing not knowing that in just a few months the experience garnered would stand me in a good stead to relate to both the House of Representatives and Senate Committees on Justice, who exercise oversight functions over parastatals under the Ministry of Justice. In the course of my duties as Director-General of one of these Parastatals, I have had to attend many committee meetings, oversight meetings and public hearing meetings of both houses in the National Assembly on the Justice sector and made my contributions to the Glory of God. Let me reiterate that humility and patience remain virtues that have paid off for me because I was ready to learn what would be important for my future because I chose to be teachable.

You would recall that my earliest glimpses of Abuja came through attending national women's meetings for FIDA and NCWS in Abuja. Little did I know that in later years and in the course of my private practice, I would visit Abuja more frequently to file documents at the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) for clients. Perhaps, I should state that



many fresh law graduates straight out of Nigeria's Youth Corps Service start their legal careers by staying patiently at the premises of CAC to help laymen process the requirements for incorporating their companies or register business names. This was made lucrative because all such filings could only be done in Abuja even when Zonal and Branch Offices were opened in states. It was better to file in Abuja because the processing was faster. So, most lawyers involved with incorporating companies preferred to travel to Abuja. This was how some new wigs hustled for their survival until they were able to get better jobs. This is the Nigerian spirit. It is the resilient spirit of a people that are always hopeful that the future would be better. Today, many of such lawyers have settled into far better jobs.

As I write this, the ruling political party has introduced an Executive Order meant to improve the ease of doing business in Nigeria. It did so through the office of the Vice President, His Excellency Professor Yemi Osinbajo. The Corporate Affairs Commission has also undergone several reforms, some of which ensure that the layman does not need a private lawyer to assist to incorporate his company. One can fill one's forms through the internet and fast track one's registration. The CAC has in-house lawyers that vet documents and assist in resolving legal issues that might arise. However, clients who wish to can still pay for the services of private lawyers and are not barred from filing papers through them.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A BATON CHANGE; ELEVATION TO SERVE THE POOR AND VOICELESS**

*“Promotion cometh neither from the east; nor from the west; nor from the south, but God is the Judge. He putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Psalm 75: 6-7).*

I was appointed the Director–General of the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria on December 23, 2010 by His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR. It was a wonderful Christmas gift to me and I immediately reported to the then Honourable Attorney General of the Federation to formally accept the appointment. I started work at once and only rested on official public holidays granted by the Federal Government. I became the seventh Director–General of the Legal Aid Council. I cannot but acknowledge my predecessors’ good works. My predecessors include Mr C. Osakwe (late), Mr V. C. Achikeh, Mr R. A. Osikoya, Mrs W. Folami, Mrs U. A. Hassan Baba and Mrs L. Akinlami. Their hard work had built up the Council’s mandate and put it on a sound footing for further consolidation.

My appointment as Director-General of the Legal Aid Council was both dramatic and significant because the announcement was very unexpected, surprising yet welcome. My heart was filled with joy because the most that I thought might come to me was board membership in any of the

ministries, departments and agencies either in the State or at the Federal level or at any of the various educational institutions statutorily mandated to have Boards. I vividly recall that I had gone to the house of my friend and mentor, Mrs Veronica Lott to listen to the 9.00pm news. Just at the tail end of the news, I intuitively encouraged her not to change the television channel so that we could see the obituaries, among other things, because such news items were often delayed till the end of the news. Rather than obituaries, the newscaster offered government announcement. She said that President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR had approved the appointment of a new Director-General for the Legal Aid Council and then mentioned my name. Both my friend and I were shocked. My joy was full and I did not know when I jumped up and began to dance. My friend was equally happy for me. Relations, family friends, neighbours, colleagues and well-wishers called and congratulated me throughout the night because they too heard the same announcement on NTA's news. In essence, it remained a testimony to the popularity of NTA 9.00 O'clock news because many Nigerians tune in to this station to catch up on full day's news report after a hard day's work. The next day, I proceeded to Abuja to meet with the Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Justice to formally collect my letter of appointment. Looking back in time, it occurs to me that the fulfilment of destiny is a very essential spiritual part of life. Everyone was created for a major purpose. Other people have more than one purpose to fulfil because God designed it that way. Until one agrees with God and knows that unique purpose,

the person's destiny cannot be fulfilled. Therefore, one cannot give up on life and living, rather one should pursue life with all the necessary vigour.

### ***THE LEGAL AID ACT 2011***

In 2011, I fully assumed office and commenced acquainting myself with the staff and other official protocols. Very quickly, I realised that I should take the opportunity given me to push for assent to the new Legal Aid Act 2011 which expanded the jurisdiction of the Council's mandate that had hitherto been restricted to criminal offences with only a sprinkle of civil cases in the areas of Road Traffic Offences/Accidents and Fundamental Human Rights advocacy. It is trite that the law is dynamic but the push for a new Legal Aid Act was not only necessary to project the Council's usefulness as an active player in the Justice Delivery system but the upgrade was long overdue. It almost seemed like the legal world had left us behind.

At that time, we the Management of the Council left no stone unturned to ensure that the Legal Aid Act, 2011 was passed on June 3, 2011. The New Act enlarged the Council's Criminal mandate from the Criminal Defence Service for the purpose of assisting indigent persons involved in criminal investigations or proceedings as specified in the Second Schedule to the Legal Aid Act to providing access to such advice, assistance and legal representation where the interest of

justice requires. The Act has remained unambiguous in this respect.

The present Legal Aid Act 2011 repealed the Legal Aid Act of 2004 which, in turn, had amended the initial 1976 Legal Aid Act. The Explanatory Memorandum of the Legal Aid Act, 2011 reads thus:

*“An Act to repeal the Legal Aid Act Cap L9, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, enacts the Legal Aid Act, 2011 in line with international standards, provide for the establishment of legal aid and access to justice fund into which financial assistance would be made available to the Council on behalf of the indigent citizens to prosecute their claims in accordance with the Constitution and further to empower the existing Legal Aid Council to be responsible for the operation of a scheme for the grant of legal aid and access to justice in certain matters or proceedings to persons with inadequate resources in accordance with the provision of this Act”.*

This enabling law expanded the Council’s scope not only in criminal matters but also to provide full legal representation in civil matters that was hitherto not within its mandate. It also provides free legal assistance, legal advice, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes to indigent, vulnerable Nigerians who cannot afford to retain the services of other Legal Practitioners.

The instant Act is innovative in three areas: (1) creating a Legal Aid Fund; (2) expanding the Council’s Civil Jurisdiction;

and (3) providing Community Legal Service which allows for the establishment of law centres at the Local Government level. The Council is proud to have established up to twenty five (25) of such law centres till date in different Local Government Areas in Nigeria.

It is right that an individual has access to justice irrespective of his or her financial status. She or he should be entitled to justice from all courts within available jurisdiction and be offered the required legal services to make that right effective. The most effective way to ensuring justice for the poor is to have a legal aid scheme in place in Nigeria. Therefore, the law is an essential ingredient to the rule of law, having its root in the *Audi Alteram Patem* (Hear the other side) Rule.

### ***ESTABLISHMENT OF LEGAL AID COUNCIL***

The Legal Aid Council (LAC) was established pursuant to the promulgation of the Legal Aid Decree No. 56 of 1976 that later became Legal Aid Act Cap L9 Laws of Federation of Nigeria, 2004. The establishment of this Council was due to the advocacy and sensitization by very passionate lawyers in the Nigerian Bar Association of the 1960s, who took more than a passing interest in the plight of the poor and vulnerable citizens of the country, especially those remanded in prison without the financial means to afford the cost of retaining a lawyer of their choice. While they brought this to the attention of the government of the day, they formed what was called the Nigerian Legal Aid Association to take up cases on behalf of

poor persons on *pro bono* basis. The Council remains indebted to these founding fathers. They have all died but their deed remains a great memorial to giving voice to the poor. They include Chief Chimezie Ikeazor LLD, SAN, OON; Chief Debo Akande SAN; and Chief Ume Ezeoke SAN. Their noble action was also responsible for the constitutional provision for legal aid for the poor by the Federal Government.

The LAC Act 2011 also provides in Section 8 (3) that:

*“The Council shall establish and maintain a service to be known as the Civil Litigation Service for the purpose of assisting indigent persons to access such advice, assistance, and representation in court where the interest of justice demands, to secure, defend, enforce, protect or otherwise exercise any right, obligation, duty, privilege interest or service to which that person is ordinarily entitled under the Nigerian Legal System. Legal Aid shall also be granted in respect of any breach or denial of any such right, obligation, duty, privilege or service. The Council shall be responsible for the representation before any court or tribunal for such civil matters.”*

OPUTA JSC. (as he then was) in *KALU V. STATE* (1988) 10-11 SCNJ AT page 10 said,

*“Justice has not got two weights and measures; one for the rich and wealthy and another for a poor taxi driver. It should be one and the same even handed justice, blind to all social distinctions and disparities in health, status and no respecter of persons.”*

Access to justice is difficult for marginalised groups or people living in poverty. They lack access to information and many laws are inherently biased against these groups of marginalised persons who lack the finances to seek legal redress such that they are often not able to challenge their arrest, remand, trial, conviction, detention and release. People generally fear reprisals and stigmatisations for standing up for their rights with the poor and vulnerable especially women and children suffering the worse effects of these violations of ordinary Human Rights. (ICCPR Art. 14).

Therefore, it behoves on Government to implement comprehensive policies based on human rights approaches to ensuring access to justice for the poor and vulnerable by ensuring that free legal aid is provided in both criminal and civil matters. In Nigeria, the Federal Government established the Legal Aid Council to cater for what, in real terms, is a psychological dimension expressed in the powerless and voiceless circumstances of the indigent by representing them in exercising their rights, where violated, and giving them a voice.

The Council has extensive experience in criminal matters spanning over forty (40) years of representing thousands of poor citizens and winning many of such cases. This led me from the inception of my appointment in 2011 in inspiring the publication of a Compendium of High Court Judgements of cases defended by Legal Aid Officers to be compiled in books entitled, "*Legal Aid through the Cases.*" The agencies in the criminal justice sector especially the Nigerian Prison Service, the Judiciary and



the Police Force whose members have worked with the Council can attest to the hard work most of the LAC Lawyers put into representing Awaiting Trial Persons.

To me, it would be imperative if not instructive to distinguish the operative Legal Aid Act, 2011 from the Legal Aid Act of 1976. On examination, it will be clear that the composition of the Board remains essentially the same with the legal qualification for being appointed a Chairman of the Board. The representation of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) now has four representatives, one of which must be the General Secretary. The 1976 Act merely stated that five other interests not otherwise represented should also be appointed to the Board. This ambiguity was cleared by the 2011 Act which specified the other “interests” as being;

- I. A representative of a women’s group providing free legal aid services.
- II. Two representatives of States sponsoring legal aid services.
- III. A representative of a civil society based organization providing legal aid.
- IV. A representative of the Nigerian Union of Journalists.

For the first time, a specific mandate was given to the Council to also maintain a register of Non-Governmental Organisations and Law Clinics that are actively engaged in the provision of legal aid or assistance and also partner or engage the services of such organizations. Hitherto, this partnership was only allowed with private legal practitioners and lawyers doing their National Youth Service. The private legal practitioners were also entitled to be empanelled or registered to offer *pro*

*bono* services. In addition, the 2011 Legal Aid Act mandates the Council to keep records of such cases and monitor their progress. Another novel innovation of the new Act was that a legal practitioner who had applied to be appointed to the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) shall be required to show evidence of diligent conduct of not less than three *pro bono* cases in the legal year immediately preceding his application.

The Council is also mandated, from time to time, to conduct inspection of prisons, police cells and other places where suspects are held in order to assess the circumstances under which such persons were detained.

For the public to understand the mandate of the Council and why a poor and vulnerable person is entitled to free services of legal aid lawyers, the true story below suffices.

A defence lawyer does not represent an offender just for the sake of representation, but they do so in order that his right to fair hearing is assured. This is a fundamental human right and based on all evidence presented to the court a decision is made; this is entirely left to the magistrate as the case maybe.

### ***A TRUE STORY***

*Nine accused persons were arraigned before a Magistrate Court at 4 Audu Bako Secretariat, Kano for an alleged offence of robbery. The 1<sup>st</sup> accused person Saminu Yahaya was a brick layer working for one influential politician in Kano who owned a building project in Kano metropolis. He hired Saminu Yahaya who he authorised to hire the services of eight other labourers*

*to work with him on the project. The politician travelled for about three weeks without giving money to Saminu to pay the labourers who were supposed to be paid daily. Saminu Yahaya was therefore put under serious pressure by the other labourers for their money. At a point they started suspecting him of diverting their money and he was forced to make a call to his master and put his phone on speaker in their presence where the man promised to come on that day to pay the accrued amount. They waited up to evening but he did not show up. This made Saminu Yahaya to call again for more confirmation if he would come that day but he did not show up.*

*Coincidentally and without the knowledge of the other labourers and Saminu Yahaya, a group of unknown armed robbers visited the politician's house in the early hours of the next day and robbed the occupants. Because of the numerous calls from Saminu Yahaya on that fateful day enquiring if he was coming to pay workers, the politician now suspected Saminu Yahaya. Upon his arrival he reported to the police and asked them to arrest Saminu Yahaya and his co-workers. They were actually arrested and transferred to SARS. However, fate was on their side because the actual thieves were later caught upon a report from a Good Samaritan. The thieves were arrested and they confessed to the crime however the complainant still wanted Saminu Yahaya and his co-labourer punished due to some very strange reasons, he probably harboured grudges against them.*

*The case of Saminu Yahaya and others was brought to the notice of the Legal Aid Lawyers who visited the Kano Central*

*Prison where they had remained remanded and they were successfully represented. Their representation started from the lower court up to the High Court leading to their bail then final discharge and acquittal.*

That the case went through its course enabling them to be discharged and acquitted shows the importance of lawyers representing the poor *pro bono*. If these poor and vulnerable victims were not given voice, they would have suffered more for a crime they did not commit.

## **CHAPTER 5**

“A LEADER IS ONE WHO KNOWS THE WAY, GOES THE WAY AND SHOWS THE WAY” (JOHN C. MAXWELL)

*For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Habakkuk 2:3*

The Legal Aid Council’s vision statement promises: “*To build a Nigerian nation where there is equal access to justice for all irrespective of means and where all rights are respected, protected and defended*”. Visions come in different dimensions and should encompass all aspects of one’s life. In this case, I had to understand the Council’s vision as the official vision in terms of access to justice for the poor in Nigeria and to run with it. This vision needed the voice of a leader to understand and actualise it for the poor and vulnerable, its prime target.

A leader must first know and tread the requisite path in order to get the buy-in of the followership so that in showing them the way, they would follow convincingly. The poor are not only helpless but voiceless. Due to a long term exposure to poverty, they do not know how to get justice when their rights are trampled upon and in the much touted social contract between governments and citizens; there is a sense of lack of social justice which is said to be non-justiciable in the Nigerian constitution. Thus, institutions need to synergize with civil

society groups to give voice to voiceless citizens which can help to drive a just and even-handed citizen's engagement.

My first year in the Legal Aid Council, Nigeria, I spent a lot of time getting my staff to understand that mission and vision gives impetus to the mandate of the Council. I explained, for example, that under its criminal jurisdiction, it gives a template to its lawyers to go to prisons and other places of pre-trial detention to ascertain the Awaiting Trial Persons (ATPs) in need of the Council's attention and the charges proffered by the police in order to provide qualitative legal representation to those who cannot afford it. However, it cannot be overemphasized that it was due to the long standing recruitment errors in the past that the number of legal staff recruited by government had been far too few to legally represent the teeming poor in such a highly populated country as Nigeria. This was one challenge to the expanded scope of the Council as encapsulated in the Legal Aid Act 2011 and required ingenious thinking and innovative actions and responses to contain.

One of the most important resolutions that the Management of LAC came up with in studying the implications of the expanded scope imposed by the new Act, was the need to restructure the Council. This resolution was accepted by consensus but needed funding which was not readily available due to budgetary constraints. Fortunately for the Council, help came when development partners included the Council as one of the most important agencies in the criminal justice sector where reforms were necessary. This coincided with the new Act.

Intensive engagement with various development partners led to the commencement of detailed interrogation of the very high number of awaiting trial persons on remand in various prisons across Nigeria. Before these engagements with development partners, there had been the need to bridge the gap in the number of legal and non-legal staff through recruitment because the non-legal staff had tripled the number of legal officers. It was also imperative to design a programme to convert the non-legal staffs who were not employed as professional Accountants or Secretaries by the Council. This was agreed to especially as these Development Partners promised free training programmes which came to fruition after all the processes of logistics and procurements were done.

LAC's Management had to embark on advocacy to enlighten the staff so they could understand the new Act that had been put in place. The non-legal staffs were also needed to implement the mandate in more meaningful ways than their usual routine so a new mind-set and buy-in was necessary by all staff to guarantee great success. The staff was informed about the programme called "Paralegalism" and told that the training was designed to build their capacity as paralegals, so that they would understand what it meant to be a legal assistant.

My view is that non-professional staff in specialised parastatals should be made to understand that they must make themselves relevant to the mandate of their parastatals otherwise they would not be happy and may become redundant and lapse into depression. The training programmes also included the legal staff because the expanded scope of the new Act gave the

Council a new mandate in civil matters; therefore they needed to be trained in mediation and alternative dispute resolution.

Those of us who have worked as civil servants know that there are always saboteurs in every system. Even with the best of intentions, some civil servants do not have the desired mindset to contribute meaningfully to the success of their institutions. Rather, they are either too lazy or could not be bothered if the institution progresses or retrogresses especially now that salaries are paid through the new e-payment system platform. I had to contend with lazy and mischievous workers but was careful not to allow them distract me from the important task of carrying the Council to a higher level. I am happy that by the time I completed my tenure the majority of the staff had understood the intricacies of the mandate and consequently most of them desired to avail themselves of the programmes and trainings required to become paralegals. There was a remarkable increase in productivity as cooperation and harmony had been strengthened in the offices.

As we expected, some staff refused to imbibe the ethos of discipline and hard work but their number was too insignificant to influence the good ones. At the outset of my tenure I undertook a schedule of familiarisation tours which eventually led me to visit 33 out of the 36 States Offices. I also went to some Local Government Areas where the Council had established Law Clinics in order to meet with out-station staff as well as relevant Stakeholders. In some State Offices, I met some aged staff who had been recruited as junior staff over twenty years before with little or no relevant skills. According to them,



they made themselves relevant by learning typing skills and became the official typists that typed monthly returns and other vital documents and dispatched these from their offices to different departments and units of the Headquarters through the Director General's office. I am recounting this story to highlight the true spirit of good civil servants who are in the majority. My opinion is that sometimes, we Nigerians are too hard on ourselves. We tend to generalise and offer negative comments implicating everyone whereas it is only a few people that are guilty. Many civil servants are sincere and hardworking and do not steal money from the public till nor do they abuse their offices. I discovered that in some offices there were two or more of such dedicated secretarial staff while some offices had none. At the management level, I raised the fact that there was over staffing in some offices while others were understaffed. Consequently, the staffs were reposted with their consent. The transfers resulted in equitable staff distribution and the management soon noticed improvement in the quality of staff output and performance.

My greatest desire was for these experienced staff, especially the women, to transfer their skills to the younger staff and to commend their attitude of seriousness at work to them and pass down historical facts about the council because they had institutional memory. However, I discovered that most of the younger staffs that had the benefit of equipping themselves with computer knowledge were not willing to become proficient in ICT so as to offer services to the Council, and if they were proficient, they refused to admit it to avoid assisting in the

office typing duties. Rather they preferred to remain idle and browse social media platforms. When we in management discovered this, it reinforced our resolve to restructure the Council, and implement training programmes that would aid the conversion of such staff to paralegals in order to improve their ability to assist lawyers.

I must confess that my experience in interfacing with Development Partners who came to assist the reformation of our justice sector played a definitive role in moving the Council forward. Most of the development partners committed both personnel and finances to assist Third World countries to improve the justice sector by carrying out vital reforms. I opened my mind to learning what it took to render effective social services to the poor with respect to the mandate of the Council and discovered that the process of giving legal aid was fraught with more technicalities than appeared at first. The Council's interface with developing partners was also an eye opener for both the legal officers and the non-legal staff who attended various workshops and training programmes. The management noted that a remarkable sense of harmony developed among both legal and non-legal staff. This had not been so in the past as one group was very reluctant to assist the other in any way because they regarded it as derogatory for graduates of another discipline to go to the prisons to get information to assist lawyers to get processes ready to defend the poor. After the training, they realised that such collaboration was the kind of reform that was necessary to achieve the Council's mandate.

### ***WORKING WITH WORLD BANK EXPERTS***

I met two amazing western trained lawyers who were supervising a World Bank Project entitled, “Access to Justice for the Poor in Civil Matters.” They did the pilot project in Kaduna State. The senior, was named Mr Nick Menzies and he worked with Ms Eva Melis (who later married) and was his junior colleague. The Council won the project on merit a few months before I started work, after submitting an application as did other non-governmental organizations. The Council won as the lead agent to execute the project because it had better infrastructure and was described as low on corruption. Let me admit that serendipity played out, again because I was fortunate to be the Head of Council when the project commenced and therefore met the World Bank experts on their first visit to Nigeria. It was therefore, providential that I worked with them through the full cycle of the project. The project was engaging and repositioned the Council for performance beyond its scope. One cannot thank God enough for the great exposure and opportunities given to the Director General, Management and Staff. The project exposed beneficiaries to modern knowledge on the technicalities of giving legal aid. Therefore, we tapped from their experience in the field of providing legal aid for access to justice for the poor. Their sheer energy spurred us on to having better competence especially in giving legal aid in civil matters. You would recall that I had said that the Council was not versed in taking up civil matters in the past as its mandate did not extend to civil matters. However, since

the new Act had already come into place by the advent of the World Bank Project and it included the civil jurisdiction, the needed help just came at the right time as the staff needed training for this aspect of law, which was providing legal aid in civil matters. This led to the acquisition of skills in Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution.

The top Management staff of the Council also benefitted from this training. It was hard work but very interesting. All of us were kept on our toes to change the old order and restructure both the workplace and our mind-set in order to be at par with the best global practices. The World Bank supervisors were very thorough and at the same time this project was on-going they were also supporting similar projects in about four other developing countries. Each time they arrived for their supervisory duties in Nigeria they did not fail to share the good results of each of the other projects in other countries that they were involved in with us. After two years of these projects all countries with similar projects nominated four members of staff who had participated in the project, to travel out of their countries on sponsorship for a training workshop which took place in Catalina, Mexico it was an exchange programme consisting of training workshops whose highlights involved information-sharing of each country's experiences on their projects.

At the workshop, Legal Aid Council Nigeria was adjudged one of the best institutions that participated in these projects. There were different criteria used in scoring each participating

country. One country's experience was its usage of mobile clinics in rural areas and market places to get the poor to access justice easily while another country was good in case management. As a pragmatic person, Ms Eva Melis ensured that the head of another country's legal aid institution adjudged the best in case management was brought to Nigeria to conduct a workshop for the Council's Staff on case management. The training was for all Senior Heads of the Council's State Offices and the Department of Planning and Research which had a good number of trained statisticians. This particular workshop was a "Train the Trainers Workshop." Therefore, the participants were empowered with requisite knowledge and skills to train the appropriate staff in their offices. They were assisted by the statisticians who later went round to all the offices in the six zones while all the officers in state offices in charge of case management went to each group in the zones for training as a cost saving device. I had instituted a policy that top Management Staff must always show commitment by attending opening and closing ceremonies of most of the workshops conducted by Development Partners. Their attendance encouraged Development Partners to do more for the Council in subsequent years. It also afforded LAC Management the opportunity to meet more often with our staff from the states and we used the opportunity to hear from them at first-hand, the challenges confronting them and helped management monitor their progress.

### ***DETAIL OF IMPORTANCE OF WORLD BANK PROJECT***

Ms Eva Melis, a lawyer, encompassed what I would call a modern day whiz kid. She was very good at multi-tasking; and she combined her legal background with an unusual knowledge of ICT and statistics, an aspect that was self-developed. In my opinion, she was very pragmatic. The technical approach that she taught us was three pronged: First, that there must be a robust awareness programme, both in the print and electronic media and also in the native language of the community we were working in while also taking into cognisance the local communication methods used by native indigenes. This entailed working with local groups and a media coordinator to ensure media participation that fully exposed the project to the beneficiaries. Second, there must be advocacy and courtesy visits to important stakeholders in the states where the council had its offices, especially the appropriate government officials, traditional rulers at all levels up to the rural communities in order to incur less resistance and suspicion by the locals. Essentially, the stakeholders helped to sensitize members of their communities to understand the meaning of giving legal aid to the poor, our projects. The project in reference was also supported by the appointment of 10 local Non-Governmental Organizations. This collaboration was followed up with several meetings and training workshops for greater understanding between the provider of the service and the beneficiaries and the outcome was overwhelming. The World Bank as represented by Ms. Eva Melis ensured that there was a befitting closing ceremony where awards were given to the most hardworking

groups and individuals who aided the project and distilled the entire report of the project into a book that detailed the role of the Council. Third, all such works done must be translated to data. The daily work done in carrying out legal representation, mediation and legal right education to the poor is enormous and if not preserved in relevant data formats would be difficult to keep as evidential records for the future and it would be difficult to convince anyone that such a magnitude of work was done in the past. Finally we also learnt that all data mined; from the 20 Local Government Areas of the pilot project in Kaduna state were important data to complete data for the Council. The reason being that, since it was the Council's staff members that were deployed in the numerous projects piloted by the Council, whatever work was done were to be translated into data for the Council.

Various forms of knowledge were exposed to LAC's Management team and the Director General and that would form the subject matter of another book. We learnt that by patiently interacting with traditional leaders such as emirs, district heads, village heads and religious heads, men, women youths and children, the educated and non-educated and others concerned, meant we learnt about the traditions and cultures of each community. Their reactions to the methodology of the project and acceptance of what it entailed; the sincerity of purpose of both State and non-State actors who took part in these projects made the project a resounding success. The narrative of LAC for a long time was that the media that had been relied upon to help

the public understand the work of LAC needed data for evidence but were not getting it therefore did little reporting.

In this project a lot of data was generated from all the work in the field. From briefings given to me, I realised that LAC had only been partially computerised a few years before my resumption of duties. The partial computerisation had been supported by a British Council Department called the Justice for All (J4A). The development partners aided the Council to essentially change data reporting from the manual format that necessitated too much paper work and was fraught with fraudulent statistics, into reporting it via electronic form in the mid-2000s. Automation of data had taken the Council the better part of about 30 years of its existence to achieve. The major upgrade was achieved through the intervention of this World Bank sponsored project and other similar assistance. The importance of working with data cannot be over emphasized as it quickly shows successes and failures in service delivery and allows management to take decisive proactive steps to improve on its service delivery and become more efficient. Fortunately several more upgrades have since taken place.

According to Ms Eva Melis, since the Council's mandate was to give specialized provision of legal aid to the poor, the importance of the project she came to supervise would be wasted if it was not also used to beam a light on the Council's Structures and Programmes with the view to restructuring it for such an important service delivery. I appreciated her sincere assessment because it helped LAC's Management team see that criticism was coming from an international expert and the staff



readily accepted it more than if I, as the Chief Executive Officer, had made such proposition. Eva Melis' proposition not only fast tracked the job of restructuring; it eased all the challenges that would have arisen. The top Management team not only cooperated in the critical restructuring, it ensured that it trickled down to their subordinate staff because they convincingly explained that a change was inevitable if the Council was to emerge as a modern legal aid provider. Eva Melis saw the weaknesses and strengths of the Council staff and turned things around by encouraging staff to continue with the good programmes that had worked well for the Council and to adopt global best practices being used worldwide to improve on the good practices for good service delivery, and to jettison unprogressive methods.

Under my watch as Director General, we had developed a measurement tool called "Client Comment Card." It was a form designed to be issued to any client who walks into the office for legal assistance. After they would have been guided through the process of stating their grievances by either a paralegal and or a lawyer and the client needed to make a formal application (and if an illiterate, she or he is assisted by the staff); the application includes a write up of the person's grievances and it is then passed on to a higher authority in the State, or Zonal Offices or the Director General at the headquarters for approval because the provision of the Act states that legal aid is only for those who earn the minimum wage or less. However, there is an official regulation on how another category of persons can be included. A civil servant who is dismissed from his job and has

lost his source of income and cannot afford to pay the services of a private practitioner, for example, can be given legal aid but, if successful, must pay 10 per cent of recovered salaries at the end of the matter. In most European countries, it is the magistrate that determines who is entitled to be given legal aid. After these applications, those seeking legal assistance are given the form to fill in order to ensure that they were satisfied with the services given, as a measure of good service delivery. This card is then given to the client who comments on it to show how satisfied he or she is with the services rendered.

Ms Eva Melis was impressed with this measurement tool and forwarded a sample to some of her colleagues at the World Bank Office for their input. This was aimed at adding or deleting clauses which did or did not elicit the required responses. Coming from a different environment, Melis' colleagues were surprised that the responses were mostly positive and that the clients even chipped in advice for the government to come to the aid of the Council by releasing more funds. I explained to them that most indigent persons in Nigeria were not aware that legal aid was free and if told prefer to be cynical and refuse to believe that government could provide free legal services to the poor because the notion was that lawyers charged exorbitant fees and were far removed from the poor people or were possibly overwhelmed by the fact that they are getting such free services. However, after examining our explanations about the Nigerian responses, they subjected the tools to thorough scrutiny and framed the questions more appropriately: They decided that a Client Comment Card No. 2 (two) was appropriate where it

would be administered again to the same client about six (6) months later if the same matter was still on hoping to elicit a more realistic response. Melis was impressed by this effort. I, too, was very impressed by the efforts they put into what appeared like a simple piece of paper. The outcome taught us how to ensure that such instruments were thoroughly scrutinized in future. She passed it through various tests with her colleagues at the World Bank and they demanded additional inputs from us to be sure it contained key items of such a tool. After this, a workshop was organised to train the front desk officers on how to welcome clients; interview them; help them apply for legal aid; then issue the cards to the walk-in clients after all the necessary services had been provided. As simple as it appeared, I have used this card to “show off” to other agencies that we possess such a measurement tool and this has stood us in good stead with the SERVICOM Department under the Presidency. During a supervisory visit, the delegation noted that we took service delivery very serious within the context of providing legal aid to the poor. They equally learnt that measuring tools should be tailored to the peculiarities of each institution because different institutions have different mandates. The Chief Executive Officer of each Institution needed to articulate tools like this to measure good service delivery to the public. It is on record that the office of SERVICOM under the Presidency has done well in getting Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to understand citizenship and know that they are entitled to good service delivery. I commend the Secretary to Government for giving this department the necessary support for

doing the job. I commend the Chief Executive in charge because they regularly visit MDAs for assessment. It is noteworthy that the Client Comment Forms, our tool of measurement, are being adopted by other Agencies. In this case, I commend the revolution in Ease of Doing Business Program initiated by the Federal Government through the Office of the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Data is not meant just for storage but acts as a check and balance for seeing the gaps and needs and to correct them. Since Ms. Melis was accomplished in data –interpretation, she encouraged LAC’s Statistics Department to always use data to interpret a lot of information and especially to know Gaps and Needs. She ensured that the Council’s database was upgraded with more modern software at no cost and initiated appropriate training for the Council’s Statisticians. Till date, LAC’s Staff still talk about the kind of hard work ethics that Ms Melis made the staff imbibe because hard work was her second nature. I was impressed by her fearlessness in visiting some rural local government areas where the projects were sited in Kaduna State even when reports of insecurity were rife. These personal visits encouraged our Kaduna State Staff to understand clearly the role the Council had to play for Access to Justice for the poor, as she often sat through one or two mediation sessions in order to critique or offer advice on how to improve and never failed to emphasize that the staff must record very detailed data with all parameters of age, gender, type of civil matter. These data could write the story of civil offences and identify which of them prevailed; their reasons for prevailing in certain areas more than

others and could lead to answers for dispute resolutions and engender the larger effects of peaceful co-existence in communities. I am fortunate to have met her and accepted her advice especially her attitude of making sure that good practice was enthroned in all LAC's offices across Nigeria. She believed in complete re-structuring and upgrading of the Council. The Management and staff appreciated the work and its outcomes in the final report. Towards the end of the project, she was assisted by Ms Victoria Esquivel-Korsiak her colleague from the World Bank. The two of them put their experience garnered from the project in a pictorial publication entitled "Engaging Citizens Through Mediation in Kaduna State, Nigeria".

## ***CHAPTER 6***

Among the powerful intellectuals who have influenced my life's journey is Dr. Uju Agomoh, the founder of Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare (PRAWA). She is academically sound and holds multiple degrees including a Ph.D. She had done extensive empirical research for many years in the course of building up PRAWA long before I met her. Some of her areas of concern included but were not limited to the necessary reforms that should be carried out for the justice sector to serve the poor and vulnerable, and the phenomenal problem of congestion and decongestion of prisons. She possesses a very clear understanding of the criminal justice sector and the reforms required especially for prisons in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. This is also related to articulating the vision and mandate of any Nigerian Department, Agency or Parastatal that must institute reforms because of their links to the prisons service. Such institutions include the Police, the Legal Aid Council and the Judiciary. I hope that Dr. Agomoh will tell her own story some time fully, especially about her work on prison reforms in Nigeria, in a biography. In my opinion she has a lot of experience of what each of the different agencies in the criminal justice sector needs to do to reform or restructure

according to their mandates, and in order to synergise with one another to achieve the desired success in prison decongestion.

I got to also know at first-hand as we worked together on reforms for LAC that she held her own internationally in issues about Prison Services at both the regional and continental levels of operations and was highly respected by the association of Principal Prison Officials all over Africa. I discovered that she was regarded as a Consultant and Specialist by those she interacted with at meetings and training workshops where she shared her competence on matters of prison reform.

She opened up to me the type of reforms that agencies in the criminal justice sector needed to undertake to achieve their mandates in order to bring Nigeria to the forefront in global best practices in prison reforms. She has worked extensively with the Ministry of Justice with certain committees on justice reforms, Legal Aid Council, Prisons, Police, Judiciary, and other Parastatals and always advise developmental partners on how government agencies in the justice sector are important and key to justice reform; and that Donor agencies must focus on such agencies in order to get better results. She insists that this is better than empowering Non-Governmental Organisations alone and that if the right support was given by developmental partners to such government agencies, their capacities would be developed. She stated that the Legal Aid Council has the foremost repository of Defence Lawyers for Awaiting Trial Persons in Nigeria. She has worked tirelessly to help the Council achieve this mandate by offering technical support.

My encounter with her occurred shortly after I resumed as the Director-General. I was invited by key Management staff of the Council to a Quarterly Meeting with the Management of the Nigerian correctional Service (NCS). The former Controller General of Prisons and his Management team had an initiative whereby some State Controllers of Prisons were invited to a special meeting in order to give their Quarterly Reports of their services as well as their challenges in order to update the Management about successes and failures.

These meetings were extended to stakeholders such as the Legal Aid Council. Non-Governmental Organisations engaged in the provision of legal aid to Awaiting Trial Persons were also invited. This was an interactive meeting designed to jointly resolve common issues and proffer solutions. These meetings have since been converted to Administration of Criminal Justice Monitoring Committee mandated by the Administration of Justice Criminal Act 2015. At that meeting Dr. Uju Agomoh briefed everyone on the reforms that PRAWA, had carried out for the Nigeria Prisons Service in some states. She also spoke of a report on a Regional Prison Officers meeting by some senior officers. After concluding her presentation, I was introduced to her as the new Director-General of the Council by my then colleague, Mrs. Edith Agbakoba who has since been appointed a Judge of the National Industrial Court (NIC). I am grateful for the assistance she gave to me in settling into my job and knowing the mechanism and dynamics of the administration of the Council.



Dr Uju Agomoh happily acknowledged me and asked a pertinent question, “Madam have you done a mapping of the ‘needs’ and ‘gaps’ from the angle of legal representation that your Council offers to Awaiting Trial Persons?” She then expressed concern about the Council’s lack of capacity to give adequate representation. Dr. Agomoh’s statement and my earlier encounter with the World Bank officials for a timely project put me on my toes to get to work immediately regarding the importance of a proper restructuring in the Council. I knew that being a Director General was not a tea party. I understood that my job as the Director General of the Legal Aid Council whose mandate was to give legal representation to the poor, vulnerable and voiceless in Nigeria who could not afford their own legal representation was a serious business and this placed a burden on me. I took the discussion with an open mind and humbled myself to take lessons from experts in the justice sector. In order to discharge this function to the best of my ability and in spite of the many challenges I discovered at the Council, it dawned on me that there was a technical aspect to the work of giving legal aid apart from being the accounting officer.

As soon as I got to the office, I invited Mrs. Agbakoba to discuss mapping, needs and gaps. I told her that I was very serious minded and hated being ignorant of subjects that I should be conversant with. I said that I hated arrogance and that my experience in various spheres of life had taught me that to get the best out of life one needed to be humble and have a teachable spirit.

This set the tone for my cordial relationship with now Hon. Justice Agbakoba. We collaborated on doing research on access to justice in relation to mapping of gaps and needs. We made other Management Staff see the need to understand the new Legal Aid Act 2011. This is a lesson to leaders. Leaders should try to have broad and in-depth knowledge of their mandate so that when accosted by the media, civil society groups and foreigners they are not embarrassed. It is embarrassing when reporters ask vital questions about one's office and one cannot answer those questions adequately. I worked hard to understand the Council's mandate in access to justice for the poor, and I have always tried to disseminate information properly in public discourse.

My next meeting with Dr. Uju Agomoh was at a programme where she did consultancy for another donor agency and the Legal Aid Council. At that time she had been engaged to consult on behalf of a development partner with the council for an upcoming project where, she explained the concept of their work plan to the Management Staff and linked the import of that particular work plan to Access to Justice. She emphasised that S.18 (1) of the Legal Aid Act meant that Legal Aid Council was a Clearing House. On the concept of Clearing House, I led the other participants in asking relevant questions. After this, Dr. Agomoh and I developed a very strong professional relationship. In addition, I grew the required network and attracted Development Partners to want to support the Council in reforms such as this because I had my work defined by my passion to achieve.

Encounters with development partners and experts who undertook to work with the Council for better service delivery made serious demands on our integrity and commitment which should not end with their short engagements with us but remain as part of our social contract with those we serve. As Heads of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), we should seize such opportunities to partner with them because national resources were dwindling and government could not meet every need of every institution as we accelerate the enthronement of best world's practice. Therefore, the donor agencies that voluntarily bring in funds are relevant in developing our institutions.

If an institution refuses partnership of this nature it usually ends up isolating itself and losing good opportunities to achieve maximum performance. In my opinion, the head of any institution needs to have a thorough knowledge of what the Act setting up the institution entails and discover the most urgent interventions required so that when the donor agencies and consultants come over, he or she would be assertive on the needs and gaps to fill. No two institutions are created to have the same mandate and a Donor Agency cannot claim the interventions are a one-size fits all. Gradually this is being respected.

## ***A VISIT TO FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE***

### ***The Reform of Prison Continued***

In 2014, I started arranging a trip to Sierra Leone after getting an informal invitation by two Directors of their Ministry of Justice that I had earlier been introduced to at a Harvard University Workshop on Justice Sector Reforms in Developing Nations by some of the world bank supervisors that I had worked with in Nigeria and who had facilitated my invitation to the workshop. They wanted me to visit their newly established Legal Aid Sierra Leone Temporary Office because their Legal Aid Act was enacted in 2012 but implementation was not until 2014, Unfortunately, I had not found the right time to go but had mentioned it to Dr Uju Agomoh. Responding, she told me that the Sierra Leonean Government in conjunction with their Prison Service would soon be celebrating One Hundred Years anniversary of Freetown Central Prison and that it would be more interesting if my visit to Sierra Leone coincided with this programme. She said that the Prison Service would be happy to meet me as Director General of Legal Aid Council, Nigeria. For me, it was killing two birds with one stone which meant that I would celebrate this millennium year of Prison Service in Sierra Leone and also visit the new Legal Aid Office. This workshop at Harvard Kennedy School was sponsored by British Council DFID that had given the Law Faculty a project to conduct research on indicators in different departments in the justice sector of several developing countries that were implementing the project. The Nigerian participants were multiple in their participation, they included the Directorate of Public

prosecutor's Office, in the Ministry of Justice, Lagos, Nigeria and the Director General of the Legal Aid Council, Nigeria. It was a promise being fulfilled as I was excited to visit Sierra Leone, for the first time.

Going to Sierra Leone was a beautiful experience. I was excited to visit a former Slave Trade Port that is now a sovereign African Country. Sierra Leone was also just emerging from an eleven year civil war, therefore establishing a Legal Aid Office was very important to the country. It was very interesting to note that flights by air, landed outside Freetown and passengers had to get to Freetown by either helicopter or speedboats right on the Atlantic Ocean.

We chose to travel by speedboat because we were used to travelling by speedboats in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. I often travelled to the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Industry (NLNG) located in Bonny by such boats. At Freetown, I basked in officialdom as Dr. Uju Agomoh was welcomed in grand style as a special visitor and since I was with her, the welcome party also respected and extended their warmth to me and this continued throughout the weekend we spent there. I realized how important she was regarded to prison reforms in the regional and continental meetings of prison officials in Africa. I was given VIP treatment with her as the Sierra Leone Prison Service celebrated One Hundred Year of its oldest Prison by the High Command of the Prisons Service at a welcome party.

There was an opening ceremony where she ensured that I prepared and read my paper on "Over-crowding in Prisons." This started with a welcome parade and a show by prisoners

who had acquired skills in different trades such as carpentry, sewing and paintings. A dinner party was later organized after a tour of the prison facilities for the visitors as part of the celebration of the activities. The dinner party was very relaxing, where we met with different Heads of Prison Services of many West-African Countries who were able to attend as well as dignitaries from the country's public and private sectors. From the excited greetings between Dr. Uju Agomoh and them, it was obvious they were familiar with one another and from the conversations I was privileged to learn that they all belong to International Prison Officers Association at regional and continental levels. Dr. Uju Agomoh was one of their Consultants at the International Prison Officers Association forum. In Africa, the Prison Services are well organized and have shown the intentions of working towards reforming the relics that the colonial government bestowed on the continent. I learnt they hold annual meetings at the sub-regional levels and at continental levels in which she is highly regarded as an expert in Prison Reforms. This good example is worthy of emulation by other agencies in the Justice Sector. In the West Africa sub-region, only three countries have and operate Legal Aid. They include Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana. Others operate as departments of citizens' rights of ministry of justice. The heads of the Legal Aid of Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana met at an International Legal Aid Conference in South Africa and tried to form a regional body but it is yet to fully materialize and work. I also noted that Ghana runs Legal Aid as Citizens' Rights Department in its Ministry of Justice.

This trip to Sierra Leone afforded me the long desired opportunity to visit the Ministry of Justice where I was welcomed by the Hon. Attorney General and other Directors. They told me that they worked with development partners, initially on viable projects which helped to accelerate access to justice, especially in war torn areas where the need to intervene with judicial process was urgent. As at that time, Sierra Leone had just slightly over one hundred lawyers compared to Nigeria's over one hundred thousand. Their partners encouraged them to bridge the gap by starting a paralegal scheme as well. I gave some useful information on how Legal Aid in Nigeria was set up and being run. The Legal Aid Act of Sierra Leone was enacted in May 2012 and run by a Board with the acronym LAB (Legal Aid Board). It is chaired by an Honourable Justice of the Superior Court of Sierra Leone with a Secretariat headed by an Executive Director.

In 2017, I attended the International Legal Aid Conference in South Africa and met the current Executive Director of Sierra Leone Legal Aid, Mrs Fatmata Claire Carlton-Hanciles. The report she gave was extensively discussed during the Conference and it showed that she was doing a tremendous job with the Board and working to improve access to justice in her country.

### ***TRAINING TAILORED TO PROFESSIONALISM***

I was bailed out of the tight corner of sourcing resources for training and building up capacity of the staff in the massive and

timeous manner it was needed through the interventions of international donor agencies. Having studied the new Act and agreed that a shift in paradigm was necessary they came on board with training tailored to carry out the new functions imposed by the new Act. The new Act gave the Council jurisdiction for the first time to take up civil matters in the same way it did criminal matters. For 30 years the Council had trained its lawyers to be proficient in criminal matters and representing mostly Awaiting Trial Persons (ATP) who could not afford the services of private lawyers. The ATP persons are remanded in Nigerian prisons and this congests the prisons. These lawyers of the council were for a very long time good in representing ATPs but had not been as proficient in Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution as necessary for most conflicts arising from civil matters. They also needed to update themselves with more modern knowledge on criminal law procedures especially with the new Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 which intended to harmonise the penal code and the criminal laws that hitherto were operating in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria, respectively.

I owe a lot of gratitude to The World Bank and United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime as well as other developmental partners under the British Council that supported these training programmes which cut across legal and non-legal staff in trainings such as Paralegalism and ICT. This, to a large extent, assisted in motivating the staff and reducing industrial disharmony between Staff and Management.



## ***GETTING CONTINUOUS TRAINING FROM LEGAL AID SOUTH AFRICA***

I had the unique opportunity of undertaking a working visit to Legal Aid, South Africa as soon as I assumed the post of Director General. This working duty was to understudy the structure and general running of their Council. I was impressed by their response and readiness to take our team through their organogram and generally on how they operated to record so much success which was measurable by their available statistics. We were given a guided tour of both their Administrative Headquarters and the main Office in Johannesburg.

They also run a model based on paying salaries to lawyers who, in turn, give free services, which is the same model that is adopted in Nigeria. This was different from the Judicare Model that they historically started with. They copied the Judicare Model from the United Kingdom, and according to them, it was not so successful and it also drained their resources. Theirs differs from Nigeria's because they run a Parliamentary System of Government and appoint an Executive Board of Directors; that run the Council with an Executive Director who manages the day-to-day running of the Board while the Board takes all proposals to the Justice Minister who vets it thoroughly and takes it to Parliament. What is important is that all their requests are granted which allows them to achieve much of their mandate, yearly. This is in contrast to what obtains in Nigeria where most parastatals have a Non-Executive Governing Board that ensures that policies are carried out but similar in that the day to day running of the Council is handled by the Director-

General while the Board does not interfere in the day to day running of the Council. So, whether there is a Board in place or not the Council is able to run itself.

They have 2,500 lawyers and over 100 paralegals and other support staff for a population of about 50 million people, compared to Nigeria's Legal Aid Council's 270 lawyers to give free services to a population of nearly 200 million people. The first trip to South Africa reinforced my vision of seeing Nigeria's Legal Aid Council become the best it could in carrying out its vision, mission and mandate. Immediately I came back, I put some workable and practical items in place. These include providing more details in the legal aid manual. I ensured that each Lawyer was given a personal copy to follow strictly in attending to clients. It also strengthened my resolve to pioneer a successful Paralegal Scheme in Nigeria by starting with the Legal Aid Council's non-legal staff. Later, I visited South Africa several times for Legal Aid Conferences because I believe in exposing staff to knowing that they needed to properly run their establishment. I needed the support Staff of the Legal Aid South Africa for the changes that needed to take place during my watch. I ensured that I did this by sending Senior Legal Staff from state offices in batches to understudy best practices in running legal aid offices. I am very grateful to the authorities of South Africa's Legal Aid for allowing our staffs access their offices which enabled Nigeria's Legal Aid Council's Staff to be educated on important aspects of giving legal aid for practical use.

I had to deal with the challenging problem of the low number of lawyers who had to carry out this enormous mandate of providing free legal representation to the poor and vulnerable. I found only 80 lawyers in the Council and I had to take steps to increase their number. I had noted that by a historical default, previous Management and Boards of Council were not careful enough to understand the enormous mandate which rested on the number of efficient lawyers that the Council had. With due respect to those capable men and women who grew the Council at that time, they did not appreciate the fact that non-legal staff were to give support services to the lawyers. Therefore, it was an error to recruit more non legal staff than legal staff. This brought about lop-sidedness and so much criticism from the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Judiciary and public in general about the Council. The Council was perceived as ineffective in the enormous task of representing the poor and vulnerable. There is the general Nigerian factor in all Ministries, Agencies and Departments of Government, which brings “pressures and bias in recruitment towards helping relatives and children of friends.”

I was very fortunate that a year after I resumed, the World Bank, a development partner assisted me in the capacity building of non-lawyers who were trained in rudiments of civil law mediation and alternative dispute resolution in order to be called paralegals. For the purposes of assisting lawyers in the offices, they were taught how to attend to clients who walk into our offices and write down their grievances while assisting those who cannot write to put them down formally in writing. They

were able to do simple mediation; however, a legal officer has to supervise the work.

In 2015, the World Bank also supported the training of 46 Lawyers who were trained by the Mediation Training Institute and the entire 46 became Chartered Conciliators and Mediators and have received membership of the Institute.

## ***CHAPTER 7***

### **RESTRUCTURING AND REFORMS UNDER MY WATCH**

My appointment as the Director General of Legal Aid Council came after the Council's thirty-four years in existence. However, in going through its vision, mission and mandate, I found that many of its activities did not conform to modern day practice of providing legal aid services. Its service delivery was far below average. As earlier indicated in this narrative, my encounter with the World Bank supervisors especially Ms Eva Melis and Dr Uju Agomoh of PRAWA sharpened my perspective on the things to do. I needed to quickly do two things to reposition the Council for effective, efficient and prompt service delivery: First, was to restructure the Council and secondly a new Legal Aid Bill was set to be passed by the two Houses in the National Assembly. However, it suffered some delay at the point of harmonization and I had to quickly follow up on it by working assiduously with Distinguished Senator Umaru Dahiru who was then the Chairman, Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters at the 6th assembly. I had earlier met him and other members of the Senate Committee at an oversight meeting conducted in the Conference Hall of the then Honourable Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice. The meeting is usually conducted for the Ministry and all its Parastatals. His opening speech showed that he was advocating for improving Access to

Justice for the poor in Nigeria. He was passionate about helping this section of the criminal justice sector to achieve its constitutional mandate for the poor and vulnerable in Nigeria through purposeful legislations for the sector. I am a witness to the fact that even after the Legal Aid Act 2011 was passed into law, the Distinguished Senator did not stop urging that strategic changes in the justice sector be established and that the best way was to push for implementations of the resolutions passed after public hearings for the different agencies in this sector.

Legal Aid Council was a beneficiary of the recommendations and resolutions and the most important aspect by both Committees on Justice in the National Assembly was that they were emphatic on the issue of decongestion of prisons. This was a sensitive issue. They were of the opinion that government should support the Council in its mandatory responsibility of the empanelling of private practitioners and giving out of cases concerning awaiting trial persons (ATP) to lawyers willing to take up Pro Bono services.

The new 2011 Act repealed the former Legal Aid Act of 1976 and set the stage for the restructuring of the Council. This required many other steps. After the 2011 Act was assented to, I quickly set up a Committee of very senior members of the Management with a timeline and terms of reference, part of which was to outline the main differences between the 1976 Act and the 2011 Act. I urged them to make recommendations on what the management was to do in order to effect changes that would reflect the mandates that the new Act had imposed on the Council.

The committee submitted its report with the outlined differences between the two Acts. The Committee report was enormous. The 2011 Legal Aid Act was innovative in increasing the scope of the Council's mandate to represent the poor and vulnerable in civil matters. The first was that the Council was not initially given the mandate to represent people in the areas of matrimonial, landlord/tenant, land, inheritance and financial matters under the 1976 Act. This meant that the staff of the Council especially the lawyers did not take up civil matters except fundamental rights applications and they could not improve on their skills in civil matters over the years rather, they perfected their skills in criminal matters. The new act has now imposed this on the Council and made Management realize that it had become compulsory for the Council Lawyers to take up civil matters. This meant that the lawyers needed to be retrained in this aspect of law. In addition, the Council needed to adopt modern trends in Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution in the resolution of civil matters rather than resorting to adjudication. The first challenge that stared me in the face was funding. The cost of retraining staff would be enormous. As the accounting officer, I had already begun experiencing the issue of low funds being appropriated for training of staff. The Management was confronted with impending danger this would create for the Council because if clients that wanted services in the area of civil defence such as resolving of marital or landlord and tenant problems where mediatory skills were required were not given in a timely manner using internationally set standards then the Council's capacity to implement the enlarged scope of

this new act would be questioned by the public who were entitled to such services. The Management was worried about how relevant staff would be adequately prepared for their new roles. Funding for building up their capacity became a serious challenge. Luckily, providence came to our aid through support from some development partners.

I was bailed out of the tight corner of sourcing for funds for the various retraining programmes for building up capacity of staff in the massive and timeous manner needed through the interventions of international donor agencies. The Management quickly drew up the required training programmes to fit the competencies for carrying out the new functions imposed by the new Act. For the first time, the new Act gave the Council jurisdiction to take up civil matters in the same way as they were proficient in criminal matters. We also decided to retrain and update the competencies of lawyers with more knowledge on criminal law procedures especially with the new Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015, which intended to harmonise the penal code and the criminal laws that hitherto were operating in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria, respectively. The specialised training elevated the competencies of the Council's Lawyers and the best among them have become chartered conciliators and mediators, as well as becoming members of the institute that trained them. This was the outcome of timely supports from development partners. You would recall that it was earlier stated that the opportunity for the much required capacity building to cope with civil matters presented itself when a World Bank advertisement to implement



a project in Kaduna State, Nigeria presented itself about the same time the new Act was passed into law. It was through a transparent process that the Legal Aid Council was selected as the lead agent for the project piloted in Kaduna State using a grant by Japanese Development Fund. The Project was entitled, Access to Justice for the Poor in Civil Matters, to offer services in Civil Matters.

This World Bank supervised project was based on civil matters and by the time it started, the Council's 2011 Act had just been assented to and it expanded its scope to also defend clients in civil matters. The project supervisors were very excited about this because they found it easier to justify allocating funds from the project's funds to give the Council a major support in retraining and other activities to enhance the capacities of the staff to defending clients in more modern practice in civil jurisdiction. The Council appreciated them for ensuring that all the Councils' Lawyers participated in the well prepared retraining programmes while both legal and non-legal staff also got trained in Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution and in Paralegalism skills.

The second problem which was the foremost recommendation of the Committee was understaffing of lawyers. It was quite challenging. Lawyers remain pivotal to ensuring that the core mandate of the Council was fulfilled. I discovered that even though recruitment had been spread across the 36 states of the federation, the Council had only 80 Lawyers (compared to about 400 non-legal staff on its employment list) to carry out this enormous mandate especially with the enlarged

scope giving the 2011 Act. Therefore, I had to increase the number of Lawyers by working with the Human Resources Department of the Council. Through the Human Resources Department, the Council took time to get the maximum number of legal staff approved by the government by getting waivers from the different recruitment agencies. This move increased the number of Law Officers from 80 to 270 in order to bridge the existing gap. I hope future recruitment would be permitted to further bridge the deficit in the number of Legal Staff to combat the gap in legal representation.

The third step was to decide and outline the type of retraining programmes required to meet up with the extended scope of work mandated by the new Legal Aid Act, 2011.

### ***MORE PROFOUND REFORMS***

The World Bank project would remain a reference point and a benchmark in the history of the Legal Aid Council because the World Bank's Supervisors deposited a wealth of knowledge of strategies and tactics in providing legal aid to the poor. The pilot state for the project was Kaduna State but both the Management and Staff were involved in order to entrench best global practices of an edifying value. A major reform used in the project in the pilot State was to adopt a model known as Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM). This involved the establishment of many law centres in the many local government areas of Kaduna State. It is a mechanism based on empirical researches by World Bank Experts. It simply means a

formalized way of accepting and resolving complaints from aggrieved individuals or groups in these law centres strategically sited in local government areas so as to facilitate accessibility by reducing the cost of transportation. The Law centres were effectively run by trained Paralegals but supervised by some of the Council's Lawyers. This has proved to be a veritable tool of good service delivery. It has impacted resoundingly and has engendered sustainability. Literally, it has not restrained access and has quickly brought justice to the doorsteps of the poor and the vulnerable. As at that time, Management did not know that the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) model was a mechanism for establishing legal aid centres at the local government levels but soon realized that the Council had already started establishing such centres through the approval of appropriation by the Chairman and Members of the Committee on Justice of the House of Representatives. The Management had established a substantial number of Legal Aid Centres at some Local Government Areas before the Kaduna State Pilot Project started and continued establishing those centres till my tenure expired. Since capital appropriation has been earmarked for it, the establishment of Legal Aid Centres should continue until all the 774 Local Governments in Nigeria get, at least, one.

The 2011 Act also gave a third new mandate called Community Legal Services. This is to improve service delivery to the Grassroots. Establishing of centres was necessary for carrying out this new mandate.

In line with the Change Agenda of the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, the Federal Ministry of Justice recently launched the policy on Justice Reform for Nigeria which included reforms for Access to Justice for the poor through the Legal Aid Council. In its policy documents it validated three of the Council's reforms as being noteworthy despite human and financial challenges. The three are the Clearing House; the Paralegal Scheme; and the Police Duty Solicitors Scheme which will later be discussed in this book.

The Council's reforms are in line with the new United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially Goal 16 which is highlighted as PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS. Goal 16 mandates nations to provide Access to Justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This gave more impetus to the driving force already existing in the Council to reposition itself as a regional and continental class institution whose mandate is to give legal representation to the poor in Nigeria. There has been a major boost in the number of cases achieved due to strategic restructuring measures for improving the work ethics of the Council for better service delivery.

Another reform was in the area of Partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This made the Council to initiate, in 2016, the Legal Aid Providers Network through the support of another development partner OSJI, where a group of legal aid service providers drawn from across the nation agreed to synergise with the Council's Staff using the coordinating name "Legal Aid Providers Network." The scope of work of the

“Legal Aid Providers Network” is to enhance Access to Justice for pre-trial detainees. Legal Aid Council coordinates the group and has continued to encourage more of such organizations to key into the Network of Legal Aid delivery.

The restructuring also involved training most non-legal staff in the skill of paralegal work. The use of paralegals in Nigeria is novel and the Council is at the forefront of pioneering its establishment as a scheme. The 2011 Act empowers the Council to be a regulator of the practice of Paralegals in Nigeria in order to improve the accessibility of the poor and vulnerable to justice through education on rights violations and awareness programmes. With support from a number of Donor Agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations Office of Crime and Drugs as well as ROLAC the Council has benefited from capacity building in paralegal training for its non-legal staff.

The three years spent implementing this project helped the Council to kick-start a timely restructuring. First, it had an interactive session with all the Staff in order to get their buy-in. In the case of the Council, the staffs was made to understand that one of the Council’s mandates was a specialised one which involved giving legal services to the poor and vulnerable persons in Nigeria. Therefore, a restructuring was necessary to reposition staff for the demands which the expanded scope in mandate had imposed on the Council. It was stated that this would lead to the much needed improvements on service delivery in line with acceptable global best practices. The Council’s non-legal staff were given a lot of attention because they needed a change of mind-set on why they should be more

relevant to the mandate through training programmes that enable them work as Paralegals. This special training for the non-legal staff increased their capacity to attend to more aggrieved indigent citizens daily seeking the intervention of the Council. Looking back in time gives me joy that I was committed to these restructuring in that there is increased inclusiveness of the newly branded paralegal staff who are now able to interview clients more effectively and generally assist the lawyers by using their newly acquired skills in mediation while the lawyers now have more time to represent those clients who need adjudication in the courts. However, the Council's regulations stipulated that the actions taken by the non-legal staff must be cross checked and supervised by lawyers who have the final approval on the necessary actions to take for the clients.

Let me offer more insight into few of the many strategies used by the Council as a specialized institution for providing legal aid needs. One, awareness creation and sensitization for the grassroots citizens to enable them know their legal rights and that if such rights were infringed upon they have a right to seek redress through free legal assistance. Seeking legal redress by the poor and the vulnerable often seems impossible because they find it hard to believe that there were lawyers that offer free services. So, one of the Council's mode of operation had always been to expose its services at the grassroots through advocacy, sensitization and awareness-creation and educate them in local languages on their fundamental rights and tell them that when violations occur they can seek redness through

the Council. The World Bank project then revealed that a major driver to making this strategy very impactful and successful was funding strategic awareness programmes so that more poor and vulnerable persons would become aware and use the services given by the Council.

The Council gained more visibility through print and electronic media exposures in Nigeria and the Diaspora. Most of the time, I led the staff in giving interviews on Television and Radio Stations. Some of the TV and Radio programmes were call-in and therefore created opportunities for engaging directly with and interrogating those at the grassroots. In a more expanded scope, these programmes provided us the feel of an unexpected number of aggrieved persons who call in to ask questions bordering on the infringements of their rights and ways of seeking redress or resolutions. In the past, the Council could only afford a medium truck float with loud speakers and music to attract the attention of passers-by and use public address system (PAS) to explain its mandate. This float was always escorted by a procession of the Council's Staff supported by a few media houses for news coverage at nearby markets and motor parks and then possibly a radio talk with call-in facilities. The Management usually insisted that Staff at the State level provide these advocacies and awareness programmes and carry them out in all states simultaneously for greater effects on the public as well as use radio stations that had a relatively wider coverage, especially those using local languages to communicate to these grassroots listeners. But once the Council began the massive usage of Television and Radio as media

outlets with donor support,, it recorded farther mileage in awareness creation than it previously achieved in its pseudo manual methods. The difference was incomparable because the project deployed more and gave better results to what the Council was in the habit of doing once a year.

The advocacy, awareness and sensitization programmes in this project included collaboration with local community rulers and elders coupled with about 10 non-governmental groups known in their particular local government areas which were chosen through a transparent process. Their main job was to intensify the awareness programmes on legal education on people's fundamental human rights and how to seek redress when disputes occur. They then helped to direct aggrieved persons to the nearest legal clinics. One of such groups was a drama group that used its dexterity and drama exponents to act out short sketches in indigenous languages, on what to do, when conflicts arose rather than resorting to violence. All the collaborating partners were trained on how to use best practices in carrying out these assignments, according to their field of expertise as well as how to document their programmes for their various audience compositions in terms of gender and age. They were also taught to be prudent and give accurate account of financial expenses.



## ***CHAPTER 8***

### **RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER AGENCIES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SECTOR**

#### ***NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION***

Legal Aid Council (LAC) cannot operate in isolation from other agencies in the criminal justice sector otherwise it would not carry out its mandate successfully, At this point, it is proper to discuss LAC's relationship with other agencies and some vital non-governmental organizations usually referred to as non-state actors. In the course of my professional and sometimes, personal encounters with non-state actors, I came away with fundamental information that over time LAC's impact on the agencies and the agencies impact on LAC emerged in various ways which will be recounted shortly.

The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) is the professional umbrella body for all Lawyers called to the Nigerian Bar. Strictly speaking, it is not compulsory to be a member of NBA but all practising lawyers are expected to pay their practising fees. Therefore, many lawyers are automatically members of NBA. Public sector lawyers are not left out because they are either prosecutors from the Ministries of Justice or the Anti-Corruption Institutions or Defence lawyers just as in LAC. Legal Aid Council and other parastatals under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Justice are statutory members of NBA and must attend every Annual Bar Conference. The parastatals

are also invited as Observers to watch proceedings at the National Executive Council meetings (NEC) although they are not Statutory Members of NEC. The Council and similar parastatals are also expected to give annual reports of their yearly performance. This shows the serious extent that NBA Executives view the Business aspect of the Conference. Often, the NBA Executive insist that only the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the agency read their organisation's reports unless a compelling reason had been given for some other staff to stand in for them. There is a subsisting tradition of preventing any other staff from standing in and reading the report. I always read LAC's report till my tenure expired. As Lawyers, we show unflinching loyalty to the Bar. The parastatals under the Ministry of Justice such as LAC, Corporate Affairs Commission, Nigerian Law School, the Nigerian Law reform Commission, among others; have a direct effect on activities of lawyers. After each report, members of the Bar make useful contributions or ask pertinent questions in order to resolve contentious issues. This practice is commendable since institutions must be subjected to scrutiny and public accountability because the public is watching. In addition, such a practice has a semblance of peer review mechanism incorporated into it because lawyers are not easily swayed. Lawyers commend good performance just as they castigate slipshod work and standards. These conferences also serve as networking avenues because they offer the platform for meeting and learning from Honourable Judges; Honourable Attorneys General; and the hierarchy of both the Ministry of Justice and

the Judiciary of the different states. This opportunity is particularly helpful to LAC because LAC has offices in 36 states of the federation. It is better to have good relationships with senior and experienced legal luminaries so as to be able to continuously promote access to justice in their states

The Council's other very important role with the Bar is to collaborate with it in the Pro Bono Service Scheme. This relationship is necessary for establishing a proactive National Legal Aid Strategy. LAC has not relented in working with the Executive of the Bar in birthing this scheme in Nigeria especially as it concerns the 2011 Act that empowers LAC to enhance and coordinate the scheme.

To a large extent, the Council is able to successfully carry out its mandate due to its foundational model. The foundation is located in government's recruitment of both legal and non-legal staff on the Salary Structure of the Civil Service. Therefore, no staff can refuse to attend to a Nigerian citizen in need of its services because they are entitled to it. Most importantly, the staff of the Council cannot charge fees for services rendered. This has created a seemingly unhindered free service delivery. The converse is that the Private Legal Practitioner does not offer free legal services. The existence of free legal services makes the Council's work very important to the teeming population of poor citizens that cannot afford to pay the fees charged by a private legal practitioner but there are not enough free legal services to satisfy the needs of those who need it.

Ordinarily, the private legal practitioner cannot take up free cases for the poor because he lives on his ability to run a

prosperous private practice. Therefore, most private legal practitioners are quick to point out that giving of free legal services to the poor is a “Panacea for poverty.” This appears to be the crossroads because the truth is that the legal aid lawyer is handicapped because they cannot cope with the relatively large number of poor and vulnerable citizens entitled to legal aid services. This fact can neither be downplayed nor ignored. First, lawyers need to develop the necessary attitude by showing empathy for the poor and by giving Pro Bono services and this Pro Bono Service scheme can only be successfully done by collaborating with LAC. The Council is mandated to provide free legal services by the 2011 Act. The Act strategically repositioned the Council as the institution tasked with enhancement and coordination of legal services in Nigeria and not merely a provider of legal services. Let me quickly state that the unwillingness of private legal practitioners to offer pro bono services stem from a lack of the culture of volunteerism, a fundamental problem that this nation needs to address, frontally. However, the Council has been fortunate because development partners have consistently supported it with funding so that it can actualise its mandate and several initiatives. The development partners have also taken time to understudy and understand an important requirement which is to empower both the Management and Staff of LAC to implement its tasks. One of the tasks is that the Council is mandated to empanel Nigerian private practitioners to develop the Pro Bono Scheme. In view of this, the partners have supported the Council to partner with the Nigerian Bar Association with the emphasis on all lawyers

(whether in public or private practice) on the need to change their mind-set and willingly give free services to the poor and vulnerable in our society. It should matter to us, for example, that international development partners perceive our lack of coordination in the criminal justice sector to promote judicial guarantees and access to justice for the poor as worrisome. This is especially so in the face of the unseen insecurity crises caused by the Boko Haram terrorist group and the farmers herdsman clashes especially in the North East and other geo political zones of Nigeria, which has caused massive refugee problems. It is imperative for Nigeria to return to those virtues and values of pre-colonial era some of which manifested till the 80s. Some of the initiatives carried out in actualizing a robust Pro Bono system in Nigeria include the following:

A section of the 2011 Act envisaged and designed a centralised system known as the “Clearing House.” The purpose of the “Clearing House” is essentially for matching Remand Prisoners in need of free legal representation with Pro Bono Lawyers willing to provide such services. This initiative was started with funding-support from Justice for All (J4A).

The Council and Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA) implemented this initiative in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), successfully. They also supported a roll over programme in the 36 states of the federation so as to involve more legal practitioners in all the 36 states where the Council offices existed. This roll over programme led to the development of an inventory of all the legal practitioners that willingly took up free cases under the Pro Bono Scheme. These

initiatives resulted in the creation of a robust database and culminated in the development of an inventory of all such legal practitioners who willingly took up free cases under a Pro Bono scheme. In my opinion, this is the way to get a National Legal Aid Scheme to work successfully in Nigeria. The present scenario is that institutions and individuals are working in silos without coordination and therefore achieving insignificant results in this great task of decongesting the Nigerian Prisons. It is appropriate to note that the Legal Aid Act 2011 established the relationship between the Council's Lawyers and Private Legal Practitioners that the framers of the Act envisaged as those most likely to give pro bono services. By this Act, therefore, the private practitioner is encouraged to collaborate with the Council's Lawyers and give qualitative and quantitative services to the heavy population of poor people. This is the right thing to do. Unfortunately, there have been instances of resistance to this change and it is not in the best interest of the poor and vulnerable citizens that we should empathize with this attitude,

During my tenure, an invisible wall that had forestalled the acceptance of offering pro bono service was demolished because a good number of private lawyers voluntarily registered with the Legal Aid Council to offer Pro Bono Services. The Council remains grateful to international donor agencies such as the United Nations Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC); and Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action, (PRAWA) for facilitating cooperation between the Nigerian Bar Association and the Council by sponsoring workshops to enhance and

coordinate the Pro Bono Scheme in order to resolve the apathy between both groups. This has resulted in concrete ways of collaboration and implementation.

History was made on the July 17, 2017 when the President of the Nigerian Bar Association, A. B. Mahmoud, SAN, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which has made it imperative for private practitioners willing to cooperate with the Council to provide pro bono services. While the MOU is one step in the right direction, it must continually be engendered by a determined effort between the Council and the private legal practitioners.

It is our hope that in future, the NBA would enact rules that would make it compulsory for every practicing lawyer to show evidence of, at least, two legal aid cases in a year which should be endorsed by Officers of the Council before accepting their practising fees and dues to each Bar Branch. The law now is that the Pro Bono Service is compulsory for lawyers who apply to be accepted as Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN). Even in this case, most of these applicants do not come through the Council to apply for the cases but go directly to access their own cases through the Prison Service. Unfortunately, this section of the 2011 Act on pro bono did not envisage that rather, it advocated a national coordination so as to have a National Database of such cases so that they can be monitored to conclusion and endorsed by the Council. There is hope that these anomalies would be corrected in the not too distant future.

## ***RELATIONSHIP WITH NIGERIAN CORRECTIONAL SERVICE***

The former Nigeria Prison Service (NPS) now known as Correctional Service (NCS) is a major stakeholder to the Legal Aid Council because most of the criminal cases that Council lawyers defend are sourced from the Prison Service since most of the remand cases are criminal cases and up to the year 2011, the Council did not have jurisdiction to take up civil matters. The Council lawyers perfected their art in carrying out criminal matters and since they source their cases from Prison Service, a bond of strong relationship evolved between the two parastatals. Provisions of legal aid is free, and so the Prison Service relies heavily on the Council's Lawyers (in all the states to take up cases for awaiting trial persons (ATPs) who could not afford the services of private practitioners. Following the new Act of 2011, the jurisdiction of the Legal Aid Council was expanded to include Capital Offences and Rape and this increased the work to the Council's Lawyers in addition to its new mandate of taking on Civil Cases.

A visit to the Correctional Service was one of the earliest official visits that I did in 2011. The style of administration of the then Controller General was to organize Quarterly Meetings. The Quarterly Meetings had been mapped out per quarter for the Controllers of Prisons of a few states to give reports of activities on all stakeholders to the Prison Service in turns. Usually in attendance were organizations like Legal Aid Council and Non-Governmental Organizations such as PRAWA and CURE whose work is targeted at Prison Reforms. At these quarterly meetings,



the Legal Aid Council whose role had always been to represent all those that needed legal representation because of their poor financial status was always represented by the Management team. The Management team are mostly lawyers and they listen to the briefs from Controllers of Prisons of a particular zone and assess the efforts of the Council Staff in such zones. Their major role is to reinforce the good works or make amends where necessary. In fact, for most of the forty (40) years' existence of the Legal Aid Council, its lawyers (although few in number) had worked tirelessly in legal representation of the Awaiting Trial Persons scattered in prisons all over Nigeria. Another commendable initiative of the Comptroller General was that all State Controllers should send monthly returns of the Awaiting Trial Persons who needed free legal services to all our Council State Offices. This procedure has been sustained and has strengthened this mutual relationship.

Herein lays a paradox: The procedure does not quickly resolve problems of representation because Awaiting Trial Persons arrive daily at the prisons for custody and even when the monthly return is sent, the data does not tally. This implies that the Correctional Service calls the Council Lawyers on a daily basis to update them on new entrants. In a similar manner, the Council Lawyers and other staff visit nearby prisons to get records and interview those that need their services. These are the compelling reasons for establishing a Paralegal Scheme in Nigeria. The Nigerian Correctional Service has the mandate to hold, in custody, all remanded offenders whose warrants are signed by a Magistrate or Judge and also all convicted persons

from a lawful Court of Justice. The Prison Service is not allowed to refuse any offender sent to it either on remand or convicted except if the offender died on arrival.

This Correctional Service contends with overcrowded cells and congested prisons. It is in the interest of all stakeholders to work towards the decongestion of the prisons. The journey of the offender starts with the police who, according to constitutional provisions, must investigate an offender before proffering a charge which it brings before a Magistrate or Judge who will remand the offender in any prison near the place the alleged crime was committed. After this, the file containing the charge is sent to the Office of Directors of Public Prosecution (DPP). The DPP must ascertain that the charge(s) brought by the Police is true and the offender has a case to answer. This is eventually sent back to be heard by the same Magistrate or Judge. This process causes delay in prosecution process. Unfortunately, a lot of offenders remain incarcerated for many years while awaiting the DPP's report and many occasions when bails were given many offenders cannot perfect them after a Defence Lawyer would have applied on their behalf because the bail conditions can be onerous. This means poor offenders cannot process difficult bail conditions. Let me cite an example. A shoe maker was given a bail condition of providing two sureties who are Directors of Ministries and own properties in Abuja. This bail condition was too harsh for such a lowly person. However, many Chief Judges give practice directions to their Magistrates, Customary and Area Court Judges to give

lower bail conditions to poor offenders. This practice usually leads to decongestion of the prisons.

Inability to process difficult bail conditions in addition to other problems associated with remand orders also causes overcrowding of the prisons by those on remand in contrast to the small number of those convicted. This often results into the lopsided ratio of Awaiting Trial Persons to convicted persons. Over the years, the media has hyped the phrase “Prison Decongestion” in trying to highlight this problem. Prison Decongestion has been in public discourse and has been emphasizing the high number of un-convicted persons to a much lower number of convicted persons all of whom are locked up in the same old colonial, poorly built, badly ventilated prisons. The colonial leaders built such prisons to house about 200 convicted prisoners. Unfortunately, they presently house 2,000 or more persons and this leads to inhuman sleeping arrangement.

It is important for the public to know that Legal Aid Council’s Lawyers act as Defence Lawyers to poor and vulnerable people. The public must also know that a Defence Lawyer can only begin his work when the Investigating Police Officer (IPO) or Federal or State Ministry of Justice Prosecutors have concluded their investigations by showing why an offender should be convicted. The process of prosecution can also take years before it gets to the stage of defence. The Defence Lawyer does not defend just for the sake of getting an offender off the hook by all means but to provide fair hearing to all parties and for the court to get the true picture of all that transpired at the

scene of crime and the real intentions of the parties in order to pronounce judgment.

Meanwhile, a revolutionary Act known as Administration of Criminal Justice Act or Law 2015 has been enacted to decongest the prisons by apportioning timelines to criminal procedures for each stakeholder in the criminal justice sector. If adhered to by each agency in the sector, there would be quick access to justice. This includes implementing what is known as non-custodial sentencing of offenders who should get light sentencing and would not need to spend long years in prisons for minor offences. This Act is yet to be domesticated in many states although a few states have domesticated it. However, non-custodial sentencing has begun operating in the Federal Capital Territory High Courts as well as Federal High Courts across Nigeria as they have jurisdiction in all states of the federation for offenders of federal offences. The commendation for the tireless advocacy for states to domesticate the administration of criminal justice Act into Law goes to Honourable Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice and his team in conjunction with Donor Agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) particularly to ensure that State Honourable Attorneys General encourage their Governors to pass this Act into Law which will allow reforms such as the NELSON MANDELA RULES. It is necessary to state that the Chief Judge of Lagos State has started implementing the non-custodial sentencing.

Each time the Management team and I visited different states, we always paid courtesy visits to Controller of Prisons of

each state. They often permitted us, and most times, escorted us to the main prison of that state while we discuss challenges and the good works done by LAC Lawyers in representing ATPs. At such occasions, I usually encouraged them to speak up on good and bad reports, if any, against any of the Council's Lawyers. In one of the states visited, for instance, the Controller of Prison said that for a year before I assumed duties, the lawyers in that state were not available to offer free services. This was a very important report because it guided the Council on the remedial actions to take. Such bad reports are very few and far between but where they exist they should not be swept under the carpet. We conducted an inquiry and discovered that before I was appointed, many lawyers had retired and left the services of LAC and the state, in this particular State there was only one lawyer and the possible reason for his under achievement was that he was overwhelmed by the work-load and simply buckled at his responsibilities. Fortunately, we got official permission to recruit more lawyers and re-invented the office. However since lawyers, just as other staff, must retire or resign to seek better jobs, there is need for the relevant authorities to permit periodical recruitments especially of lawyers to carry out the mandate of Council.

During the period that I served as the Director General of Legal Aid Council (LAC), I visited not less than 33 states and many local government areas. In the course of those tours, I met many hardworking Controllers of Prisons, and their staff. The Welfare Officers are very important because they compile the important records of inmates and it is necessary for the lawyers

to discuss Awaiting Trial Persons with them. The mutual interest of the Prisons Service and the Legal Aid Council Lawyers is to make sure that Awaiting Trial Persons who cannot afford the services of lawyers are promptly attended to by the Council's Lawyers. However, the Council is constrained because it has limited number of lawyers. As a Director General for eight years, I admired the Council's Lawyers hard work particularly their tenacity in overcoming the challenges of a very low numerical strength in the context of profiling; and representing ATPs who needed the free services of lawyers. It is quite reassuring that I participated in many Jail Delivery sessions with the Honourable Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). At the state level, the senior Lawyers also attend similar sessions with State Chief Judges. I was equally privileged to have witnessed many reforms carried out by the Prison Service with the support of Ministry of Justice and Developmental partners. Some of the support include the digitalization of the prisons; building of staff capacity; and implementing the Mandela rules. Their latest Prison Service Bill was also passed by the 8th Senate, known as the Nigerian Correctional Service Act.

### ***RELATIONSHIP WITH NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE***

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is constitutionally mandated to investigate and charge offenders to court if they were suspected to have committed any crime. The offender's first custody is with the police and does not visit any other place

until police investigations have been completed. The offender is entitled to the services of a lawyer of his or her choice while making confessional statements. The police do not usually comply with this section of the process. For very many years, the Legal Aid Council has advocated initiatives that would encourage the police to always call the offender's lawyer of choice or a legal aid lawyer and read his or her right to him.

In 2004, the Council started an initiative known as the Police Duty Solicitor Scheme where a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Police High Command; Legal Aid Council; and Open Society for Justice Initiative (OSJI) who supported it through funding. The Legal Aid Council has been fortunate to have the services of the National Youth Service Lawyers in its employment who are usually deployed to council's offices across Nigeria and are required to work in this scheme after being given the requisite training and stationed in designated Police Stations so that they could be readily available to assist offenders (who could not afford the services of lawyers) answer questions. This initiative was designed to continuously remind the police to change their mind-set to globally accepted methods of always reading the offender his or her rights and asking them to apply for a lawyer of their choice or to inform them that they could use the services of legal aid lawyers. Due to inadequate number of lawyers to station in all the Police Stations in the thirty six states, the Council has in its Act a mandate to always collaborate with the National Youth Service Commission (NYSC) for legal representation. However, concerning the scheme the Council has sustained its advocacy to the Inspector-

General of Police (IGP) to make this initiative a FORCE ORDER.

In 2017, the Inspector-General of Police assented to this request that the amendment of FORCE ORDER 20 include a compulsory representation by a lawyer, of an offender who cannot afford the services of a lawyer. This strategy ensured that more lawyers in private practice could give pro bono services even at the pre-trial level. As a result of this development, the Council and the Director General commended the Inspector General of Police for making sure that the Police develop a new mind-set of giving the offender(s) the right to call a lawyer which is a fundamental human right. In the past, there were unsavoury instances in which some State Commissioners of Police refused to allow lawyers to go in freely for pre-trial assistance to offenders. Fortunately, few other policemen were very proactive in working with LAC lawyers to ensure this fundamental right was fulfilled.

The IGP's amendment of the FORCE ORDER 20 in 2017 to include the Police Duty Solicitor Scheme has made it compulsory for all Police Stations in Nigeria to make offenders have access to their lawyers, a matter of right. No police woman can resist this fundamental right of offenders. As part of the new reforms, the Police have commenced training of its officers in fundamental human rights of the citizens. It has been enshrined as a compulsory course in the curriculum in Police Colleges.



## ***RELATIONSHIP WITH COURTS***

As enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution (as amended), the Judiciary is the third arm of Government. Its role is to adjudicate on the fundamental rights of every Nigerian citizen and their relationship with other citizens in the diaspora while the Legal Aid Council is the state institution established to defend indigent, vulnerable persons at all levels of courts. The role of the Judiciary is crucial to ensuring that justice is not unduly delayed. One of the important duties of Courts is to carry out all judicial processes including civil and criminal matters; they show concerns about the number of Awaiting Trial Persons (ATP) and the congestion in prisons. All the Chief Judges of States including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) intermittently embark on visits to most prisons in Nigeria and conduct assizes or court sittings in order to verify reasons for delays in prosecution and defence of Awaiting Trial Persons (ATPs). During their visits, they also exercise discretionary powers and release inmates that had been detained longer than necessary. The Legal Aid Council legal staff in all states are invited to accompany the Chief Judges of their States for such jail delivery exercises. In the FCT, the Director General and her team are expected to be in attendance with the chief judge and his team.

It is also noteworthy that there used to be a Criminal Administration Committee (CAC) in each State of the Federation. The CAC is headed by the State's Chief Judges. While most states thought it fit to invite the Council's legal staff to attend its meetings in order to resolve issues of delays in

justice delivery, it was sad that the Legal Aid Council in both States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (at that point in time) had not become statutory members of these committees. This position has been radically altered because in 2015, the revolutionary Act known as the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 was assented to by the then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GCFR) and it is gradually being domesticated in many states of the Federation. It is now fully operational in the Federal High Courts including courts in the FCT. The Legal Aid Council has taken its statutory position as a member of this important committee as mandated by the Act.

These Criminal Administration Committees abridge time for cases to be completed. Perhaps, and most importantly, is the fact that there is a Monitoring Committee known as the Administration of Criminal Justice Monitoring Committee chaired by the Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory and supervised by the Honourable Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice. The Director General of the Legal Aid Council is mandated to be on this Committee and, by extension, all states that domesticated the law would have such Monitoring Committees and the State Coordinators of LAC would be statutory members.

The development partners also offered capacity development training on globally acceptable best practices in Judiciaries to Judges, Magistrates and other Staff. During the training sessions, they also introduced the use of recording machines as opposed to writing in long hand which has been the bane of

Judges and Magistrates; and which also causes delay in the completion of cases.

On one occasion, I visited a former Attorney General of Lagos State and was quite impressed to see these innovations had been implemented. I have tremendous respect and admiration for Lagos State for always being a pioneer at implementing reforms. The problem with most courts in Nigeria regarding the use of recording machines is the lack of trained Stenographers to operate the machines; as well as the epileptic electricity to power them. Therefore, most of the recording machines are not used and this still affects dispensation of justice.

Many Legal Aid Council Lawyers have good relationship with many Judges not only because the Judges understand the Council's mandate but rely on the Council's lawyers to take up awaiting trial matters on the spot during court sessions just as they rely on Council's Lawyers during court assizes or jail delivery sessions. Judges have also commended many Council Lawyers for working hard work. In return, LAC's Management always encourage the Honourable chief Judges to do all in their powers to accelerate cases in courts. It is quite reassuring that the Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory that I worked with in the assizes and on the Administration of Criminal Justice Monitoring Committee was very proactive in giving important practice directions. One of them was that Magistrates should visit all detention cells in Abuja especially police detention cells to ascertain the number and conditions of pre-trial offenders. To ensure that their matters are brought in timely fashion before the

Magistrates, the Council collaborated with them in developing the right template and strategies for carrying out these directives. On different occasions, many Chief Judges in states have extended helping hands to the Council's staff at their time of need. In states where there were no Federal Secretariats, for example, Chief Judges have offered office spaces to mitigate the cost of renting office spaces because the Council does not have such funds. This symbiotic relationship has helped the process of decongesting the prisons. This strategy has kept the Council's lawyers happy and encouraged them to discharge their duties willingly. Happily, a few of the Council's lawyers have also been elevated to the Bench.

### ***RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNING BOARD***

I came into Legal Aid Council as Director General when the subsisting Board was completing its final year of operation. The Board Chairman was a retired Judge and as the Act stated I was also a bona fide member of Board. At that time the Board still operated under the legal Aid Act 1976, for instance the constitution of the Board adopted a slightly different criterion from what now obtains under the Legal Aid Act 2011. The Board then was constituted with more of former politicians representing geopolitical zones and a few lawyers. There were various representations on the Board: The Chairman represented the NBA. Other representations include Minister of Justice; the Minister of Finance; and the National Youth Service Commission. I spent the first half of 2011 with the Board that

operated under the 1976 Act, when their term expired at the inauguration of a new government that eventually inaugurated another Board. Permit me to recall the memorable meeting, I attended in the office of the then Honourable Attorney General of the Federation, where he informed me that a new Chairman of Board for the Legal Aid Council had been selected because he was known to be passionate about access to justice and other pleasant accolades, all I was told were true and more. This Board Chairman, known as Chief Bolaji Ayorinde SAN, OFR, was really passionate about the provision of legal aid to the poor and he often expressed this fact at every opportunity and had created the required public awareness on the issues of giving legal aid to the poor by writing and publishing several articles in various newspapers and journals. In addition, he was always willing to assist the Council to find the required support for various initiatives that would enhance coordination and collaboration in actualizing its mandate. He often said that legal aid was not a charity but a right.

The Legal Aid Act 2011 stated that the Board shall be made up of the Chairman, other members and the Director General who is mandated to see to the day to day running of the Council. The members of the Board are non-executive but have oversight functions to ensure implementation of government policies. It is important to note that there is a distinct departure on how the membership was constituted between the Legal Aid Act of 1976 and that of 2011.

The Chairman must either be a retired Judge or a Legal Practitioner of not less than fifteen (15) years standing

The three years spent with the Board I met on ground were indeed very helpful because the composition reflected the intention of the mandate of the Council since most members were lawyers representing interest groups such as NBA and Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA); Civil Society Groups providing legal aid and the representative of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC); Controller General of Prisons; and the Inspector General of Police. All these were to ensure the promotion of access to justice and ensure that the Council implements its mandate successfully. The Honourable Chairman always attended meetings and this was a strong motivation to other members to ensure the attainment of the Council's mandate. During the tenure of Chief Bolaji Ayorinde SAN, OFR, he demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities as he often arrived Abuja from Lagos a day before each Quarterly Meeting. In addition, he always ensured he got all the necessary information for the next day's meeting with a tentative programme for the day. The meeting always started with a press briefing to bring public awareness to the programmes and initiatives of the Council. At the press briefings, all the members usually answered questions because the Chairman ran a very inclusive Board and sometimes the meetings were held in Lagos to create awareness through the press in the Lagos axis. The Chairman was a master at using press briefings and media coverage to galvanise awareness on issues of public importance. He brought his depth of experience to each meeting and to the administration of the Board. This was not about money because the Legal Aid Council was not established for profit making

because it gets little or no contract jobs and the sitting allowance was very poor. His input was driven by his passion to help the poor and vulnerable. He gave magnificent support and indeed, I was very fortunate to have had a Chairman with such immense exposure and experience because I learnt a lot from his leadership qualities and the way he discharged his duties as the Chairman.

Using a tone of fondness, he always called me madam DG. One day, I was in my office in Abuja when he called me on phone and said, “madam DG, I am in the Office of the Honourable Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice of Lagos State and met a gentleman called Julien from Harvard School of Law whose Department had been commissioned to carry out research on using ‘INDICATORS’ by the British Council DFID.” Julien came to Lagos to supervise a part of this project because the Ministry of Justice in Lagos was a Pilot Department picked in Nigeria since the international project focused on developing countries round the world. After passing this information to me, he immediately arranged that the Honourable Attorney General’s Personal Assistant bring Julien to me to acquaint himself with the Legal Aid Council Nigeria; with the aim of helping the Council to advance access to justice because at that time the Council was implementing an Access to Justice project entitled, “Access to Justice for the Poor in Civil Matters” and using Kaduna State for the Pilot Scheme. That linkage by the Chairman gave more opportunities to the Council than could have been envisaged. Julien came over to the

Council's Office in Abuja and listened to the reforms the Council was carrying out. Responding, Julien told us what INDICATORS were. We were also surprised that he knew Eva Melis and Nick who were our supervisors in the World Bank Project. Julien was so willing to assist the Council that, at his own cost, he never got tired of visiting the Council's Office in Abuja anytime he came to Lagos. This quintessential leadership is Chief Bolaji Ayorinde, SAN, OFR, personified. He knew what leadership required and spared no effort offering sound leadership in his three-year-term-tenure as Chairman. He ensured we had a Pro Bono Conference in Lagos and influenced its attendance by the Crème de la crème of the Lagos Senior Lawyers. His humility never ceases to amaze me each time I recall that he volunteered to make courtesy visits with the Council's Management. We conducted several press conferences in both Lagos and Abuja and advocated the media to showcase the work of the Council. Chief Bolaji Ayorinde worked tirelessly for funds from the government to improve the finances of the Council just as he tried raising funds for the Council's work. The outcome of these laudable efforts showed that many Nigerians had not bought into the culture of volunteerism; and had not realised the sublime calling of offering free legal services to the cause of the poor. Those three years spent while Chief Ayorinde was Board Chairman impacted constructively on my life. I still cherish those years.

Perhaps, I should just say this: It should not have been a surprise that Chief Bolaji Ayorinde, SAN had so much wonderful leadership qualities. His pedigree had prepared him



for very noble roles: His father, Late Chief Timothy Ayorinde, was a former Chief Justice of Oyo State who left an enviable record and an enduring legacy for his children and for Oyo State. So, Chief Bolaji Ayorinde grew up in the tradition of an accomplished legal luminary. Interestingly, Chief Bolaji Ayorinde chose not to join the bench but opted for legal practice. He understood the working of Civil Service because he had once been appointed as a Pro Chancellor of Ago Iwoye University and understood the Management of human, financial and material resources in accordance with the Act establishing the University just as I, as the Director General, was also mandated to manage available resource as the Chief Executive Officer of the Council. Therefore, when staff sent petitions to the Board Chief Bolaji Ayorinde knew what to do to determine and resolve the issues. Let me reiterate that Chief Bolaji Ayorinde, SAN brought in his wealth of experience and rich connections in the legal profession into serving as Board Chairman to LAC. He always remained very calm in taking decisions and often went the extra mile to starting the journey of helping to build up and motivate staff to proudly work in the Council for the poor to access legal aid as they are entitled to do.

## ***CHAPTER 9***

### **RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKING**

There is an unassailable fact that no matter how we prepare for our journey in life not even with the fact that the best of us can be articulate, meticulous and very orderly, including having the best plans every step of the way, unforeseeable situations usually happen. I never envisaged that my career would veer from teaching under the Federal Ministry of Education to Legal Practice. Looking back at what changed the perception, I realized that I was not satisfied with the direction my teaching career was taking me because I realized that I was not likely to ascend to the highest position in that field. I realized that teaching had offered me a leverage of applying for transfers to wherever my husband went. Although I enjoyed the unique relationship of teacher to students; and the camaraderie with fellow teachers but I still did not get the required fulfilment. In the teaching profession, a teacher forges closer relationship with co-teachers of the same subject and unwittingly forms closely knit ties within smaller common rooms built within each department and establishes friendship with other teachers during the general staff meetings in the larger staff rooms. My teaching career gave me a Pan Nigerian view of life because I met people of diverse backgrounds from the various language groups in Nigeria. So, I was not new to people from Jos, Warri; Enugu; Port Harcourt and other places before venturing into Law. At

this point, I realized that TIME AND CHANCE HAPPEN TO US ALL.

In the exegesis of life, my final transfer was thrust upon me as my small family found itself in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. This transfer was sheer providence because the policy of the company where my husband worked at the time was never to transfer a staff to his home state but somehow, my spouse was transferred to his home state for four years; and it was time for another transfer, he was asked to go to Kano state. At this point, both of us resolved that the children needed stability so that their education would not be affected by regular movement from one place to the other. Therefore, we decided that the children and I stay back in Port Harcourt because our first child had just gained admission into Federal Government College, Okigwe while our second son was preparing for the Common Entrance Examination.

This decision to stay back in Port Harcourt turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life because I became more secured in the school I taught in. Being stable enabled me complete my Law programme just as our children stabilized in continuing their education in the same school. Today, they have become alumni of their primary, secondary and tertiary schools. I, too, completed my law studies and proceeded to the Nigerian Law School, Lagos. Providence also smiled at me because just as I was preparing to go to Law School in Lagos, my mother who just retired from the Police Force, relocated to my house, for one year. Her relocation to my house gave me peace of mind

to focus on my studies at the Law School until I qualified and enrolled to practice as a Lawyer.

### ***MORE ON RELATIONSHIPS***

Travelling had become second nature to me so that when I was given a political appointment and told that tours and travels would be part of my schedule as Director General, especially because the Council Offices were in the 36 states of the federation, I was not flustered. As the arrowhead and the major implementer of the Council's mandate, the work was quite enormous: Most of the results of the work done and recorded data from states would have to be reprocessed at the Headquarters. The Headquarters Legal Officers also contribute cases sourced from prisons under the jurisdiction of courts in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) but they are not as copious as the State's Legal Officers. Therefore, the states remain a very important segment of the whole and any Chief Executive Officer must maintain regular contact with all the staff and more importantly with those of the states through phone calls and internet mails and follow up visits before embarking on the traditional familiarization visits. These visits offer the unique opportunity of introducing the new boss to the staff that he or she would work with for at least four years or eight years if there was tenure renewal. For both the CEO and the Staff, the first impressions really mattered.

There was really nothing different about me from my predecessors who had gone on these tours in the course of duty.

Since my regular travels occasioned by my husband's work-nature had prepared me for routine trips, and God's hand remained on me, I neither fell ill nor experienced any accident on the road or air travels. Travelling on a larger and more intense scale did not scare me because I have tied my faith to God. I believe in prayers for journey mercies and have strong faith in the covenants I made with God that I was working for the poor and should not be rewarded with sudden death or death by accident. God answered these prayers because we never recorded any accident and the staff that travelled with me always marvelled at the fact that I considered the prayers for mercy very important. Most times, we would stop, park the vehicles and pray to God while going and when returning from the journeys or even on short visits. We also got a caterer who cooked rice and kept it in coolers for us just as she also provided cold drinks. Both the Management team and Staff share these foods and drinks with open mind devoid of suspicion. Whenever we visited states, both the Management and Staff of those state offices were invited to eat lunch together at restaurants with affordable prizes whose prices were moderate.

In planning scheduled familiarization visits, the office always followed protocol: First, by writing official letters to the Executive Government of the State they intend visiting. Second, the letter was routed through that State's Honourable Attorney General. This is important because all Governors build their activities on protocols and it is a mark of courtesy to alert the highest political office holder of a state that a federal appointee intended to visit his state. Legal Aid Council takes pride in

seeing itself as an important stakeholder in the justice sector of any state and since its mandate is to decongest the prisons in each state, it is important that the Chief Executive of a State knew why and when LAC was visiting because prison matters strictly remain security matters. I am aware that many governors have a good relationship with the security agents in their states. They also pay close attention to the Prison Services and look out for briefings to forestall jail breaks. In view of this, LAC is taken seriously by governments of many states so LAC goes out of its way to maintain a good relationship with the Honourable Attorneys General and Commissioners of Justice of each state. Therefore, all communications going to the Executive Governor must go through the Attorney General who discusses it with the Executive at their Executive Meetings. LAC's Senior Staff in Council's State Offices are encouraged to have a very good working relationship with the Honourable Attorneys General, the Solicitor General and Permanent Secretaries including the Director of Public Prosecution and other Prosecutors. Once this relationship is cordial, there is rarely any hindrance to the official visit of LAC's Director General. Third, the protocol also includes writing to the Chief Judge of the state; the Controller of Prisons and Commissioner of Police of each state so as to encourage them to concede on a courtesy visit on the same dates with the Executive Governors largely to ensure alignment of purpose. LAC enjoys a very good relationship with the Prisons, the Courts and the Police because they remain stakeholder agencies in the criminal justice sector. My life has been a testimony to the Biblical saying of "show me

a person diligent in his work and he will dine with kings and queens.”

Legal Aid Council maps out the familiarization tour for each geo- political zone. Whether the journey is done by air or by road, the first point of call is the Zonal Headquarter of the chosen state. The staffs of Zonal Headquarter receive the visiting team comprising the Director General and the Management team. After completing the routine of hotel accommodation and freshening up, the team goes straight to the state office to get acquainted with the staff on ground. They brief the team on the scheduled itinerary for the visitations. If the Executive Governor had accepted the application to pay him and his Executive a courtesy visit, the team follow the protocol of the state by allowing the Attorney General lead it to the Executive Chambers. Most of the time, other Commissioners in that State’s cabinet would have been invited to the executive Chambers to assist His Excellency receive the team. It is usually convenient for the Executive Governors to meet with us on their Council Meeting Days. On such occasions, we are usually ushered in immediately the meeting is concluded. Let me quickly reiterate my appreciation to the Executive Governors for accommodating LAC’s team in this manner because it shows their good relationship with their Attorneys General. It equally shows that their Attorneys General brief them regularly on developments in the justice sector. Fundamentally, it shows that the Executive Governors created enabling environment to ensure prison decongestion by all the relevant agencies. Let me quickly share a typical scenario with you: Governors who honoured our

visits with a full complement of Council Members in sitting often made formal and endearing speeches during which they discuss the Justice Ministry in their state and how they have approved an Office for their citizens right as a Department in their Ministry of Justice to assist poor persons to access justice. They then explain the wherewithal provided to ensure the smooth running of such offices. Some of the Executive Governors usually extended little assistance such as State Grants to some of LAC's state offices because we inform them that their indigenes are the immediate beneficiaries of our services. Although some extended this cooperation by offering office spaces in the Judiciary Complex and in one case, another provided space in the State Secretariat. However, in cases where the Executive Governor had been officially engaged and unavoidably absent, they often asked their Deputy Governors to stand in for them and meet with LAC's team. On some other occasions, they assign the State's Honourable Attorney General or the Chief Judge of the State to honour our visits. We never experienced any situation in which LAC's team was ignored or snubbed by any Executive Governor. I commend this bureaucratic structure that subsists in this nation's Civil Service where political appointees are schooled in the art of correct procedures for retaining norms in governance. With regards to structural support such as office space, I once, again, commend all the Executive Governors of the different states but particularly the successive Executive Governors of Lagos State. My reason for deferring to Lagos State is this: The state created the Office of Public Defender. It gave that office a mandate



similar to that of the Legal Aid Council but slightly different in scope and authority. The Legal Aid Council, for instance, has jurisdiction to operate in the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) but the Lagos State Office can only operate in Lagos State. The Lagos State Office of Public Defender not only has a good working relationship with the Legislative Aid Council, it networks by sending referrals to other LAC's Offices outside Lagos.

However, it is good that during my tenure a few Executive Governors gave the council office spaces, in their state, some in addition will give project vehicles and promises of other things to be followed up through their Attorneys General. Unfortunately, after the euphoria of such visits, some Attorneys General do not help the Council follow up on such promises. Another challenge is the regular political, policy and cabinet changes which often affected Attorneys General. Other challenges include lack of tenure elongation or non-re-election of the Executive Governors that made those promises or pledges unattainable. When a new governor is elected, for instance, it becomes strenuous to undertake another marathon familiarization tour and restart the entire cycle, again. Even, when I had the privilege to revisit some states, I did not request to see the governor again but simply concentrated on ensuring our collaboration with other stakeholders was on course to ensure that our mandate continued to succeed. My belief is that a high level visit to the Executive Governor of a State is sufficient for each Director General otherwise it may unwittingly be given a political colouration which is not what

the Council's mandate envisages. There ought to be intensive follow up on promises and pledges by Senior Officers of the Council to persuade the Executive Governors through their Attorneys General or whoever was charged with that responsibility to honour their promises and redeem their pledges.

On those numerous visits, the LAC's team met governors who had a very clear and commendable understanding of the workings of the different agencies in the Justice sector; and the roles of the Legal Aid Council Lawyers in defending offenders. It is very important to note that in the Nigerian Legal System an offender is legally entitled to a Defense Lawyer. Therefore, if during the prosecution of a criminal matter, the court realizes that an offender is not represented by a Defense Lawyer or the Private Defense Lawyer abandoned the case midway, the court often adjourns the case and remands the offender in prison till a lawyer takes up the matter. This ensures that the matter is seen to have had a fair hearing. This is why a Defense Lawyer is meant to represent offenders on criminal matters because in the same Nigerian Legal System, an offender is presumed innocent until proven guilty. This explains the presence of many awaiting trial persons (ATP) and therefore, a major cause of prison congestion in Nigeria. There is need to reiterate that it is only a court of law that can competently pronounce the verdict of a person being a criminal. This is because the human mind becomes obfuscated on being fixated on a terminology like "criminal." The label, "criminal" also deprives the victim, the opportunity of exercising his basic human rights. In this regard,

public education is important not only at the highest level of decision making but for all connected to the Commissioners for Justice; Lawyers in the Legal Aid Council; Private Practitioners that offer Pro Bono services; and everyone in the Justice Sector including the entire citizens of the nation.

As interesting as this narrative has appeared, it should be stated that it was not all smooth because we met very daunting circumstances and negative attitudes but overwhelm them by doggedness, focus and determination. Some of the people we met just did not want to work or cooperate with the Management of Legal Aid Council. For some, there was no pretension of nicety rather, it was a direct refusal. Some patiently explained to us that assisting a federal agency might open a floodgate of requests that they would be unable to cope with. Let me say that we took such negative actions in good faith because we knew that their offer of assistance was a privilege and not a right. In some states of this nation, Legal Aid Council offices are in rented buildings, in two states because they were the last state to be created and the Federal Government has not completed the last six of the Federal Secretariats which usually houses council's offices. In those two states, the governors promised us spaces in their yet to be completed State Secretariats. One of the states has since honoured its promise while the other is yet to. There was a dramatic situation in one state. The former Executive Governor had accommodated several Federal Government agencies in its State Secretariat because the Federal Government had not completed the Federal Secretariat in the state. When a new Executive Governor assumed office, he

ejected all such Federal agencies including their staff from the State Secretariat but a good Samaritan volunteered space to keep the Council's furniture and files until the Chief Judge of that state, (who understood the important mandate of the Council) was able to find a few rooms in the Judiciary Complex and saved the Council's files and office furniture from loss and destruction. LAC's Management quickly wrote official letters of gratitude and made personal phone calls to the Honourable chief Judge.

At the risk of being described as immodest, I can state that I related well with some Chairmen of Local Government Areas because we have about 34 Law Clinics in different local government areas. You would recall that I had earlier stated that since 2010, the Council had begun establishing offices in local government areas as a strategy to be present at the grassroots and fulfil two important roles: One, our third level of engagement with the grassroots which is to give legal education to the poor and vulnerable as well as represent them in courts. Two, the Judiciary of the State usually sited new Courts in local government areas usually there is also a prison service wherever these new courts have been established. The Management and I often wondered at the attitude of the Chairmen because no sooner do we request spaces for offices in their council headquarters than they give us the most dilapidated office space. Their comments were often instructive. They always said that since we had "federal might," we could help the local government to renovate those dilapidated offices. Sometimes, the spaces provided are so inaccessible that our poor clients

cannot get to us. It is ironic that this level of government that ought to be most eager to assist Legal Aid Council because of the heavy concentration of population that need access to health, education and the judicial system appears to be the most unfriendly.

In 2010, the Honourable Members of the Committees of Justice in the two chambers of the National Assembly had approved very minimal appropriations under the capital expenditure to acquire and renovate such offices. The Council normally approaches local government Chairmen by first paying them advocacy visits after writing to officially notify and request for visitation dates. A few of them often acknowledged and replied the official letters written to them. Others neither replied the letters nor permitted advocacy visits. However, anytime we had the privilege of being given office spaces, we immediately proceeded to renovating the spaces judiciously applying limited funds. In the past there was enough funds appropriated for the renovation of about four of such offices in a year but due to harsh economic recession in the Nation, the council is barely able to complete two renovations in a year and so the number of offices that could be renovated has reduced, drastically. I called attention to this scenario because the laudable intention of the legislators in making such appropriations was that the Legal Aid Council would eventually open Area Offices in all the 774 Local Government Areas of Nigeria. It appears that intention may become a tall dream. Perhaps, a possible approach is for each new Director General of LAC to sustain their appeal to the Budget and Planning

Office through the Honourable Minister of Justice for more appropriation so that LAC can establish more local government offices.

Let me share, for example, real life instances from the project we handled under the supervision of the World Bank in Kaduna State for three years. The project was implemented in 20 out of the 23 local government areas of the state. There were series of entreaties from the Federal Government; the World Bank; and the Legal Aid Council but most of the Local Government Chairmen did not show interest in the project. At the advocacy stage, LAC explained the importance of the project to them yet they gave us the most dilapidated office spaces in their office complex. After much persuasion during which we relied on their administrative and legal officers to help us lobby for the spaces, we did not get other forms of assistance in moving the project forward. Many of the local government chairmen and even their high level officers failed to attend any of the numerous workshops held for their citizens as they often embarked on political visits to the state capital and other places. During the duration of the project these Chairmen were changed several times because they were caretaker chairmen and because as we later learnt the local government elections had not been conducted and therefore most appointees were temporary. Therefore, it was understandable that the temporary nature of their appointment and the controversial issue of monetary allocations could have de-motivated them from showing commitment to projects of this nature. Meanwhile we strove to

get their attention but ended up working with their Administrative Assistants and the Local Government Lawyers.

One of the strategies deployed in this project was to involve the administrative and legal officers in workshops and the training programmes so they would have bought-in and agreed to collaborate with the Council by attending to the poor and vulnerable who needed to access justice through them. Apart from trying to get them to ensure that they implemented the project to succeed, it was also a strategy to build sustainability into the project after its completion. When the project came to an end after three years, the question of sustainability of the offices arose because it formed part of the handing over procedure from the development partner, the World Bank. Interestingly, only about four Chairmen agreed to sustain the offices renovated in their local government. In order that their citizens might gain access to justice, the Legal Aid Council had to accept to sustain five more offices so that all the gains of the project would not be lost. In a twist of events, it was also said that some of the newly appointed local government chairmen recovered the offices from LAC after their renovation. It is sometimes worrisome that we take the care of the poor for granted.

### ***RELATIONSHIP WITH STAFF***

All these achievements had been made possible by the hardworking staff of Legal Aid Council. Upon my resumption of duties as the new Director General at the headquarters, the first person I met was the most Senior Director who had been

the acting Director General for three months. As it is customary in the civil service, he was summoned to the Office of the then Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Justice, where I was officially introduced to him as the substantive Director General while giving me a briefing about the background over which he had headed the council for the preceding 3 months as acting director general, there and then he asked him to hand over to me as well as to assist me in settling down properly. The acting Director General briefed me on the history and mandate of Legal Aid Council and immediately sent memos to all the Heads of Departments and Units to update me on their records; functions; staff strength; and job descriptions. He also extended a similar request to all the state offices so that I was equipped with adequate information before my first meetings with them.

At the first Management meeting at the headquarters, I met the heads of departments and units in the headquarters where I was officially introduced to them by this most Senior Director. We held a brief meeting and immediately proceeded to an already scheduled meeting with all other staff of the headquarters. Welcome speeches were made and I found out that there was a bit of bureaucratic structure in place; the union executive introduced themselves to me and pledged their support. I saw dynamism in this bureaucracy, with the benefit of hindsight it is my opinion that it is essential that a matured person must be well prepared mentally, physically and most importantly, spiritually before taking on serious appointments. I believe the saying that when we first settle the spiritual aspect with prayers, the physical outcomes and manifestations are



guaranteed. The golden rule is that one should never fail to be alert at all times and never betray oneself by being naïve. Wisdom and understanding remain critical to succeeding at all levels of Life's endeavours. At those first meetings, I knew that behind all those smiles were some serious thoughts. In all situations, some staff do not easily accept the chief executive on arrival because they take their time to assess him or her. Some accept with reservations, others with a kind of open mind of "Let Us Wait and See," if he or she will succeed. In many agencies, majority of the staff prefer a change of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) every four years and when that CEO succeeds in getting another term of four years some are disappointed. The people that are most dangerous are those that sit on the fence because even the Bible warns us of the dangers of being neither hot nor cold. They often follow the personalities that can sway them and usually use the wrong options. As William Shakespeare said, "it is difficult to know the mind's construction on the face." At that first meeting, it was impracticable to personally know each of the staff of the headquarters who were about 200 in number and occupied different offices because at that time there was no official Headquarters Building. What I met was rented buildings to house some of the staff while other office spaces were in one of the Federal Secretariats complex. There and then I decided to make out another plan for getting the council a permanent building and to develop better strategies to know the staff by their names and disposition. The Council's work was enormous and dynamic and only the grace of God could help fulfil the

mandate. However, I believed the Holy Book's saying that "it is not by our strength nor by our might but by the spirit of God, that we run our course and purpose in life."

I immediately rolled up my sleeves and sank myself into the work because as a leader, one must understand and work with the Management team and other staffs, through who work is assigned for effective supervision. I was always conscious of the special mandate of the Council so whether at the headquarters or state levels, legal representation must continuously take place while the non-legal staff must assist as legal assistants or paralegals as a daily routine and in between the management team and I, must do oversight by visiting the prisons on two levels: One, is to visit the prisons in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with our Legal Officers and interview the awaiting trial inmates who need the Council's free legal services. Two, is that as the Director General and key Legal Officers must accompany the Chief Judge of FCT on his annual assizes to do jail delivery of the prisons. These visits afforded me first-hand information on the prison conditions as it affects the Council's mandate and get reports about how Legal Officers perform at the assizes. It also equipped me with the wherewithal for relating with the Justices, Magistrates and Area Court Judges who accompany the Chief Judge and hear their comments on how they work with our Legal Officers over prison decongestions. Honourable Justice and Officers of the Prison Services always commend the efforts of the Council staff. Not only was it encouraging to hear constructive comments about the Council's staff from respectable Civil Servants, the positive

comments remained a standard that should not be allowed to drop. Therefore, I guarded this reputation jealously and usually took disciplinary actions on those staff that attempted to tarnish or bring down the Council's reputation by negative attitudes such as not attending to their cases with the expected seriousness or they dump the cases given to them by the Courts.

I undertook similar visits to Police Stations. The familiarization tours to states enabled me do oversight functions on state staff. Engaging with development partners and other external stakeholders such as the Nigerian Bar Association remains a unique lifetime experience for me. During my tenure as the Director General of LAC, I did not miss any NBA Annual Conference. In addition, the Management always made provisions for all lawyers in the Management team and the most Senior Legal Officers of the States to accompany the Director General to NBA Annual Conferences because the platform afforded me more time to know the most Senior Legal Officers for information sharing and more constructive collaboration, as well as affording us all continuing legal education.

The purpose of interfacing with the Honourable Members and Distinguished Senators of the National Assembly was to enable them conduct oversight on the Legal Aid Council and discuss budgetary allocations to Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). At all times, I must be available to hold meetings with the Ministry of justice leading us parastatals because they are our supervisor.

I will like to recount, again, that my dear colleague and friend now Honourable Justice Edith Agbakoba , a Judge of the

Industrial Court (who served as a National Youth Service lawyer, with the Council but was retained after her service year ) helped me understand the staff better. She spent a little over twenty years in the service of the Council before her elevation to the Bench. To me, she was in the best position to inform me about the goings on before my arrival. The import of the information disseminated collectively by different officers enabled me know that there was a subtle but strong underground resistance to restructuring and other fundamental changes that had been designed to take place. Somehow, and this was not unexpected, some staff felt that helping me understand the running of the Council precipitated the success attained. By God's providence, I got to know of the group of persons who would have wanted her to work against me. Having come from a background in which one needed to be quick in the uptake, I learnt very quickly after listening to various advice, views and opinion. After all these I began taking decisions and asserting authority. I believed in being fair in all issues and know that in taking decisions I must have inadvertently stepped on toes. Those steps were not deliberately meant to hurt anybody but done in the interest of our collective responsibilities to the public we were mandated to serve. I always took the moral highway and strived to make the Management team (especially as well as other staff at the state level) to understand the rationale for my actions. I was not interested in being "cultivated and patronized" by any staff and believed in establishing limits of relationship so that there would be mutual respect. It was a matter of principle and this was helped by the

fact that I had always been and remained a private person. In that regard, I did not encourage staff to visit me at home but when occasions such as a wedding celebration for any of my children arose, I often extended invitations to them especially the Management team. My consideration for not extending invitations to other staff particularly those in the out stations was to save them the unplanned expenses of transportation and, perhaps accommodation. However, some staff always found their way to such celebrations and this usually meant pleasant surprises, to say the least. I often appreciated them but must openly reiterate that I appreciated them all. Life never ceases to teach us lessons because those that one had expected would offer a positive input sometimes displayed less than sublime attitude.

I operated an open door policy to the Management staff. One of such policies was that they could walk in to see me rather than fill forms as required by protocol. The other category of staff were encouraged to discuss and sometimes explain their reasons for deciding to see me without going through their heads of unit or department, a regulation they had been advised to adhere to so as to instil discipline into the system. I applied a lot of discretion but the policies had a human face and enabled me know the staff and their disposition more closely.

Whenever there was enough funds for familiarization tour, I was always accompanied by most of the Management staff. For the first four years of my two tenures, I was able to tour about 30 states except the core North Eastern states because terrorism raged there. One major reason for taking Heads of Departments

on state visits was to allow our meeting with staff of the state offices be more inclusive. I valued bringing the Management face to face with the staff outside the headquarters where a lot of issues were resolved in one fell swoop. On such occasions, the Director of Planning and Statistics, for example, often instructed and corrected those who sent monthly returns of cases into the database. He also ensured that no fake data was sent to headquarters because it was easy to cross check with files of clients if the lawyer did his job. Similarly, the Director of Human Resources Management often addressed administrative issues, so did the Director of Accounts and Finance and by the time we were done with a state office, all the issues concerning staff and clients would have been known and corrective actions would have been taken. I was fortunate to have met sincere and hardworking staff and was quite impressed by their selfless service to the Council; to the poor; the voiceless; this nation and the world at large. The developmental partners offered support by providing training and retraining opportunities for all legal staff. The retraining was done in three sets. During the training period, the Management staff used the opportunity to identify and showcase hard working legal officers and asked them to share, with their colleagues, their strategies of how they had been able to complete many cases and become more efficient and effective in discharging their official tasks. The Management staff also instituted a peer review system and gave awards to hard working staff that had been chosen by their peers. Of course, there were a few recalcitrant staff but with time, Management devised ways of putting them back in line by

empowering the senior colleagues in state offices to counsel, correct or, as a last resort, issue queries to those staff that fell out of line; absent from work; or demonstrated unprofessional behaviour. Where the infraction appeared to have gone out of hand, a strong Disciplinary Committee at the Headquarters usually took up the matter and the senior or Junior Staff Committees often ratified their recommendations.

It is not out of place to recall a particular disciplinary issue because of the lessons learnt from it.

A female staff in one of the State Offices was alleged to have been working in two Federal Offices at the same time and collecting income from both places. The anomaly was brought to the attention of the Management by an anonymous petitioner. When the member of staff was asked to respond to the petition, she admitted to working in the two places but said she thought she had the right to do both jobs because one job was permanent while the other was part time. She was informed that in the Public Service Rules, a civil servant was only expected to run a farm part time. She was informed that she was expected to be familiar with the Civil Service Rules and therefore had no right to work at two places and collect salaries from both places. She was asked to face the Disciplinary Committee. After the committee had conducted its investigation, it recommended that she should be transferred out of the state to discourage her from doing both jobs but rather than show remorse, she became defiant. She refused to go on transfer and resorted to writing petitions against the Director General and accused her of victimization. She sent the said petitions to the Offices of the

Head of Service; the Council's Board; Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC); and the National Assembly. She also influenced a Senator of her constituency to join in supporting her petition. She got other staff to sign one of the petitions under the name, "Concerned Lawyers." These malicious petitions were unhealthy and time consuming because all the institutions they were directed to also redirected them to the Director General for comments. At the end of the day, the allegations were found to be false, malicious, mischievous and misleading and therefore the petition was confined to the dustbin of history. The then Honourable Minister of Justice instructed that she be asked to comply with the ratified recommendations of the Disciplinary Committee and go on transfer.

Till date, I have spent the longer part of my career in the private sector and so found this type of defiant behaviour by a subordinate staff in the employment of the Civil Service, a disservice to the employer. The fact that after the allegations were found to be false and malicious against the Director General and the matter was swept under the carpet and no disciplinary action was taken against the petition-writer, has laid a terrible precedence. It is therefore not surprising that such frivolous petitions have become the order of the day precisely because those who write them know that no punishment awaits such behaviour. This is a lesson to political appointees.

Political appointees must take up offices because they desire to serve the nation diligently. They must endeavour to work hard and be above blame, like Caesar's wife so that



unproductive staff who attempt to tarnish their image by writing petitions would fail. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of every organisation carries a lot of pain because the top is lonely. According to a Nigerian proverb, “if you cannot stand the heat do not stay in the kitchen.” Another equally ridiculous petition surfaced but went into the incinerator. However, it is worth retelling: Providence later smiled at the Council as the Council’s Supervisory Ministry encouraged the Presidency to give the appropriate approval to the Ministry of Finance to release funds for purchasing a befitting Four Storey Building as the Council’s Headquarters after 40 years of existence. Appropriation was also given for its renovation. The said petition stated that the Building was dilapidated and fraudulently purchased. When officials of the ICPC arrived for physical inspection, they saw that the Building was not dilapidated and had been occupied by the Management and Staff of the Council. They met me seated in a new office while many departmental and unit heads were busy settling into their offices. The ICPC official briefed me about the petition and wanted to know where the dilapidated Headquarters Building was. I told him that the only Headquarters Building of the Council was the one we were occupying. He was so shocked and unhappy that someone could be so malicious to have made such false allegations. He ended up congratulating me for being the Chief Executive that ensured the Council moved into such a beautiful edifice. He had even brought in a photographer, in case he had found a dilapidated building as alleged. He still went ahead and took pictures of the newly renovated Headquarters Building as evidence that the

petition was false and malicious. According to him, it would help him write his report. That was how I was exonerated. So, rather than chastisement, I got commendation. There were other unpleasant experiences but I did not allow them to discourage me. It was God's providence that saw me through the eight years spent as Director-General because I learnt that I was the first Director General to complete an eight-year-tenure.

In 2012, I attended a-one-week high level leadership training at Dubai. Other outstanding Nigerians also participated at the training. It was at the training that I learnt and understood the fundamentals of Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). I also mastered the art of putting round pegs in the round holes. This course helped me to understand strategies for working with staff; knowing their strength and weaknesses and putting round pegs in round holes across board. I learnt the art of delegating authority and put my best staff forward. Sometimes the Management wondered at such decisions and I often explained that it was not about seniority but the capacity to deliver. I never regretted such decisions because those that I proposed always delivered, successfully. You would recall that the Council is specialized and mandated to give legal representations in different fields of law. Since Lawyers specialize in different areas, their specializations often tend to be their areas of strength. Some are very competent in criminal matters just as others are good in civil matters. As managers of resources, our task is to identify the areas of strength and deploy resources to those areas. This prevented the Council from getting backlashes from clients. For the Front

Office Staff, we had to deploy a very well cultivated staff who was not only well informed but understood the necessity of image making for the Council because the Front Office staff remained the first face seen by clients on coming into the headquarters. We took that decision because human rights issues are taken seriously in public domain. Incidentally, in the course of my work, I was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from a European University.

I also attended a one-month training on “Leadership and Strategy” at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) Kuru, near Jos. It was a one-month capacity training course packed with studies on policy formulation, strategies for implementation of different policies as there was no one size fits all. The training exposed the participants to the importance of management skills in the light of current realities such as globalization and digitalization. As Chief Executives Officers, the training exposed recipients to need to retool with more modern knowledge to be at par with counterparts in other parts of the world. Some of the revelations included the need to know that the staff working in our institutions and offices remained important stakeholders. Such staffs are known as internal stakeholders and are the implementers of policies so that management must obtain their “buy in” to a policy before its implementation. At the training, I got introduced to and became familiar with the topic “Becoming Concept.” In my opinion, this concept appears to be the missing link in the civil service engine because civil servants have not fully understood and imbibed it. Essentially, it explains why staffs that are

seemingly unproductive in their workplaces end up as the weak links that prevent the public institution from offering optimal performance.

## ***CHAPTER 10***

### **BASIS OF BECOMING**

“Becoming.” for me, started from a two pronged approach the normal preparations that parents make for their children particularly parents that value and fund their children’s education. The second approach is what I intentionally built myself to be, in order to continue becoming. I benefitted from the old Western Nigerian region free and compulsory education at that time that had made many children get that fundamental education. My relationship with God began early and it was an inheritance from my parents who were staunch Christians. In the course of growing up, I attended Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools. Inevitably, I followed the tenets of the Roman Catholics but my father insisted that I should not convert from being a Methodist to a Catholic. Somehow, I got used to the Catholic ways of worship and consequently became an adherent of Catholicism. I carried on with Catholicism in the early part of my marital life but later converted to Pentecostalism. In my youthful age I made a conscious effort to start my personal relationship with God, which I believe is a panacea for the preparation for one’s life’s journey because directions and revelations come up and leads to discoveries of one’s purpose in life. It was at this point that I started understanding the deeper things of life and I began making

sense of Bible passages and establish their correlations with physical things such as lyrics of songs, stories read or heard. Intuitively, I saw art meeting life and became enthralled and drew spiritual messages from them. I had earlier referred to one of them and stated that it impelled me to change my career. The iconic line of a lyric “nothing comes from nothing,” from the classic movie, “Sound of Music” became both significant and symbolic to me. The main character in “Sound of Music” was Sister Maria (played by Ms. Julie Andrews). The plot of the movie was weaved around Sister Maria who aspired to become a Catholic nun but was not able to transform into a nun as the Mother Superior felt she was too playful and sent her to work as a nanny to a family of seven young children who had lost their mother. The care of the children was left to their father, Lord Von Trap (played by Christopher Plummer) who had become precocious with business and politics and requested the local Convent for a nanny to raise his children. The story of the movie played out through songs especially nursery rhymes. One of the scenarios that fascinated me most was when the father fell in love with and proposed to marry Sister Maria. Amongst the many songs featuring in that scenario was the line “nothing comes from nothing” and was followed by the line “I must have done something good.”

For a very long time, I had lived with the notion that one has to have done something good to earn good things of life. For me, the movie touched very deep points of my spiritual being. In it, for instance, Sister Maria was depicted as a commoner (the lowest cadre on the social ladder). The class system of that era

made it impossible for people to cross from one class to the other in the same country. Although today, it appears as if the class system has disappeared, vestiges of it subtly play out once in a while. A similar class system called caste system exists in India. Lord Von Trap eventually married Sister Maria because he loved her genuinely. In my opinion, affection evolved into love when she treated the children very kindly and as her own. As in the case of Sister Maria God predestines us to be what he wants us to be for the purposes he created us. It is our duty to deliberately find our purpose in life. It takes efforts, patience, endurance, persistence and tenacity to “Become” what we were destined to be. We can liken life to the simple processing that plays out at the Automated Teller Machine (ATM). An ATM machine only obeys the command given it. Our relationship with God through Jesus Christ depends on how we acknowledge him, through prayers, praise and worship and serve humanity. Such an approach will open our eyes of enlightenment and reveal our inherent gifts and talents. If these gifts are rightly prepared and harnessed, they enable us live a fulfilled life.

### ***EARLY LIFE EDUCATION***

At the formative stages of our lives, we get exposed to both informal and formal education from socialization agents like parents, neighbours, churches and mosques. Some parents carefully watch their children closely and often successfully detect the talents hidden in them. Deliberately, they encourage those children to nurture their gifts. Those children grow their

talents and later become blessings to themselves and their families. We all have talents and we need to uncover them. Everyone has, at least, one talent. Others have more than one. Talents tend to be more openly acknowledged in the creative and entertainment industries. There have been stories of how observant and sensitive mothers helped their children develop their talents. Initially, most Nigerian parents did not like acknowledging talents that were not academically inclined because they see them as the forte of “never-do-wells.” Many parents are fixated on having their children become doctors or lawyers or engineers not minding if such children have the required capabilities. The 6-3-3-4 system of education was designed to ensure that the children obtained a compulsory 6 years of primary education; then do the first 3 years of Junior Secondary School (JSS) and then write a Junior Secondary Examination to see if they could proceed to the next 3 years of Senior Secondary level. After this they proceed to 4 years of university education. If the student(s) did not pass the examination of the JSS level, the examination would be repeated and if they still failed such children would be sent to trade schools. Initially, this policy was resisted by parents who wanted their children to be promoted to the next level of three years of Senior Secondary School (SSS) by all possible means.

I am genuinely worried that the 6 3 3 4 system of education did not attain the desired goals. I am speaking from the position of a stakeholder because I started my career as a teacher in the Federal Government Unity Schools and had first-hand contact with this educational system and its products. In my view, the 6



3 3 4 system was a well thought out. The system was designed to incorporate the non-academic competence of children that were not intellectually capable of the rigours of proceeding from JSS to SSS and to the tertiary level. The 6 and 3 years of Primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS) show that Nigeria has nine years of compulsory education in place but the 9 years is still not enforced. Educators feel that the only way of knowing if a child is not sufficiently intelligent to proceed to any tertiary institution is the number of years that the student spends redoing the ordinary level transition examination called West African Examinations. After a student has passed the West African Examination, he or she writes the Joint Admission Examination to proceed to the tertiary institution, if a student passes the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) Examinations she/he goes into a tertiary institution. However, the worrisome dimension is this: There have been instances of students who just could not pass the transition examination from the secondary level and earn the required credits and so rewrite the examination many times for several years. Rather than assess the student's area(s) of strength and stoke it, the parents deploy unethical means of making the child get into a tertiary institution particularly the university. Few of the methods include procuring live examination questions; contracting mercenaries to impersonate their children and write examinations for them; out rightly buying admission into the desired universities and the desired courses. Let me quickly say that these unethical practices are sometimes done with the connivance of school authorities, teachers, examination

supervisors, admission officers, among many other people of unscrupulous character. The most tragic aspect of this unethical practice is that few of these students manage to go through the educational system undetected and graduate. They also deploy similar unorthodox methods for getting posted to their states and, perhaps, preferred places of primary assignments for the national service. Eventually, they complete the national service and get absorbed into the employment structure. In many instances, deficiencies in the system does not track and stop them before they wreak havoc on the society. However, their colleagues; heads of units; and sometimes the overall leader of the workplace would have noticed that they cannot cope with the required pressure of work; and are not able to give good service delivery. As these inadequacies play out, the culprit is also shielded by colleagues using silent conspiratorial agreement strategy. Only when major tragic events in which the culprits cannot be exonerated occur do the society and educational system embark on inquests and unearth the deficiencies that connivance had built into the formation of such people. This is an example of students that cannot “Become” even after fraudulently acquiring certificates and fraudulently secured employment. One of the reasons for this problem is because of the high premium placed on the acquisition of paper qualification in this country. Paper qualification appears to be the only means of recruitment for competitive jobs in this nation. There is a big contrast in the western world because it is mandatory for children to attain education up to the secondary school level. After this, they undertake advanced level

examinations and if successful, get into tertiary institutions. However, those not so educationally endowed that cannot get into tertiary education level go into other areas that require technical or artistic or practicable application of talents such as entertainment, movie making, sports and other creative ventures. In all, they do well in life and the larger society is able to benefit from their constructive input.

In Nigeria, most children who have succeeded in creative art careers tend to give credit to their mothers for nurturing those hidden talents. This is perhaps because mothers tend to offer more accommodating attitude to nurturing such talents without the knowledge of the fathers. Stories abound of mothers going the ridiculous extent of having to watch out for children and encourage them to realize their dreams because mothers tend to be more intuitive and use their negotiating ability on behalf of their children when father sees things in a different light. It is known that fathers tend to be more logical in thinking and prefer realism to a “dream world engendered by fantasy” often associated with creativity. Happily, most parents have accepted that the world is a global village and has gone digital and have reassessed their notions. They now know that globally acknowledged billionaires like Bill Gates used basic education in developing Microsoft just as Mark Zuckerberg who created Facebook. There are other globally acknowledged artists who only got basic education but have become icons in various parts of the world. Very reluctantly, fathers have begun to embrace the concept that their children could do well in life after obtaining basic education. They have accepted the reality of life

and have begun supporting their children who aspire to excel in fields other than academics. Many parents seem to have a better understanding of the wholesome upbringing of their children because while it is good to ensure that children get a sound formal education and make progress in their chosen careers they have recognized that hidden talents and gifts can transform the lives of those children and in many cases, their own lives too. As it is, a relatively large number of Nigerian children have begun to find purpose and fulfilment in life. In Nigeria, the creative arts and technical industries have begun to grow rapidly. These two areas can competently hold their own against their counterparts in the western world. Today, many young Nigerians devote a lot of time to information, communication and technology (ICT) and creative works because once they attain their objectives, there is instantaneous success. At these two pursuits, their energies should be channelled to constructive usages and not negative and destructive ventures. Nigerians are doing exploits in automobile-designs, working at high-tech precision industries like aeronautics and space ships. All these are clear evidences of Becoming. The entire process of Becoming what and who we were meant to be involves knowing that we must be realistic about life especially in challenging environments. Survival is the first stage of preparation for life's journey. So, after putting children through school, they need to remain alive and survive. The second stage is to become gainfully employed in a good job. Gainful employment and living wage have provoked a very robust debate among analysts in the contemporary world. However, it is not the focus of this

discourse at this point in time. After acquiring relevant educational qualifications, a relatively large number of Nigerians tend to seek employment in the private sector as a preferred choice because the salary therefrom tends to be higher than that of the public sector. In addition, those who had worked in the private sector tend to be more patronized than those from the public sector. Perhaps, another humorous part of the private sector reality is worth examining. A number of people had, through apprenticeship, become masters of their trade and risen to becoming entrepreneurs. In this category are electricians, mechanics, carpenters and vulcanizers, among others. Their clientele base includes many educated people. There is no formal salary structure in this sector but these groups of Nigerians are very confident and ambitious. Some of them that I had patronized often asked me to help them secure employment in government departments and agencies but as soon as I interrogate them and ask for trade test results they fluster. It does appear that while they are extremely proficient at their trades, they are not aware that they should back up their skills with certificates from vocational and technical schools. Many of them and this may be genuine, claim that they had never heard of trade tests or technical schools. Therefore, there is need to embark on a vigorous programme of repositioning vocational and technical education centres as was done in the 70s till the early 90s in Nigeria. There is nothing wrong in allowing these centres operate and flourish just as monotechnics and polytechnics. It is important to state that entrepreneurship should be built into the educational curriculum of students from

an appreciable stage because it would help to de-emphasize the mentality of looking for non-existent white or blue collar jobs whereas they could do well in their trades and earn more money. The other reality is that public sector jobs have suddenly begun disappearing and this has compelled government into creating awareness about entrepreneurial activities so as to move the minds of the youth away from the illusion of readily available government jobs. Government can promote entrepreneurship as a survival strategy by offering seed money in form of soft loans. Instructively, there are a category of people who took up employment in either private or public sector with just West African School Leaving Certificates as their basic qualification but took advantage of short courses and similar opportunities and have risen beyond the low cadre they started with. This demonstrates the “Can Do Spirit” in the Nigerian person.

### ***PROVIDENCE AT WORK***

Reality goes beyond pointing one’s feet in the right direction whether it is assessing one’s progress; taking stock of one’s wherewithal; scaling one’s career progression whether in the public and private sector; networking helpers; acquiring a bagful of degrees. It is the providence of God that repositions one in the needed space for Becoming. Nigeria is catching up with the world but perhaps not as quickly as it should. There is, for example, a new law called Administration of Criminal Justice Act, which practitioners in the justice sector have described as revolutionary because it stipulates that only

policemen who have degrees in law can act as prosecutors in court otherwise only lawyers employed as prosecutors in the Federal and various States Ministries of Justice are allowed to prosecute offenders. It is worthy of note that the study of law is easily attainable for police officers because they are part of the criminal justice system, many of them are lawyers and are prosecutors. A Law degree serves the owner for life because there is no age limit to practicing law as a private practitioner in Nigeria. Purpose however goes beyond degree acquisition. It lies in being happy and fulfilled in one's pursuit and that is why a Medical Doctor can become a professional Photographer or a Creative Writer or practice any unrelated profession and be happier than by practicing medicine.

My preparation to "Become" came through the revelation of God. In looking back at my childhood and adolescence, I appreciate my parents for bringing me and my siblings up to following the path of Christianity but I remained convinced that at a point in time, adults should decide on their own pathways in life. One of them is the choice to seeking the creator in a personal and determined manner devoid of the influence of parents, families, or friends. Many parents pander to the Biblical advice of "teach a child in the path he should follow and he will never depart from it." Perhaps, a deeper reading to this advice is that there is an eternal life after this present life but there is also a process to following this path to a final destination by consistently building up faith and diligently pursuing obedience of God's commandments. This is summed up in the love for God and one's neighbour. However, there are

principles for attaining the said elevation. The principles include making sacrifices; and giving to the poor because this is a life time journey. I decided to continue in this pathway of Christianity because the words in the Bible shall not go unfulfilled.

I believe in destiny, a situation affirmed in the Biblical saying of “I knew you ever before we were formed in your mother’s womb.” God had predestined what we shall become in life. Once we discover our purpose on earth, our work becomes easier and almost effortless. It is like a fish in water, its natural habitat. It swims effortlessly but once out of water it struggles to the point of death.

God did not promise a problem free life but that he would be there to help us overcome and triumph and live victorious lives. As individuals, we must work out our salvation by our individual efforts so as to be assured that God would accept our souls at the end of life because salvation is not by collective bargaining.

### ***POLICY FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION***

As the Chief Executive Officer of the Legal Aid Council (LAC), I often got invitation letters from capacity building organizations to train and retrain staff. In this regard, I knew of the Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS). I preferred honouring invitations and trainings that would really benefit LAC staff. So, I ensured that they attended and participated in various workshops and training programmes of



one month duration due to funds available. It was clear to me that once the staffs at the directorate level were exposed to the rudiments of “Policy Formation and Implementation,” LAC would be better positioned to drive its mandates more optimally by implementing the policies using well thought out strategies. Therefore, I ensured that all management staff benefitted from training on this course and was only constrained by the low funds appropriated for training. I, too, availed myself of this course because change must start from the top and percolate downwards. For that particular training, the course work re-awakened in us, the fact that Leaders and Managers must get the right training on the concept of policies, their processing through rigorous analysis and tests to fit either the public or private sectors. It also demonstrated that it was important to have the right policies in place because specific strategies must be instituted for correct application and implementations.

The course opened up details of principles that we regularly and daily apply in doing our work but took them for granted. The word Stakeholders embraces not just all the in-house staff and clients or customers that access our institutions for services but those in the Ministries, Departments and Agencies. It subsumes showing the correct attitude to them so as to elicit reciprocal responses for good service delivery to them. Unknowingly, many management level staff take their other staff for granted just as we take clients for granted because we fail to abide by the concept that a well and able staff should first and foremost exist before he or she will give the required good

service delivery to clients or customers. Stakeholders expect that management of the different institutions have instituted implementable strategies for optimal service delivery according to their different mandates. These strategies must be well thought out; adopt the correct strategies and tactics with the help of experts. Finally, policies must also be regularly monitored and evaluated to assess success or failure and then plot the way forward. One of the takeaways from a major training I attended abroad was formulating and planning the Council's five-year National Legal Aid Strategy Plan. This was reinforced when I had the opportunity to attend the one month training at NIPSS; I realized that I had practiced many of the concepts without knowing them. My belief that knowledge is for all times and all seasons made me impel all the management staff to attend the one month training sessions offered by NIPSS for management staff of ministries, departments and agencies. These trainings among courses taught, touched on essential aspects of the "Concept of Becoming", we brainstormed using our experiences as chief executive officers to what we saw of different staff's application of self to work and I came to a painful realization that this is probably the most cogent reason for the inertia and lack of passion that many staff exhibit at work. On a few occasions, I found myself wondering if this was not the reason for management and staff inability to buy into the Council's mandate and vision and run with it

## ***BECOMING AND DOING***

The concept of becoming and doing is predicated on Staff (the internal stakeholders) being able to perform effectively and efficiently at work. They do this by coming to work early and willingly; knowing their work schedule and doing them. This can only be possible if they had been properly motivated; are fit; competent and free of fear and guilt. They must be energized; matured; physically; mentally; emotionally and spiritually equipped for working as team players and not for selfish interest. Unfortunately research has shown that one of the challenges of Civil Service is that the staffs work in silos rather than as team players or as interdependent workers. In my opinion these challenges can be surmounted through appropriate training, mentoring, coaching and provision of welfare for the staff. These inputs would make them “Become” staff that willingly go to work and are able to collaborate as team-players.

“Becoming,” first starts with the upbringing of children in the nuclear families. This is where the virtues, values and principles infused into children at home and in schools germinate and take root at higher levels of education. Preparation also comes through mentoring and coaching, it goes to say that the staff that had been exposed to such mentoring and coaching at home and at school, would in turn, impart these virtues into other younger children at the impressionable stages of their lives because they have direct control or supervision over them . The Manager or Unit Head has the responsibility of identifying indolent staffs that promote gossips; refuse to complete their daily schedule; and closes relatively early. It is the responsibility of the Manager to correct them and put them

on the right pathway. It never ceases to amaze me that workers that display indolence in the public sector often buckle up and become effective and efficient once given the opportunity to work in the private sector. One of the first measures to tackling such indolent behaviour is counselling. If this does not work, then queries can be given and if that approach fails, disciplinary action can be taken in the official bureaucratic structure especially in the civil service. The answers to query may expose, to management, the reasons for such unwholesome behaviour. Sometimes the indolence may have arisen from a genuine human problem such as lack of accommodation or the threat of immediate ejection by the landlord or landlady. Other problems may be depression or emotional challenges. These problems can be solved immediately. For the accommodation problem, the manager can approve a compassionate welfare loan. Once this is done, the said staffs are most likely to do a volte face because the gesture shows that management is concerned about the plight of staff. At other times, one may discover that the staffs are just not genuinely interested in the job rather the staffs are marking time, collecting salary while awaiting a better job. The management staff and the senior staff in the Council's State Offices are often encouraged to assess their subordinates for capabilities and, or truancy and indolence. There is a reporting template in place and the Public Service Rules supports this template to report very serious cases of unacceptable behaviour (such as extreme absenteeism due to illness or truancy) to management at the Headquarters. In some instances, Management has found cases where some staff

deliberately absented themselves from work but still collected their salaries as e-payment mode rarely discriminated on who to pay since the Federal Government changed the old method of payment of salaries, known as personnel costs, to the world best practice of electronic payment known as Integrated Payroll and Personal Information System (IPPIS). This e-payment system directs salaries into a staff account as an automatic salary payment from the Federation Treasury Account (FTA) through an integrated platform. It is a modern digital and efficient form of payment of salaries to reduce fraud but it also has flaws: A staff, for example, can deliberately leave his or her job without proper resignation knowing that with the present civil service rules it takes time to ascertain the genuineness or otherwise of a staff's sudden absence from work. Whatever reasons a staff gives for continuously accepting salaries without going to work is acceptable until management's attention is called to it. Only then can the management officially notify the government department responsible for payment of salaries to stop the payment of such salaries. Fortunately sometimes the government department in charge has periodically worked with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to recover the illegally drawn salaries. This is part of the good efforts of the anti-corruption drive of the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari.

### ***THE CIVIL SERVANT AND THE POLITICAL APPOINTEE***

I shall discuss the civil servant first and the political appointee later. The civil servant is employed by the government. He or she assumes a career in the public domain and attempts to serve the public. In other words, the civil servant can be described as government employees serving in States or at the Federal Government level. In the past and perhaps till date, working for federal government was more rewarding because salaries and allowances were paid before the end of each month while those who work in the different states often complained about delayed salary payments. Till date, there is still the problem of late and irregular payment of salaries. The Civil Service recruitment is guided by a process clearly defined in the Public Service Rules; extant laws; and other laws guiding the Ministry, Department or Agency (MDAs). At the beginning of job hunting, most job seekers accept any job for survival and not what they desire and are passionate about. This attitude is a flaw because such employees do not take time to articulate what life means to them and probe the things they want to achieve by applying for a particular type of job that would lead to the desired output. Eventually, they tend to be quickly frustrated, experience discontentment; lack of job satisfaction; and constantly seek secondment to the more desirable Ministries, Department or Agency, for example, many of the legal officers employed into the services of the Legal Aid Council often attempt to apply to be seconded to the Ministry of Justice which they perceive as having improved conditions of service than for staff in other MDAs. One other strong reason is a pull-factor. This is because there is usually a very vibrant underground

communication between workers across the length and breadth of MDAs. They often share information on vacancies and other relevant matters that are important to career progression. This leads to a constant deliberate attempt to move from an agency that offers lower financial benefits to those that offer better ones. While this is true for few MDAs, the grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence. In Nigeria, what people refer to as better jobs are those that have better financial benefits. However, it does not mean that the worker that transfers his services to another MDA is able and fit in the concept of “Becoming,” and giving of his or her best in good service delivery. Please, do not get me wrong. There is nothing wrong in a staff exercising his or her human rights of moving from one establishment to the other. It is a natural quest to improve their lifestyle and have a better life. There is nothing wrong in working towards improved basic things of life such as comfortable housing; standard schools for one’s children; better health care and a generally good life which can only be possible by seeking better jobs. However, it is honourable to do so with all sense of responsibility and be seen to work on a higher moral ground which is to impact society constructively by contributing the utmost for better service delivery. One of which is to change the mind-set of workers to making them understand that it is not all about money but that it requires serious hard work. Perhaps, one of the best ways to stem incessant migration of staff for better jobs and, or financial gains is for Governments to deliberately reduce the disparity in the conditions of service amongst all MDAs. Let me quickly commend the staff that

have become upwardly mobile especially those who improved their academic qualifications for career progression. I am impressed when I come across staff who were initially recruited on low qualifications such as Primary School Leaving Certificates and Secondary School Leaving Certificates but had studied and obtained degrees (using the public service rules which allows for part time studies while the staff is still working, actively) and consequently made serious career progression. The Civil Servant's important commandments (apart from those in the Holy Books) are contained in the Public Service Rules. (PSR). The civil servant is expected to commit the PSR to memory and be guided by it daily both in and outside the office. Two of the ways in which the career civil servant ought to exit service is to have spent the mandatory 35years of their career life before retirement or to have attained the age of 60years. This rule is not peculiar to Nigeria as it is applicable to civil services all over the world. This 60-year-age limit has been reviewed for certain disciplines such as the Judiciary. The Judges of the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court now retire at the age of 70 years whereas in some jurisdiction in the Western world their Supreme Court Justices retire at a more advanced age or at an age determined by their health conditions. Therefore, as long as they are able and fit to continue, they can work till very old age. The argument for Nigeria is that the environment in which Judges work is harsh and stressful. Many Judges, for instance, still write in long hand rather than use the more modern automatic stenographic machines known as



Recorders. Taking down court oral pleadings in long hand has serious health consequences.

### ***THE POLITICAL APPOINTEE***

As the phrase implies, the political appointee is a person appointed by government because the Constitutional Provisions and Acts that established different Ministries, Department and Agencies have provisions stipulating that a particular appointment should be made with specified academic qualifications. Usually these appointees head Departments and Agencies as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or Heads of Governing Boards and members of Governing Boards under the supervision of a Supervisory Ministry whose Ministers are also political appointees. This means that all political appointees are not elected and are not core civil servants. Few of the most senior civil servants who are fortunate end their careers as Permanent Secretaries that assist Ministers. I met only a few Heads of Department and Agencies who were core civil servants and were appointed to head their own Department or Agencies because the Acts that established them allowed career Civil Servants who attained the position of Director by their meritorious service, to be appointed as Directors General. This is common with the Armed Forces and Paramilitary Forces .It is good to allow such institutions to be so structured because of its command structure and not run against the tenets of the Act that set them up. If an “outsider” is appointed to head such institutions, it may lead to chaos. In the civil service structure,

departments and agencies are supervised by the Ministers; and whether a Military or Paramilitary institution, a politically appointed Minister must head either the Defense Ministry or Interior Ministry, respectively. The ministers appointed in the Defense ministry are usually retired senior military officers although this has not always been strictly followed in Nigeria's present democratic dispensation because sometimes civilians are known to head that ministry.

Executive Governor of Kaduna State's book entitled "The Accidental Civil Servant" chronicles his life, political appointment and transition from the private sector into the public sector. I believe that he chose this title to emphasize that if one did not start his working career as a core civil servant then accepting the political appointment into the civil service makes that appointee an accidental civil servant. This is true because many political appointees are from the private sector. This is not to say some did not have a complete career in the civil service and later retired to the private sector at another point in their lives before being called to head MDAs. The Act establishing Legal Aid Council required that for a person to be appointed as a Director General the person must not be less than 10 years in practice as a Lawyer of the Nigerian Bar and that means that an Accountant cannot be the Director General of LAC because its mandate is for legal representation to the poor citizens of Nigeria who cannot afford the services of a lawyer. I commend the Civil Society Groups that support developmental programs for departments and agencies and in the process help to review their old acts in order to bring about reforms for

improvements and best global practices such as appropriately qualified political appointees. I commend the Nigerian Legislative Houses for legislating on the reforms of these Acts and other extant laws with a view to constantly reviewing old Acts of MDAs in order to create desired reforms. The Council has benefited from this type of review because its old 1976 Act was reviewed to an improved 2011 Act. This has led to many other reforms.

The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria through recommendations made to him by the Minister of the Supervisory Ministry and sent through the Office of the Secretary to Government usually appoints the political appointee or “accidental civil servant.” This results into an approval through a media announcement and formal letters of appointment given to the appointee through the Office of the Secretary to Government. This is how Chief Executives Officers (CEOs) of Departments and Agencies are appointed. However, Ministers and other Political Appointees are first nominated through the ruling political party. Then their names are then sent to Security Agencies for clearance and due diligence; and the Senate confirmation either at committee level or as is common for Ministers, public hearings of their abilities to perform as ministers is aired on national electronic media. Afterwards, the names of the successful nominees are sent for final announcement as successful ministers-elect who are eventually sworn in and then given their portfolios.

This is the point at which political appointees are introduced to the career civil servants. A political appointee is expected to

spend four years, the maximum number of years for a single tenure. If the Act allows for another four years, it may or may not be renewed. This adds up to 8 years that most appointees can spend as Chief Executives Officers. This means that the career Civil Servant spends more years in an organization than the political appointee can ever spend in that organization. Therefore, the career civil servant may work with a few or as many as four or five political appointees or Chief Executive Officers, during the span of his career.

It is incontrovertible that career Civil Servants know the intricacies of the Bureaucratic Structure more than the Political Appointee who comes in as fresh Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). The Civil Servants are quite adept at the rules and extant laws guiding the implementation of the policies that drive the mandate of MDAs. To avoid the usual “trip wires” that new CEOs tend to trip, those in management should endeavour to put CEOs through rather than leaving them to meander through twisted pathways filled with “booby traps.” This will ensure a good take off and guarantee good service delivery. In the long run, it is better to help the new CEOs succeed in implementing the institution’s policies that drive the institution’s mandate than to watch them trip and fail. Often, the result of such failure can be devastating to all the stakeholders. Essentially, the new CEOs ought to know that they need to be humble and be shown the correct pathway by career civil servants who willingly help to point out the policies and laws that guide the institution and other protocols that must be followed. A CEO, for example, may be knowledgeable on restructuring and other reforms but needs




the advice of the appropriate management staff on procedure such as the human resources management for staff matters; and the accounts department for advice on budget processes; or on matters of funds appropriated for items such as staff trainings or projects that must have the approval of the Bureau of Public Enterprise (BPE) or none at all; and what applications to make in the course of the federation's budgeting process including getting approvals from higher authorities for carrying out of essential aspects for implementation of policies. All these show that the CEO cannot work in a vacuum rather he or she needs assistance from those staff that had been trained through the years in the process of bureaucracy. The CEO also needs to quickly improve his or her knowledge about these processes and procedures in the system by studying and understanding the laws, rules and policies guiding the institution as well as the implications of actions and inactions. It is important to be wise in decision making and not degenerate into a "totalitarian" or "dictator." It is also unwise to incur unnecessary hatred from the already existing staff that will help the CEO to succeed. We should not pretend that the appearance of the new CEO is always embraced by existing staff. No, that would be self-delusion and unrealistic because there have been instances of staff that tried to mislead the political appointee in order to score unhealthy points with equally aggrieved and negatively-oriented staff. I have had to deal with such unwholesome behaviour by choosing to engender a harmonious relationship environment for majority of the staff in order to elicit contentment and more passionate attitude to work enough to

drown the diversion from “trouble makers.” Often one of the feedbacks that get to me is “why does the DG not get angry.”

The attitude I maintained in the face of crises was to fixate my attention on bringing all the staff to understanding the importance of the Council’s mandate. More than the average number of staff bought into the propositions. It is not news that all the staff can be pleased because a few of them did not like the restructure and reforms such as converting the Administrative Officers to Paralegals to assist the Lawyers to accelerate access to justice for the poor. Gradually, the public became aware of the Council activities such as offering mediation and alternative dispute resolution (MADR) as free services.

I may have stepped on some toes but I never deliberately intended to offend anybody. However if we all professed to be passionate to work for the voiceless and deliberately joined the institution for the purpose to assist the poor, it was meant to be a tea party and needed us all to take hard decisions, to reform the institution, to retrain the different categories of staff, in order to be worthy of being in the regional and Sub-Sahara African continent as a foremost provider of legal aid to the poor and voiceless, this was how I understood my role and I did my best. I can only pray that history judges me fairly.

## PHOTO GALLERY

S/N	IMAGE	CAPTION
001		<p>CHIEF C. IKEAZOR, SAN, OON</p>
002		<p>HEADQUARTERS MOVED PERMANENTLY TO HER OWN BUILDING LOCATED AT NO. 22 PORT HARCOURT CRESCENT, OFF GIMBIYA CRESCENT, AREA 11, GARKI, ABUJA</p>
003		<p>ACCESS TO JUSTICE WORKSHOPS</p>

004



005



006



PORT HARCOURT  
PRISON VISIT






007



008



009		SIGNING OF MOU WITH NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT MAHMOOD ESQ.
010		PRAWA / SERVICOM WORKSHOP, ABUJA WITH DR. UJU AGOMOH
011		

012	 <p>A photograph showing three women seated at a table covered with a white cloth. The woman on the left is wearing a white hijab and a yellow and black garment. The woman in the middle is wearing a black jacket. The woman on the right is wearing a dark blazer. In front of them are papers, a pen, and a glass of water. A banner in the background reads 'KADUNA STATE WELCOMES YOU TO A... ON OF THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE... JUST... FOR THE POOR PROJECT KADUNA STATE... HALL, CON-M... S: HOUSE, ... 2TH NOVEMBER... 5'.</p>	ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR THE POOR PROJECT, KADUNA
013	 <p>A photograph of two individuals sitting on a red leather sofa. On the left is a man in a dark suit and glasses. On the right is a woman in a grey dress. They are both looking towards the camera.</p>	WITH HON. JUSTICE P.N.C. AGUMAGU PRESIDENT CUSTOMARY COURT OF APPEAL, PORT HARCOURT (AS HE THEN WAS)
014	 <p>A photograph showing two people, a man and a woman, sitting at a table covered with a red cloth. They are looking down at papers on the table. The man is wearing a black shirt, and the woman is wearing a dark blue jacket. Other people are visible in the background.</p>	MR. STANLEY IBE (OSJI) AND MRS JOY BOB-MANUEL AT A LEGAL AID PROVIDERS WORKSHOP IN ABUJA.

<p>015</p>		<p>LAUNCHING AND PRESENTATION OF POLICE FORCE ORDER NO.20</p>
<p>016</p>		<p>WITH THE RIVERS STATE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE AND O. C. LEGAL MRS. SUSAN HARRISON, MR. AWOPONLE AND MR. UBAZI</p>
<p>017</p>		<p>CHIEF JUDGE OF THE FCT, UNODC COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE, AND MR DAYO APATA (SOLICITOR GENERAL OF THE FEDERATION) AT</p>

018



LACON 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

019



ROLL OUT OF THE CUSTOMER COMMENT CARD



020



**TRAINING  
WORKSHOP ON  
THE CLEARING  
HOUSE**

021



**CELEBRATION  
OF THE  
CONCLUSION OF  
THE ACCESS TO  
JUSTICE PROJECT**

022



LACON  
STAKEHOLDERS  
WORKSHOP ON  
REPOSITIONING  
THE LEGAL AID  
COUNCIL HELD  
IN  
PORTHARCOURT.

023



024



AN ADR  
WORKSHOP IN  
KADUNA UNDER  
THE ACCESS TO  
JUSTICE FOR THE  
POOR PROJECT

025



A LACON/FIDA/  
ADUVIE  
MONTESSORI  
SCHOOL CHILDS  
RIGHTS  
WORKSHOP  
WITH PROF A.  
ADEYEMI AND  
HON. JUSTICE C.  
C. NWEZE.



026



CHILD RIGHTS  
ACT WORKSHOP

027



LACON IN-HOUSE  
ORIENTATION  
WORKSHOP  
HELD IN  
MAKURDI

028



A MEDIATION  
TRAIN THE  
TRAINERS  
WORKSHOP IN  
ABUJA UNDER  
THE ACCESS TO  
JUSTICE FOR THE  
POOR IN  
KADUNA STATE  
PROJECT

029



A LACON –  
OSCAR UNIT  
WORKSHOP ON  
MOTOR  
ACCIDENTS

030



A LACON  
STAKEHOLDERS  
CONFERENCE ON  
ACCESS TO  
JUSTICE IN  
ABUJA

031



THE DIRECTOR-  
GENERAL LACON  
PRESENTING A  
PLAQUE TO ONE  
OF ITS  
FOUNDING  
FATHERS CHIEF  
DR. CHIMEZIE  
IKEAZOR SAN,  
LLD.

032



MR. CHIKWEZIE KINGDOM (A LACON PROBONO COUNSEL BASED IN RIVERS STATE), MRS JANE BIYANEYIN (RIVERS STATE COORDINATOR) AND MR VICTOR LABESA (DEPUTY DIRECTOR CIVIL JUSTICE, LACON HQ) AT THE LEGAL AID PROVIDERS WORKSHOP IN ABUJA

033



LACON  
GOVERNING  
BOARD HOLDING  
AT A PRESS  
BRIEFING IN 2014

034



ADMINISTRATIO  
N OF CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE  
MONITORING  
COMMITTEE AND  
ITS  
ADMINISTRATIV  
E STAFF AT THE  
OPENING OF ITS  
HEADQUARTERS  
WUSE ZONE 5  
ABUJA. 2018



## ***REFERENCES***

1. Chimezie Ikeazor SAN LLD, ‘Legal Aid for the Poor in Nigeria’
2. [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/Access tojustice.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/Access%20to%20justice.aspx) - Report submitted by Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights at the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in October 2012
3. Eva Melis & Victoria Esquivel-Korsiak, ‘Engaging Citizens Through Mediation in Kaduna State, Nigeria’, June 2016, published by the World Bank IBRD-IDA.

## ***LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS***

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ATPs	Awaiting Trial Persons
CEO	Chief Executive Officers
CFR	Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic
FIDA	International Federation of Female Lawyers
GCFR	Grand Commander of the Federal Republic
HAGF	Honourable Attorney General of the Federation
J4A	Justice for All
JSC	Judge of Supreme Court
LAC	Legal Aid Council



NCS	Nigerian Correctional Service
NBA	Nigeria Bar Association
NCWS	National Council of Women Societies
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
MDA	Ministry Department and Agencies
OSJI	Open society for Justice Initiative
PDSS	Police Duty Solicitors Scheme
PRAWA	Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action
ROLAC	Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNODC	United Nations office on Drugs and Crime



# WORKING FOR THE VOICELESS

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mrs Joy Sheila Bob-Manuel (nee O'Dwyer) born in Ibadan, Oyo State Nigeria. She attended University of Lagos for her first degree, and later Rivers State University of Science and Technology for her Law Degree and was called to the Bar.

She has had a fulfilling career from teachings to a successful legal practice culminating in her becoming the Director-General of the Legal Aid Council. She is married to

Chief Awoye Kelly Bob-Manuel and they are blessed with four children.