



**CENTRE FOR
SOCIO-LEGAL
STUDIES (CSLS)**

CELEBRATING

20
YEARS
OF IMPACT

20th

ANNIVERSARY

**TWO DECADES OF ADVANCING CRIMINAL
JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
ACCOUNTABILITY**



www.censolegs.ng

2006–2026

YEAR
ANNIVERSARY

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Editor Notes

A commemorative record of twenty years of institution-building, reform advocacy and people-centred justice work.

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WELCOME TO CSLS @ 20

This special edition commemorates the 20th anniversary of the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies: an institution built on the conviction that law must be understood in the social, economic, cultural, and political realities of the people it serves.

Across research, legislative advocacy, institutional strengthening, capacity development, and strategic partnership, CSLS has helped move criminal justice reform from policy ambition to practical change. The pages that follow trace that journey - from early legal aid and criminal procedure reform initiatives to the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, the National Minimum Standards, state-level implementation, and a new generation of reform champions.

This is not only a record of achievement. It is an invitation to sustain the work: to make justice faster, fairer, more inclusive, more accountable, and more accessible to every person.

Twenty years of impact. A future still being written.





It is with immense gratitude and a deep sense of fulfilment that I welcome you to the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies (CSLS). This milestone offers us an opportunity to reflect on two decades of dedicated service, meaningful partnerships, and impactful contributions to justice sector reform in Nigeria.

Since its establishment, CSLS has remained focused on a clear mission: advancing criminal justice sector reform. Our journey demonstrates the power of collaboration, perseverance, and strategic focus. By remaining committed to criminal justice reform, the Centre has contributed to significant legal and policy developments, strengthened institutions, built capacity across the justice sector, and supported initiatives that improve justice delivery for all Nigerians.

Our achievements would not have been possible without the support of our valued development partners. We are deeply grateful to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNICEF, the MacArthur Foundation, International IDEA, GIZ, and many other partners who have supported our work over the years. Through their financial, technical, and strategic assistance, they have helped transform ideas into impactful programmes and strengthened our ability to contribute meaningfully to justice reform.

PROF. YEMI AKINSEYE-GEORGE, SAN, FCIARB
PRESIDENT, CENTRE FOR SOCIO-LEGAL STUDIES

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT, CENTRE FOR SOCIO-LEGAL STUDIES (CSLS)

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the many justice sector stakeholders who have been part of our journey. We thank the Federal and State Ministries of Justice, the Judiciary, law enforcement agencies, correctional institutions, and other criminal justice actors whose collaboration has advanced the cause of justice in Nigeria. We are equally grateful to civil society organisations and professional bodies, including LEDAP, NIALS, the Nigerian Bar Association, Juritrust Centre, CLEEN Foundation, and many others whose partnership and shared commitment to reform have enriched our work. We also acknowledge the media for consistently amplifying our advocacy efforts and helping bring important justice sector issues to public attention.

I would like to specially appreciate the CSLS family; lawyers and non lawyers alike; alumni, and current team members. Your dedication, professionalism, and commitment have been the driving force behind the Centre's success. We celebrate your invaluable contributions and thank you for the role you have played in building and sustaining this institution. As we celebrate twenty years of impact, we remain conscious that our work is not yet complete. CSLS will continue to focus on criminal justice reform because there are still important goals to be achieved and challenges to be addressed. At the same time, we are expanding our work into areas such as youth development, religious freedom, human rights, and broader access to justice initiatives. We are particularly committed to leveraging technology to improve justice delivery and promoting greater access to justice for indigent and vulnerable persons.

To guide this next phase of growth, the Centre has developed a strategic plan that outlines our priorities and vision for the future. As we look ahead, we count on the continued support and partnership of all our stakeholders. Together, we have accomplished much over the past twenty years, and together we can achieve even more.

Thank you for being part of our journey. We believe the years ahead will be even more impactful than those behind us, and we look forward to continuing this important work with all our partners and friends.

CSLS at a Glance

Twenty years distilled into reach, people, knowledge, and reform infrastructure.

20

YEARS OF REFORM

36+FCT

NATIONWIDE REACH

3,000+

STAKEHOLDERS TRAINED

60+

PUBLICATIONS & POLICY RESOURCES

700+

ACJA/ACJL RANGERS

1

ENDURING MISSION: JUSTICE

SIX CONNECTED PRACTICE AREAS

Human Rights Advocacy Placing dignity, equality and fair process at the centre of legal reform.	Good Governance Improving policies, institutions and accountability mechanisms.	Law Reform Improving policies, institutions and accountability mechanisms.
Legislative Advocacy Connecting practitioner experience with laws and policy decisions.	Research Producing knowledge that explains problems and tests solutions.	Capacity Building Equipping justice actors to implement reforms consistently and well.

Vision, Mission & Core Values

The principles that connect CSLS’s founding philosophy to its national reform agenda.

VISION To attain national and international recognition as the foremost advocates, experts and trainers in criminal justice reform, social justice, accountability, human rights, security and allied matters in Nigeria and beyond.	MISSION To promote justice reform, human rights, security and accountability in Nigeria, consistent with international best practices, while building the capacity of justice-sector stakeholders to serve as agents of change and development.	CORE VALUES <i>Integrity</i> <i>Excellence</i> <i>Equality</i> <i>Justice</i>
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THE FOUNDING IDEA

Law does not operate in a vacuum. Its legitimacy and effectiveness depend on how well it understands social realities, protects human dignity, and enables institutions to deliver public value.

The Story of CSLS



From a multidisciplinary idea in 2006 to a national platform for criminal justice reform.

CSLS began with a critique of conventional legal thinking: that the law could not solve complex public problems if it ignored the society in which it operated. The Centre therefore embraced a multidisciplinary approach - linking legal doctrine with governance, economics, culture, institutional behaviour, human rights and security.

Its early work strengthened public-sector lawyers, supported legal aid reform and contributed to criminal procedure initiatives. Over time, the Centre developed a distinctive method: rigorous research, technically credible drafting, inclusive stakeholder consultation, sustained advocacy and practical implementation support.

That method proved consequential. CSLS participated in legislative advocacy connected to the Evidence Act 2011 and provided technical support to the Panel on Implementation of Justice Reform during the development of the Administration of Criminal Justice Bill. After the ACJA was enacted in 2015, the Centre shifted from law-making to implementation - supporting monitoring structures, state ACJLs, implementation strategies, judicial learning and institutional capacity.

By 2019, the challenge had become clearer: Nigeria had criminal justice laws, but implementation remained uneven. The National Minimum Standards emerged as CSLS's response - a common framework for evaluating whether essential provisions were being applied and whether institutions had the capacity to make reform work.

Today, CSLS combines national policy influence with state-level engagement, using evidence, partnerships and frontline experience to close the gap between law on paper and justice in practice.

OUR REFORM METHOD

- **Research the system**
- **Listen to frontline experience**
- **Build coalitions**
- **Develop practical tools**
- **Strengthen institutions**
- **Measure implementation**
- **Adapt and scale**

"The journey reflects organisational growth, but more importantly, a sustained commitment to a more effective, accessible and equitable justice system."

2006–2011 | Foundations and First Reforms

The years in which CSLS built institutional credibility and entered national law-reform processes.

2006

CSLS was established in June, advancing a multidisciplinary understanding of law and society. Capacity-building programmes strengthen strategic management skills for public-sector lawyers.

2006 – 2010

The Centre supports criminal procedure and legal aid reform initiatives, collaborates with the Federal Ministry of Justice and attracts international development support.

2011

Legislative advocacy contributes to the passage of the Evidence Act 2011, helping modernise rules of evidence and the administration of justice.

THE FOUNDATION WAS NOT A SINGLE PROJECT. IT WAS A REFORM PRACTICE: TECHNICAL, COLLABORATIVE, AND PERSISTENT.



2013–2018 | From Reform Bill to Implementation

A decisive period that helped reshape Nigeria's Evidence law and criminal justice framework.

2013-2015

CSLS provides technical support to the Panel on Implementation of Justice Reform, coordinates consultations, and contributes to implementation strategies and needs assessments for the Administration of Criminal Justice Bill.

2015

The Administration of Criminal Justice Act was enacted, introducing measures designed to improve efficiency, fairness, case management, accountability, and the protection of rights.

2016-2018

Legislative advocacy contributes to the passage of the Evidence Act 2011, helping modernise rules of evidence and the administration of justice.

THE REFORM QUESTION CHANGED: FROM “WHAT SHOULD THE LAW SAY?” TO “WHAT MUST INSTITUTIONS DO?”



2019-2023 | Accountability and National Standards

CSLS expands from implementation support to national evaluation, performance and consistency.

2019-2022

The Centre monitors high-profile corruption cases, advances Federal Criminal Code and Penal Code proposals, supports Code of Conduct reform, strengthens court administration and promotes electronic recording and other technology-led solutions.

2022

CSLS begins sustained advocacy for National Minimum Standards: essential ACJA/ACJL provisions that every jurisdiction should prioritise and implement.

2023

The Centre develops the NMS framework, conducts baseline assessments, publishes a National Scorecard and convenes a National Technical Review and Evaluation Conference. The Attorney-General of the Federation adopts the initiative as a national project and appoints CSLS to lead the National Working Group.



2024

The validated NMS is launched; ACJA/ACJL Rangers are trained; training resources are expanded; state-level sensitisation and capacity building intensify.

2025

CSLS advances the ACJA Amendment Bill and Model Practice Direction, supports inclusion of persons with disabilities, strengthens state implementation, secures judicial digitalisation commitments, and records measurable behavioural change across focal states.

2026

Legislative advocacy contributes to the passage of the Evidence Act 2011, helping modernise rules of evidence and the administration of justice.

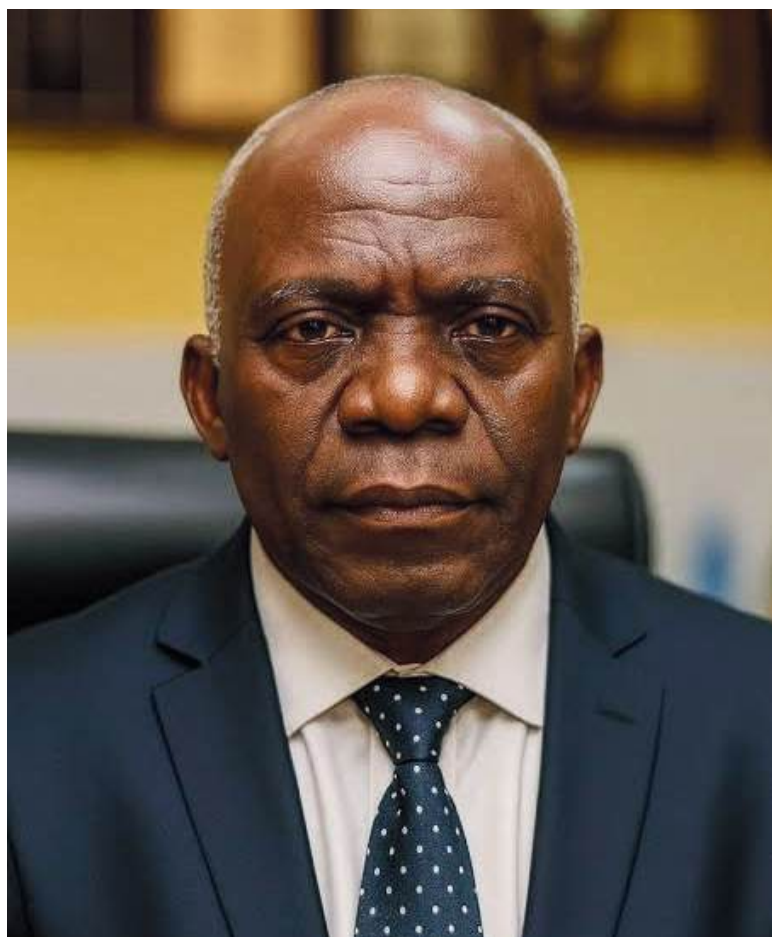
FROM A REFORM ORGANISATION TO A NATIONAL REFORM ECOSYSTEM.



Reflections on CSLS' Enduring Impact

BY

Femi Falana, SAN



"It is a profound honour to be invited as the Distinguished Lecturer at this public lecture commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015. I extend my sincere appreciation to the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies (CSLS) for convening this important national conversation and for its sustained leadership in justice sector reform over the last two decades. The CSLS has been a strong intellectual and advocacy force behind the enactment and implementation of the ACJA across several states of the federation, and history will record its contribution to deepening criminal justice in Nigeria."

***Distinguished Lecturer, Public Lecture
Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the
Administration of Criminal Justice Act
(ACJA) 2015
30 October 2025
—Femi Falana, SAN***

Transforming Criminal Justice in Nigeria

CSLS's strongest contribution has been its ability to connect law reform, implementation architecture, and practitioner capacity.

Over the past two decades, the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies (CSLS) has played a pivotal role in shaping Nigeria's criminal justice reform landscape. Through partnerships, advocacy, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and evidence-based research, the Centre has strengthened the rule of law, accountability, and justice administration nationwide



EVIDENCE ACT 2011

Legislative advocacy helped advance a modernised evidentiary framework for Nigerian courts, strengthening the legal foundations of justice delivery.

ACJMC AND IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

CSLS advocated for effective monitoring, provided technical and strategic support, and helped strengthen national coordination.

ADMINISTRATION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT 2015

Technical support, consultation and implementation planning contributed to one of Nigeria's most consequential criminal justice reforms.

STATE ACJL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The Centre supported Kaduna, Plateau, Adamawa, Kano, Ondo and Nasarawa, among other states, in developing or strengthening state criminal justice legislation and implementation approaches.

"THE DISTINCTIVE VALUE: NOT ONLY HELPING TO MAKE LAW, BUT BUILDING THE SYSTEMS THAT MAKE LAW WORK."

Building Capacity. Producing Knowledge.

Reform becomes durable when institutions can interpret, apply, monitor and improve it.



WHO CSLS HAS EQUIPPED

- Judges and magistrates
- Prosecutors and state counsel
- Police and investigators
- Correctional service personnel
- Court registrars and administrators
- Defence lawyers and civil society actors
- ACJMC/JSRT officials and reform coordinators

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

- ACJA implementation strategies and needs assessments
- Annotated and simplified legal resources
- Comparative analysis of the ACJA and state ACJLs
- National Minimum Standards and guidance materials
- Baseline assessments, scorecards, and policy briefs
- Model Practice Direction and emerging-trends materials
- Research on court administration, sentencing, asset recovery, and justice technology

"THE DISTINCTIVE VALUE: NOT ONLY HELPING TO MAKE LAW, BUT BUILDING THE SYSTEMS THAT MAKE LAW WORK."

WHY THE NMS MATTERS

Nigeria has adopted criminal justice legislation nationwide. The persistent challenge is consistent implementation.

THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

- Inadequate investigations
- Weak prosecution and case preparation
- Delayed trials and court backlogs
- Overcrowded correctional facilities
- Fragmented inter-agency coordination
- Uneven monitoring and data systems

A COMMON BENCHMARK

The NMS identifies priority provisions of the ACJA and ACJLs that must be implemented for the innovations in the laws to become real.

It creates a national framework for evaluating performance, comparing progress, identifying gaps and directing advocacy and investment toward the areas that matter most.

The standards are not an alternative to the law. They are an implementation discipline - a way of asking whether institutions are complying with essential safeguards, timelines, oversight duties and coordination requirements.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE & ANTI-CORRUPTION

NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS
(FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACJA & ACJLs)



The Architecture of Consistent Justice

Four clusters, three purposes and one national ambition: effective implementation across every jurisdiction.

FOUR CORE IMPLEMENTATION CLUSTERS

01 PRE-TRIAL PROCESSES

Arrest, investigation, legal safeguards, detention oversight, and timely prosecutorial action.

02 TRIAL PROCEEDINGS

Fair hearing, efficient procedure, witness management, and compliance with statutory requirements.

03 CASE MANAGEMENT & TIMEFRAMES

Adjournment discipline, legal advice, reporting, inspections, and the reduction of avoidable delay.

04 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Monitoring bodies, inter-agency coordination, data, accountability, and sustainable reform systems.

THREE PURPOSES

BENCHMARK

A standardised framework for assessing criminal justice performance.

COMPETITION

Healthy comparison that encourages states to improve measurable outcomes.

INVESTMENT

Evidence for advocacy, budgeting, and targeted institutional support.

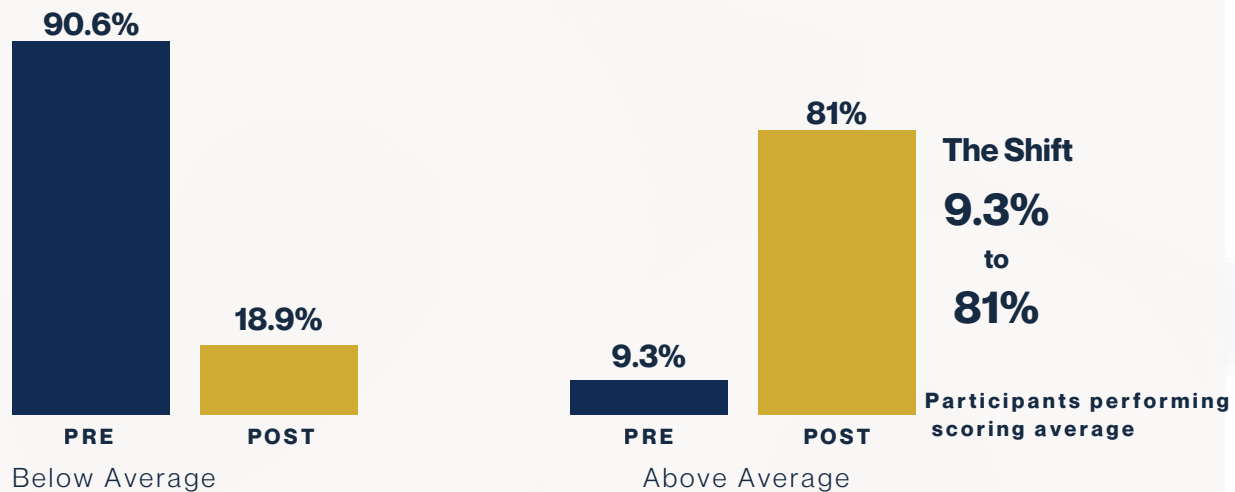


From Training to Measurable Learning

The NMS project combines standards, practical training, advocacy, dissemination and evidence of behavioural change

TRAINING THAT CHANGED THE KNOWLEDGE AND CURVE

ACJA/ACLS Rangers Training and NMS Project Launch



NMS MOMENTUM

700+

ACJA/ACJL Rangers trained across 36 states and the FCT

36+FCT

National implementation network

4

Core implementation clusters

1

National benchmark for consistent justice delivery

WHAT THE ASSESSMENT SUGGESTS

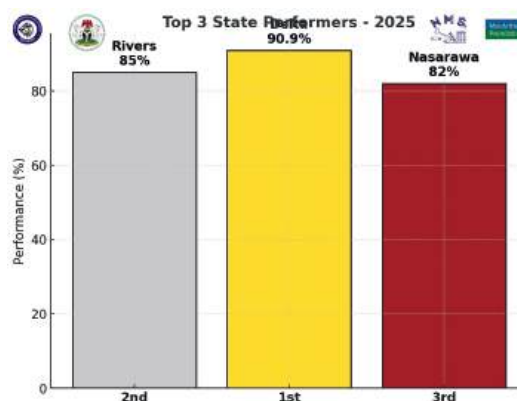
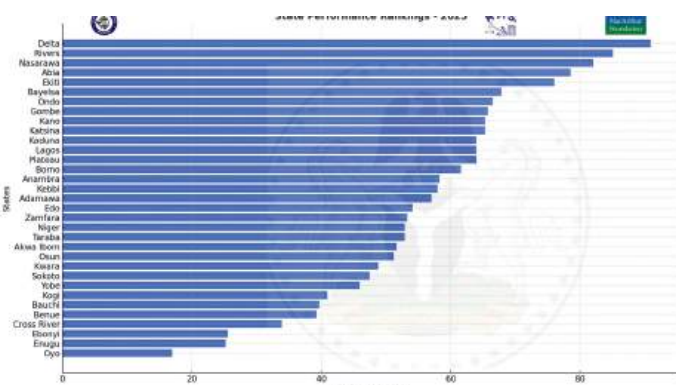
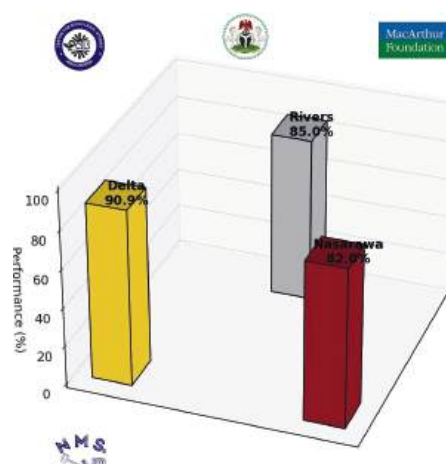
The reported assessment shows a major movement from below-average to above-average performance after training. The result supports a wider lesson from the outcome stories: interactive, practice-led capacity building can improve understanding, strengthen confidence, and catalyse institutional action.

NMS Scorecard for ACJA/ACJL Implementation

The National Minimum Standards (NMS) initiative was developed to strengthen the implementation of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act/Laws (ACJA/ACJLs) across Nigeria. Through systematic assessment, monitoring, and reporting, the NMS Scorecard provides an evidence-based framework for measuring state performance, identifying gaps, and promoting accountability in criminal justice administration.

In 2025, the Scorecard highlighted notable progress across participating states, with Delta, Rivers, and Nasarawa emerging as the top-performing states.

GENERAL PERFORMANCE OF STATES-2025



States in order of performance- 2025

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Delta - 90.9% | 16. Kebbi - 57.9% | 31. Ebonyi - 25.6% |
| 2. Rivers - 85% | 17. Adamawa - 57% | 32. Enugu - 25.2% |
| 3. Nasarawa - 82% | 18. Edo - 54.1% | 33. Oyo - 16.9% |
| 4. Abia - 78.5% | 19. Zamfara - 53.3% | 34. Imo - N/A |
| 5. Ekiti - 76% | 20. Niger - 52.9% | 35. Jigawa - N/A |
| 6. Bayelsa - 67.8% | 20. Taraba - 52.9% | 36. Ogun - N/A |
| 7. Ondo - 66.5% | 22. Akwa Ibom - 51.6% | |
| 8. Gombe - 65.7% | 23. Osun - 51.2% | |
| 9. Kano - 65.3% | 24. Kwara - 48.8% | |
| 9. Katsina - 65.3% | 25. Sokoto - 47.5% | |
| 11. Kaduna - 64% | 26. Yobe - 45.9% | |
| 11. Lagos - 64% | 27. Kogi - 40.9% | |
| 11. Plateau - 64% | 28. Bauchi - 39.7% | |
| 14. Borno - 61.6% | 29. Benue - 39.3% | |
| 15. Anambra - 58.3% | 30. Cross River - 33.9% | |

NATIONAL REFORM, INCLUSION AND THE NEXT LEGAL FRAMEWORK



CSLS continues to shape the rules, tools and implementation mechanisms of a more accessible criminal justice system.

NMS AS NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Attorney-General of the Federation signed the NMS document and approved its gazetting, reinforcing the standards as an authoritative national framework for ACJA/ACJL implementation.

The work now extends beyond publication. Implementation requires state ownership, institutional budgets, functioning monitoring committees, reliable data, practice directions, inspection tools, legal safeguards and sustained capacity building.

CSLS's emerging role is therefore both technical and catalytic: develop credible tools, convene institutions, amplify practitioner experience and keep reform focused on the human cost of delay, exclusion and weak accountability.

ACJA AMENDMENT BILL

- Stakeholder review and technical input
- Frontline prosecutors' recommendations elevated into plenary discussion
- Stronger procedural protection for persons with disabilities
- Executive approval for further legislative action

MODEL PRACTICE DIRECTION

- Practical operational guidance for implementation
- Alignment with the NMS framework
- Stronger gender and social inclusion provisions
- Clearer pathways for judicial and institutional compliance



Abia | When Standards Enter the Law

CSLS engagement moved from training and advocacy into proposed legislative and institutional change.



"The amendment of the Abia State ACJL and the Criminal Code Law benefitted directly from a detailed review of the NMS, and both bills are now before the House of Assembly."

— Mrs Nkwachi Onwutebe-Madu, Secretary, Abia State ACJMC

In Abia State, CSLS-led capacity building on the ACJL, the National Minimum Standards, and the Model Practice Direction strengthened the work of the Administration of Criminal Justice Monitoring Committee, particularly in data collection, documentation, and the gradual automation of monitoring processes.

The most significant outcome was legislative. A working group reviewed the NMS clause by clause and reflected relevant provisions in draft amendments to the Abia State ACJL and Criminal Code Law. Both bills were subsequently transmitted to the State House of Assembly.

The intervention also produced behavioural change. Police engagement had initially been difficult, but participation in NMS training improved responsiveness, cooperation and willingness to join reform activities. The Abia experience shows how sustained technical engagement can influence law, institutional practice and inter-agency relationships at the same time.

Plateau | Training Becomes Institutional Behaviour

In Plateau State, CSLS trained justice-sector stakeholders on emerging ACJA/ACJL developments, the NMS, and the Model Practice Direction. The training simplified the law, clarified institutional responsibilities, and strengthened coordination among criminal justice actors.

Police officers who attended returned to their commands and directed officers across the State to cooperate with magistrates conducting inspections of detention facilities and to provide the facilities and information required for effective oversight.

The Justice Sector Reform Team also developed a standardized inspection form and began preparing data-collection templates for the police, other law-enforcement agencies, and the correctional service. Although funding and logistics still constrain routine inspections, the intervention produced a concrete shift from knowledge acquisition to institutional preparation and improved compliance.

Practical capacity building changed police cooperation and strengthened monitoring tools.



"After one of the trainings, the police went back to brief their colleagues across the State to cooperate with magistrates during inspection visits."

— Mrs Shetak Becklang, Secretary, Plateau State JSRT

Lagos | A Commitment to System-Wide Digitalisation

Evidence-based advocacy secured high-level judicial interest in a comprehensive digital transformation partnership.



"What CSLS has presented today convinces me that this is a partnership worth pursuing."
 — **Hon. Justice Kazeem Olanrewaju Alogba, Chief Judge of Lagos State**

During a CSLS advocacy visit on 3 March 2025, the Chief Judge of Lagos State described the Centre's digitalisation proposal as practical, credible and aligned with the judiciary's actual needs.

The engagement produced a commitment to work with CSLS and seek the funding required for a system-wide approach. The Chief Judge emphasised that meaningful digital reform could not depend on individual judges using personal resources; it needed consistent infrastructure, adequate financing and uniform implementation.

The outcome validated a central feature of the CSLS model: advocacy is most persuasive when it combines technical preparation with a clear understanding of institutional constraints. It also opened a pathway for integrating digital court processes with the implementation goals of the NMS.

Adamawa | A Daily Guide Against Unnecessary Detention

At a low-level advocacy visit in Adamawa State, a senior magistrate reflected on a young defendant who had spent five years in pre-trial detention. The delay was driven by fragmented communication among the police, the Directorate of Public Prosecutions and the Nigerian Correctional Service, as well as the absence of clear timelines and operational guidance.

The story captures the human cost of implementation failure. A criminal justice system can have modern legislation yet still produce injustice when institutions do not coordinate, monitor cases, or comply with time limits.

For the magistrate, the NMS was not simply a policy document. It provided a practical framework for inter-agency responsibility, case progression and humane justice delivery. Her response illustrates how reform often begins: a frontline practitioner recognises a tool that makes better decisions possible and commits to using it.

For one magistrate, the NMS transformed a painful case memory into a commitment to better practice.



"If we had these Standards earlier, that young man would not have wasted five years of his life in detention. From today, I will use this document as my daily guide."
 — **Senior Magistrate, Adamawa State**

PROSECUTORS' VOICES ENTER THE REFORM PROCESS

A stakeholder review meeting demonstrated the value of inclusive legislative engagement.

At the June 2025 review of the Draft ACJA Amendment Bill, prosecutor Chinwe Obasi saw two of her recommendations adopted as major plenary discussion points. The significance was not procedural; it was practical.

Her intervention drew attention to cases delayed by the retirement, transfer or elevation of judges and by witnesses who became unavailable, ill or deceased. Such delay burdens prosecutors, weakens evidence and prolongs the suffering of victims' families.

By creating a structured forum in which frontline practitioners could shape the draft law, CSLS connected legislative design with the operational realities of prosecution. The outcome reinforces the principle that credible reform must be technically sound, but also informed by the people who confront institutional failure every day.

"It would be a big relief for prosecutors, who suffer a lot when cases are delayed... yet there is no justice for the dead and their family members."

— Chinwe Obasi, Prosecutor, Federal Ministry of Justice



ACJA Amendment Stakeholders' Review Meeting, Abuja.



Kano | Standards Become Compliance

Clear guidance and sustained engagement improved arrest safeguards and prosecutorial timelines.



"Statements are now taken in the presence of legal representatives or relatives, and legal advice is issued within the time prescribed by law."

— Mr Ibrahim, ACJA/ACJL Ranger, Kano State

Feedback from Kano State indicates improved compliance with arrest-recording requirements and safeguards under the State ACJL. Statements are increasingly taken in the presence of a suspect's legal representative or, where appropriate, a relative.

An ACJA/ACJL Ranger also reported that the Directorate of Public Prosecutions now issues legal advice within the fourteen days prescribed by the law. Faster legal advice supports more efficient case processing and reduces avoidable delay.

The Kano experience does not suggest that every implementation challenge has been resolved. It shows something more credible: consistent advocacy, practical training, and the dissemination of usable standards can improve specific institutional behaviours. Reform becomes visible when legal safeguards are observed in the station, the prosecutor's office, and the case file.

Anambra | Reform Leadership at the Frontline

Chief Magistrate Onome Nwankwo has supported CSLS training, sensitisation, and advocacy in Anambra State, helped validate the Model Practice Direction, and led engagement with criminal justice institutions.

In practice, she has used the NMS to strengthen detention oversight, reinforce timelines, and improve police cooperation during court-ordered inspections. Her work demonstrates how institutional reform depends on credible champions who can interpret standards, convene actors, and model compliance.

Her recognition as Best Magistrate in Nigeria in 2025 also highlights the value of investing in reform-minded practitioners. National frameworks gain life when local leaders make them operational, insist on accountability, and show colleagues that improved practice is possible.

Judicial ownership turned the NMS from a policy framework into a working tool for oversight and case management.



The Standards have strengthened our work and improved how justice is delivered in practice."

— Chief Magistrate Onome Nwankwo

STRONGER SYSTEMS, WIDER INCLUSION

RoLAC support improved CSLS's internal systems and extended the meaning of reform beyond formal justice institutions.



Institutional reform begins inside the reform organisation. RoLAC support helped CSLS move from annual to quarterly reporting, refine policy documents, strengthen financial controls and transition from manual to electronic financial management. Later M&E training and an internal retreat produced a Theory of Change, Logical Framework and monitoring plan designed to improve evidence, learning and accountability.

The benefits also reached vendors. Business-registration requirements, official-account payments and clearer distinctions between quotations and invoices improved transparency. One vendor reported that the support helped her formalise operations, build credibility and access higher-value clients.

Inclusion became more systematic as well. CSLS began explicitly requesting the participation of persons with disabilities in programme invitations, resulting in broader representation across focal-state events. The lesson is significant: justice reform is strengthened when organisational systems, procurement practice and participation standards reflect the accountability being promoted externally.

“The support we received has been transformative. It has allowed us to strengthen our internal processes and ultimately make a greater impact in the justice sector.”

— Prof. Yemi Akinseye-George, SAN



Participation of persons with disabilities across focal-state activities



Justice Heroes | National Recognition for Reform

"This recognition reflects the collective effort of our partners and supporters."

— Prof. Yemi Akinseye-George, SAN



Mrs Esther Ugo-Gbeye receives the Justice Heroes Award on behalf of CSLS

On 6 November 2025, CSLS was recognised at the Access to Justice Parley Awards as the Civil Society Organisation with Outstanding Contributions to Criminal Justice Reform in Nigeria.

The award acknowledged years of work bridging policy and practice: legislative reform, technical assistance, implementation support, institutional monitoring, the National Minimum Standards and collaboration with justice institutions at federal and state levels.

Recognition matters because reform work is often cumulative and difficult to see. A consultation shapes a clause; a training changes practice; a scorecard creates pressure; an advocacy visit unlocks commitment. The award made that chain of effort visible and honoured the staff, partners, supporters and frontline practitioners who have sustained it.

It also creates a standard for the future. National recognition is not an endpoint. It is a public expectation that CSLS will continue to defend evidence, inclusion, accountability and the practical delivery of justice.

Partners and Collaborators

CSLS's achievements are inseparable from institutions and people willing to invest in sustained reform.

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

- Federal Ministry of Justice
- State Ministries of Justice
- National Judicial Council
- National Judicial Institute
- Nigerian Law Reform Commission
- Administration of Criminal Justice Monitoring Committee
- Nigerian Law School

JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY ACTORS

- Nigerian Bar Association
- EFCC
- ICPC
- NAPTIP
- Legal Aid Council
- National Human Rights Commission
- Court of Appeal and High Courts
- Justice Sector Reform Teams

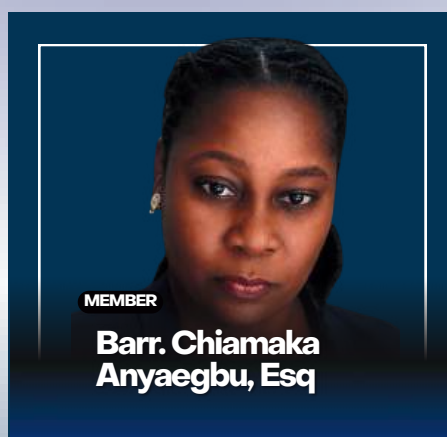
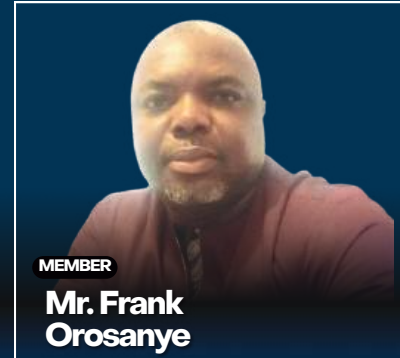
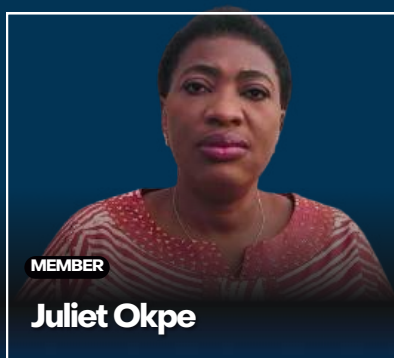
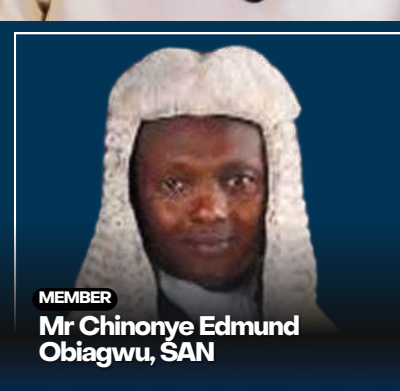
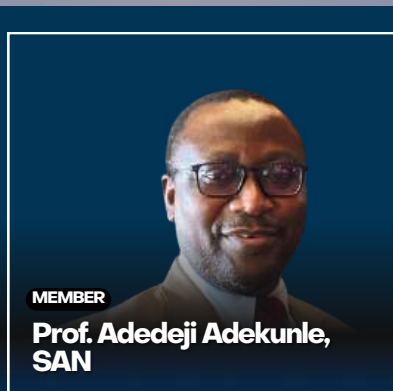
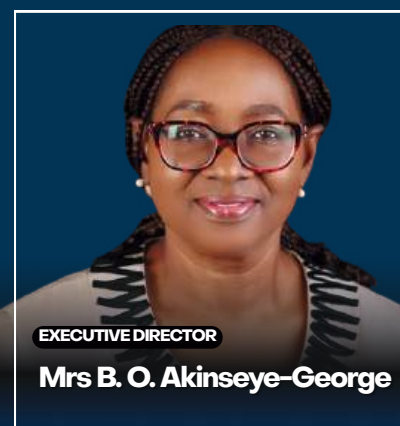
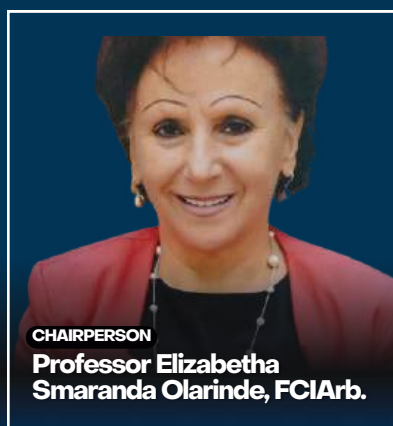
DEVELOPMENT & CIVIL SOCIETY

- MacArthur Foundation
- European Union
- International IDEA / RoLAC
- UNODC
- GIZ
- LEDAP
- NULAI
- TrustAfrica
- Legal Resources Consortium
- Human Rights Agenda Nigeria



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A board combining legal scholarship, professional practice, administration and reform experience.





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Vision Beyond 2026

The third decade must convert national frameworks into durable, measurable and inclusive justice outcomes.

FOUR CORE IMPLEMENTATION CLUSTERS

01 IMPLEMENTATION AT SCALE

Deepen state ownership of the NMS, ACJA/ACJLs, and Model Practice Direction.

02 JUSTICE DIGITALISATION

Advance e-filing, electronic recording, data systems, and technology-enabled case management.

05 NEXT-GENERATION LEADERS

Develop reform champions among young lawyers, magistrates, prosecutors, investigators, and administrators.

03 DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY

Strengthen monitoring bodies, scorecards, reporting, and public evidence of progress.

04 INCLUSIVE JUSTICE

Embed disability, gender, and social inclusion across laws, facilities, procedures, and programmes.

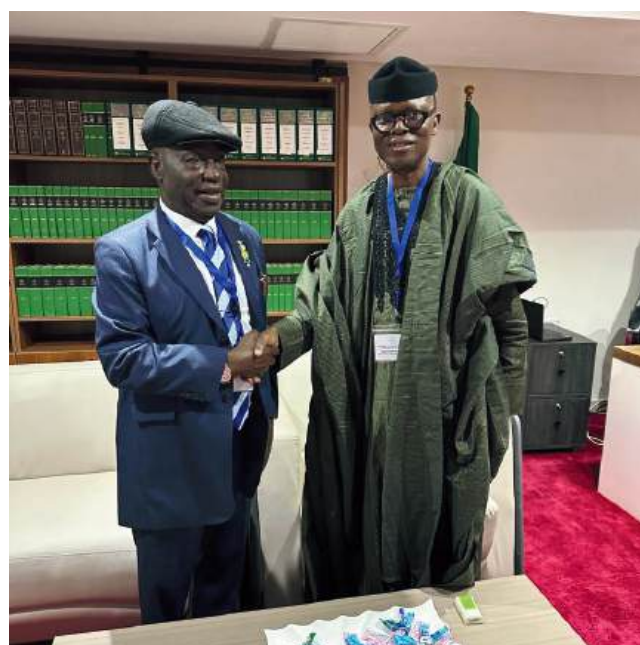
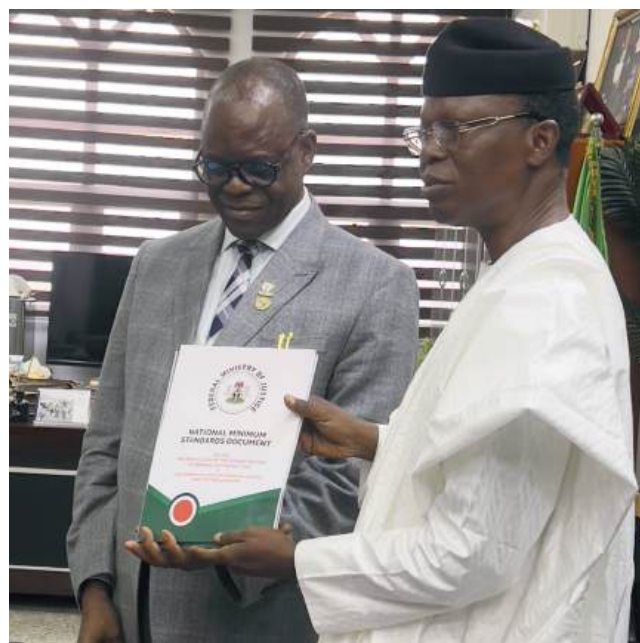
06 SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONS

Mobilise budgets, partnerships, and organisational systems to sustain reform beyond projects.

The future of criminal justice reform will not be secured by legislation alone. It will be secured by institutions that comply, coordinate, learn, measure, and place human dignity at the centre of every process.

Anniversary Gallery, Acknowledgements & Sources

A visual record of advocacy, training, recognition and reform partnerships across Nigeria.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CSLS acknowledges its Board, staff, state coordinators, ACJA/ACJL Rangers, public institutions, justice-sector practitioners, civil society partners, development partners, consultants, vendors, media organisations, and every participant whose experience and commitment have shaped this twenty-year journey.









Justice + Accountability + Human Rights + Good Governance



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