

Volunteers Justice Scheme: A Framework for Community Justice in the South-Western Nigeria

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Abstract

The focus of the study is on how to improve the justice system in Nigeria by reducing court congestion and improving access to justice through community justice system. The issue of court congestion, delay in court processes, and the inaccessibility of the justice system to the poor and uneducated is affecting the sustainable peaceful co-existence and orderliness in Nigeria. The inability of government to sustainably fund the justice system is a clear pointer that there is need for a people-centered approach to reduce the burden on government and to increase accessibility. Therefore, adopting descriptive analysis method, and relying on relevant secondary data, the paper examines the pre-colonial traditional justice system in the Yorubaland (South-west, Nigeria), and post-traditional justice system in Nigeria to identify salient issues responsible for inefficiency and inaccessibility. In the process, the paper identifies community justice as an alternative justice system and proposed the Volunteers Justice Scheme (VJS) committee, which is a non-formal alternative dispute resolution mechanism, that relies on community trust, knowledge of their tradition, with little or no financial cost incurred, no technical legal requirements and time friendly; to be established in each of the wards at the local governments level, as a framework for the operation of community justice in South-western Nigeria. Among the essential for the scheme are enabling law, a coordinating center at the local government, stakeholders' representatives to serve as volunteers, and identifying a public building in each of the wards as venues for the operation of the committee. Thus, for effective implementation of the Scheme, the study suggests

constitutional amendment to integrate the Scheme into the justice system, mass education to mobilize citizens, and training of committee members for efficient operation.

Keywords: *Community Justice, Court Congestion, Justice System, Volunteerism*

Introduction

The 16th Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations is the promotion of peace and strong justice institutions, and efforts are being made globally towards achieving this in line with the 2030 benchmark agenda. While various strategies are being explored by others towards achieving the goal, observations on the Nigerian justice systems are not promising. Although, the traditional backgrounds of different regions in Nigeria influence evolution of the justice system, the post-independence justice system indicates similar inadequacies across the land.

Findings show that Nigerian correctional centres (prisons) across the country are overcrowded. Also, out of the 244 custodial centres, which are currently accommodating 75,507 inmates, about 52,436 inmates are awaiting trial, with huge financial burden on Nigerian weak economy (John, 2023). The budget of the federal government for the 224 correctional centres in the year 2023 appropriation act to cater for the 75,507 inmates is N22.44 billion. The breakdown shows 52, 436 awaiting trial, 23, and 071 convicted, while 3,322 are on death row (The Whistler, 2023).

In addition, the consequence of poverty in Nigeria hinders the access to justice by the poor and vulnerable. Therefore, following this trend, it will be a mirage for Nigeria to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16 by the year 2030. The alternative approach that is being gradually advocated to support this initiative is the community justice system, which is less cumbersome, involves lesser technicalities and enhances process-ownership by the community. Thus, this study attempts to propose a framework referred to as the Volunteers Justice Scheme to facilitate the propagation of community justice operations in the south-west region of Nigeria. Therefore, the objectives of the paper are to:

- Examine the nature of the Nigerian justice system.
- Identify issues affecting court congestion and accessibility to justice

- Examine the relevance of community justice to effective justice system in Nigeria.
- Illustrate how VJS can serve as a framework for effective community justice in south-west Nigeria.

The remaining outline of the paper is: conceptual explanations, theoretical framework, nature of the Nigerian justice system, state of the Nigerian justice system, Volunteers Justice Scheme, conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Explanations

Justice System: The justice system comprises the established institutions meant to resolve disputes associated with the violations and conflicting interpretations of the societal rules. It is central to the administration of laws and rules that regulate public and private actions (Hammergren et al, 2007). The nature of civilization in every state and society influences the operation of its justice system, stability and development (Petersmann, 2003). Furthermore, the justice system is instituted to uphold the rule of law and provide checks and balances against abuse of power by the executive and legislature.

However, it must be stated that although, justice and judicial systems are intertwined, the latter is a narrower part of the former (Wex, 2020). The judicial system refers to the system of courts that passes judgment on whether a person or legal entity has broken the law and imposes appropriate punishments. It includes a variety of professionals, who work as judges, lawyers, defence and prosecution services, paralegal practitioners, court personnel (such as bailiffs and ushers) (Toolkit for Security Sector Reporting). Some organizations, which responsibilities relate closely with courts, includes bar associations and legal aid bodies.

The justice function of the judicial system is critical to ensuring the rule of law in two ways. The first role of the courts is to administer justice by ensuring that people accused of crimes are appropriately judged in a timely manner and fairly punished accordingly. The function is essential to the work of security providers in preventing impunity, and also means the judicial system works closely with both the police and prisons. It is sometimes referred to as the criminal justice chain, encompassing all the state security institutions that are involved in the process, by which a suspect is apprehended, charged, judged and punished. Secondly, the courts also provide a check on government power by ensuring that all the laws passed by governments and parliaments respect the fundamental principles and rights contain in a

country's constitution, and its other organic laws. These oversight functions prevent violations of rights and abuse of power by both the security operatives and the political authorities.

Community Justice: The term indicates an idea of justice practices with particular concern for the way crime and justice affects community life. Community justice encompasses the diverse forms of crime prevention and justice activities that explicitly include the community in their processes with the objective of enhancing the quality of life of the community. It is the sum of efforts by the criminal justice system to include the community in the process of both crime prevention and criminal sanctioning. Recent communities' initiatives include community crime prevention, community policing, community defence, community prosecution, community courts, and restorative justice sanctioning systems (Karp & Clear, 2000).

Community justice is rooted in the activities of the citizens, community organizations, and the provisions of the criminal justice system directed towards crime control and social disorder. Its central focus is community-level outcomes, changing the emphasis from individual to systemic issues, from individual conscience to social mores, and from individual goods to the common good.

Community justice is also referred to as Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ). It is an alternative strategy to the criminal justice system. Community justice focuses on repairing the harm to the victims and communities due to the offences or crime committed.

Regardless of diversity in perspectives and approaches to community justice, there are six core elements that prevent the imposition of external standards and programs, and also distinguish its nature and operationalization from the traditional criminal justice. These elements are: operation at the local level; emphasized citizen participation; cantered on problem solving; information-driven approach; devolution of authority and accountability; and being process-oriented (Karp, 1999).

In the Nigeria legal system, the adoption of restorative justice as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism can be traced to the introduction of the new Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) in 2015. The Act regulates the entire criminal justice process from arrest, investigation, trial, custodial matters and sentencing. The ACJA redefined the character of crime by changing the focus of criminal justice from punishment to restorative justice and

protection of society. It addresses the problem of prison congestion by initiating other potent alternatives to imprisonment in sections 453, 460 and 468 (Alobo & Inaku, 2018).

Specifically, community justice initiative aims to strengthen the citizens' confidence in the justice system and reduces recidivism (Karp & Clear, 2000). Community justice is beneficial to all parties, ranging from the victims, the community, law enforcement agencies, and to the offenders themselves. Community justice enhances quick outcomes, for instance in South Africa, traditionally it can take six months or longer to resolve a case, but it is addressed as soon as possible at the Hatfield Community Court (Wolf, 2008). It actively engages and empowers the community in resolving public safety issues. Restorative practices allow for reparation to the community and the victim (California Community Justice Project, 2004). Community justice promotes offender accountability and reintegration. Hence, the low-risk offenders are referred for rehabilitation, such as drug treatment, job training, and debt counselling, and also, it addresses the underlying root causes of criminal acts (Wood et al, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the paper is the theory of justice. The theory of justice as proposed by John Rawls has been used by researchers to explain the issue of injustice, in the economic context and ethnic phenomenon (Sari, 2020). The theory was initially published in 1971, and then revised in 1999. John Rawls attempted to provide a moral theory alternative to utilitarianism to address the problem of distributive justice. The theory attempts to develop a non-utilitarian justification of a democratic political order characterized by fairness, equality, and individual rights (Britanica, 2023).

In his 2001 book, *justice as fairness: a restatement*, Rawls further redeveloped the central principles for the theory. These principles point that the society should be structured so that the greatest possible amount of liberty is given to all its members, but the liberty of a member should not infringe upon that of other members. Also, inequalities-either social or economic are only to be allowed if it would be worse than under an equal distribution. Finally, if there is such a beneficial inequality, it should not be harder for those without resources to occupy positions of power such as public offices (Voice, 2011).

To achieve justice, access to justice, which is a basic principle of the rule of law, is also fundamental for peace and prosperity, and for the full inclusion of all citizens in the polity. Access to justice ensures that citizens are able to defend their interests in court and achieve full inclusion in the political community (Crawford & Maldonado, 2020). It reiterates the connections between legal, social and health problems. It also addresses the obstacles to getting legal advice and potential remedies. Denying access to justice hinders the individuals in expressing their rights, challenging discrimination, and demanding accountability in governance (United Nations, n.d.). Thus, there must be provision for alternative dispute resolution anchor by the community stakeholders themselves.

Nature of Nigerian Judicial System

The pre-colonial Nigerian societies have their own traditional judicial systems. The judicial systems, which consisted of formal and informal institutions, were hierarchical. The evolution of the Nigerian Judiciary can be categorized into 4 distinct eras namely: the period before 1842, 1845-1912, 1914 to 1953 and 1954 to date. Before the Europeans, various indigenous people of Nigeria had different difficult methods of dispute resolution mechanism. Among the Yoruba (west) and Ibo (east), the systems revolved around their traditional institutions. In the north, to some extent, the system was formal, based on the sharia, which is the Islamic legal system, in which the Emir was usually the appellate judge (Ali, n.d.).

Justice System in Traditional Yoruba Society

Prior to colonial rule various indigenous people of Nigeria had different methods of dispute resolution mechanism. Among the Yoruba tribe (Western Nigeria), the system resolved around their hierarchical traditional institutions. Usually, contentious issues are referred to the head of the family (*olori-ebi*). Those disputes, that cannot be resolved are further referred to the head of the compound (*olori adugbo*) and finally referred to the traditional ruler (*Oba*) for solution (Ali, n.d.). Hence, for the Yoruba tribe, the hierarchical mechanism for judicial adjudication is: the family council/court headed by the *Olori Ebi*, quarter or compound council/court headed by the *Olori Agboole*, and village council/court headed by the *Oba*. Each social stratum handled various levels of cases. Since the family constituted the basic unit of society, it was also recognized as the fundamental unit of the society's administration as well as a judicial unit. *Baba* settled quarrels among his wives and children; the *Olori Ebi* mediated civil cases within his extended family; the *Olori Agboole* handled civil and mild criminal cases; and the *Oba*

addressed civil cases that occurred between two or more quarters, and heinous criminal cases within his domain (Onadeko, 2008; Adeniyi, 2019).

The *Ogboni* was another institution that usually adjudicates on dispute in the traditional society. In most Yoruba towns, difficult criminal cases that involved important dignitaries were not tried openly. They were usually passed to the *Ogboni* or *Osugbo* cult, and the decision of the cult was final irrespective of the Oba's opinion (Ijagbemi, 1973). However, very little is known about the *Ogboni*, because they operate secretly at their Iledi (conclave). Only initiated members could be privy to these secrets, and these privileged members never revealed publicly their actions.

The Oro cult is another prominent institution that performs political, judicial and religious functions in a traditional Yoruba society. The cult was vested with the power to adjudicate over both civil and criminal cases. The Oro cult wielded a very strong judicial power and could condemn guilty offenders to exile or even death. Its judicial pronouncements were irreversible, even by the Oba, as was commonly seen during the reign of Oba Alake (the first king of Egba land) (Akanji & Dada, 2012).

Adeniyi (2019) further examined the traditional system of jurisprudence (TSJ) in Yorubaland, especially the spirito-extra-judicial framework, such as the use of masquerades, sassafras concoction administration, 'broom-and-key' method, and use of legal proverbs. He submits that depending on the nature of the issue, dispute resolution hold in the market square, village square, an open hut, land boundary (in the case of a land/boundary dispute), village court (community adjudication centre) or a traditional shrine, as the case may be. In the same vein, Onadeko (2008) reviewed traditional adjudicatory systems in Yorubaland. The study revealed that the main objective of adjudication among the Yoruba tribe was to resolve a dispute amicably in manner seen and accepted as fair by both parties.

While analysing the traditional peace and conflict management practices in the traditional Yoruba society, Adeniyi (2019) affirms that the incursion of foreign ideology and introduction of the western colonial model of jurisprudence into the African (and Yoruba) setting, which introduced alien methods such as litigation, contradicts the existing judicial processes. He concludes that the contemporary form of adjudication is not compatible with the indigenous peace and conflict management framework, which had promoted peaceful coexistence by eliminating animosity.

Post-Traditional Societies Justice System

By 1942, the power to administer and dispense justice in Nigeria resided in the native courts, which was later transformed into the present customary, area and sharia courts. It prescribed systems of taxation, civil laws and procedure, penal law and sentencing policies including death sentence to effectively administer justice.

The Provincial Courts were replaced with the High court after the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. It consisted of Chief Judges, Judges and assistant Judges. Below the High Courts were Magistrate Courts, while the lowest at the judicial hierarchy is the Native Courts. However, the Supreme Court which was established in 1954 exercised appellate jurisdiction over the High Courts (Onyekachi, 2012).

Hierarchically, under the 1999 Constitution, the Courts recognized as constituting the judiciary are the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the Federal High Court, the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, the Customary Court of Appeal, the States High Courts, the Sharia Court of Appeal of the States and the Customary Court of Appeal of the states (Adebayo, 2022).

The Nigerian legal system though, evolved from the British colonial experience; its components presently include Sharia (Islamic) and Customary laws (natives). Also, it comprises the police, courts and the prisons, which were highly influenced by the previous colonial orientation. The police serve as the main law enforcement agent, the Courts is an institution for adjudication, arbitration and punishing offenders and the prisons are basically state centres established for punishment, correction and custodial of those awaiting the trial or already convicted of various offenses (Mohammed et al, 2017).

The State of Nigerian Judicial System

The observations from the earlier discussed justice processes (traditional and present Nigerian judicial processes) reveal the following as the fundamentals of their operations:

The first is the structure that drives the processes; while the structure of the traditional justice system is non-formal and determined by the tradition, the modern Nigerian justice system is formal and hierarchical, and determined by the constitution and various acts of parliament at the federal and state levels.

The second is the procedure, by which they operate. Each of them has its own procedure, which is usually determined by either tradition or relevant laws that determine processes that must be strictly adhered to in most cases.

The third observation is the public acceptance of the two systems. While the indigenous people accepted and recognised the traditional justice system in the Yoruba region as a dispute resolution mechanism, the Nigerian judicial system is generally accepted by Nigerians as the institution created by law to handle conflict and legal issues.

The prominent, which is also necessary for the efficacy of the justice system, is the provision for remedy and sanctions in the two systems. There are various notable remedies and sanctions usually awarded as applicable to the parties involved in legal disputes among the Yorubas of the southwest region in Nigeria. In the same way, various existing laws and criminal codes explicitly stipulates remedies and sanctions to be awarded to either the complainant or defendant depending on the final judicial decisions.

However, there are observed weaknesses in the two systems, which make community justice as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism inevitable to stem the tide of gradual loss of public confidence in Nigerian judicial system. It is pertinent to state that traditional justice system as operated in pre-independence days are no longer operational because most of its practices and procedures are not in tandem with the provisions of post-independence constitutions and laws in Nigeria. The pre-eminent status of various acts of parliaments indicates that the traditional system can no longer be sustained by law and relied upon by the citizens. This is not to say that modern justice system completely satisfies the expectations of the citizens.

The findings of the study on the effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in Nigeria as an instrument of social justice and criminal behaviour control indicate that the Nigerian CJS is responsible for the ineffectiveness of the justice system. The preponderance of social injustice, lack of discipline and lawlessness in Nigeria are due to the lack of credibility of the communicator; the Nigeria CJS (i. e. the police, lawyers, judges, and the prisons), in the administration of justice and the laws (Olonisakin et al, 2017).

As posited by Ugwuoke and Eze (2021), a substantial proportion of the laws inherited from the colonialists that are obsolete and no longer in use in England hinders effective justice delivery

in Nigeria. This condition limits the scope of the justice system because they are not in tandem with the reality of the present Nigerian social condition, hence the need for alternative dispute resolution approach.

Furthermore, other inherent operational inadequacies include: the judicial system as presently operated is expensive on the part of government and the litigants, while the Nigerian economy is too weak to sustain financing various plethora of judicial institutions. Despite the protection of the constitutional bill of rights, poor people still confront more obstacles in accessing justice due to ignorance and illiteracy, procedural complexity, huge costs of legal procedures, lack of assertiveness, and high level of mistrust in the judiciary (Brems & Adekoya, 2010). Thus, the huge financial implications of seeking justice in form of filing fees and engaging the services of a lawyer, exacerbates non-accessibility of justice system, and this require an alternative justice mechanism (Igwe & Agbor, 2021).

As corollary to the above, there is shortage of both professionals and other skilled judicial officers to administer effective and timely judicial processes. The inadequacy of courts facilities and personnel is a worrisome challenge constraining the justice delivery in Nigeria. The high population growth in major Nigerian cities is inversely proportional to the available judicial personnel and court facilities. Hence, the available personnel are inundated with excess cases, necessitating unavoidable court adjournments. Related to this is the poor standard of legal education. When practitioners go through a system of legal education that is poor, the result always manifests itself in Judges who are lacking in many respects apart from the limited knowledge of the law (Anyi, 2022).

The neglect of the judicial system through underfunding by the government hinders efficient justice delivery. Despite the constitutional provisions (through amendment), which provides some modicum of financial autonomy for the judiciary, the judiciary is still over-dependent on the executive arm of government because the provisions are barely implemented (Mohammed et al, 2017). Hence, the system continues to expose the judiciary to intimidation and manipulation of the executive.

Delay in the administration of justice, which is a common phenomenon in Nigeria, is another militating issue in the effective and efficient justice system in Nigeria. Also, the judicial procedure and processes are long and cumbersome in Nigeria, which usually results to denial of justice, abandoning the process, loss of interest by the parties, and the mismanagement of

justice. The delay in justice dispensation further contributes to the congestion experienced in Nigerian prisons (Muhammad, 2019). This delay is usually due to many factors such as constant applications for adjournment by lawyers due to poor preparation, repeating the processes when judges handling certain cases are transferred, failure of police or prison officials to ensure the appearance of the accused in court for trial, and technical procedural rules (Olusegun & Oyelade, 2022).

The most worrisome is corruption among the judicial officers, which has caused the judiciary public embarrassment, judges have been indicted and retired, and at a point, the department of state security (DSS) barged into the houses of judges, arrested and prosecuted some of them. Counsels at times have to bribe their way to hasten the adjudication of their cases. Corruption remains a significant factor that contributes to the delay and hindrance in the access to justice in Nigeria. All the participants in the administration of both criminal and civil justice, from the police, the judiciary, legal practitioners, to the litigants and the prisons are guilty of one form of corruption or the other (Ani, 2020). The pervasive corruption in the judiciary is presented in two forms; administrative corruption and operational corruption. Administrative corruption arises when administrative staffs of the judiciary violate formal administrative procedures for their own self-interests, such as accepting bribe in exchange for stealing or removing a document from the file; while operational corruption usually occur in grand corruption schemes involving political and significant economic interests (Anyi, 2022).

Furthermore, there are unethical practices by legal professionals to create legal encumbrances for the processes by introducing unnecessary technicalities to delay or deny justice. Legal practitioners sometimes adopt certain delay tactics to frustrate cases. This delay could be as a result of the counsel's unpreparedness which results in frivolous applications for adjournments. Also, Counsels in criminal cases sometimes deliberately request adjournments to secure the full payment of their fees or to increase their fees in cases where fees are based on the number of appearances in court (Omotesho, 2022). These unprofessional practices cause delay in the administration of justice. In Yoruba region, there is a popular belief that "it is abnormal to return from court as disputants and reconcile to continue as ally". Therefore, you must refrain from settling disputes at the court, hence, the need for a generally-acceptable community justice system.

Volunteers Justice Scheme (VJS)

Volunteer Justice Scheme derives from the three political concepts of the community justice, restorative justice and volunteerism. James (2018) posits that restorative justice system is the way out for the Nigerian justice system is influenced greatly by the retributive school of thought inherited from the colonial experience. He further argues that a restorative justice system is an approach to improve the lives of the less-privilege and the vulnerable groups by facilitating more access to justice. Through restorative justice, the offender takes responsibility for his/her action, participate in repairing the harm and seek assistance of the community. Restorative justice also enhances the opportunity to enlighten the community on the need to work together to repair the harm and to create safer communities due to the effect of crime on all. Furthermore, the cooperation of all the stakeholders in the processes will enhance the transformation of the people, relationships and communities. Restorative justice draws from traditional and indigenous forms of justice; hence, it is appropriate for those who are likely to suffer effect of crime resulting from conflict to participate in the resolution of their disputes (Ogugua and Eze, 2021).

However, the concept of restorative justice has not been totally institutionalized in the Nigerian criminal justice system despite global acceptance of the relevance of this emerging principle and practice to effective justice administration. Although, ACJA 2015 provide opportunity for the integration of the concept, it has not produced significant result, instead, harsh legislation and tough policing as the means to adjudicate on civil and criminal cases still persist (Alobo and Inaku, 2018).

The United Nations lend credence to the global embrace of Volunteerism through the Resolution 67/138 (2012). It recognizes volunteerism by advocating its integration with various strategies design for poverty reduction, humanitarian action, sustainable development, health, youth empowerment, education, climate change, social welfare, peace building, disaster risk reduction, social integration, and preventing social exclusion and discrimination.

Volunteerism is a form of action, in which people assist others that are in need, by making considerable commitments to continue assistance that can be sustained within a set period, without any financial compensation (Snyder, 2001). Volunteerism is essential in promoting both nationally and internationally the people-cantered approaches to the implementation of sustainable development and human capital investment, (Nowakowska, 2022).

Several elements and principles distinguish volunteerism. They are: mutual benefits to both the community and the volunteer; volunteer work is unpaid; volunteering is always a matter of choice; volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers; volunteering is a legitimate way, in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community; it respects the rights, dignity and culture of others; and promoting human rights and equality (Volunteering Australia, 2006).

VJS is a form of community justice system in which members of the community that are willing to volunteer participate in community organised non-formal dispute resolution scheme involving members of that particular community. It is an alternative dispute resolution approach to justice deliverance among community members to avoid the cumbersome and technical nature of the government justice system. It is a postulation to address court congestion in Nigeria by preventing disputes that are not criminal in nature from becoming court cases that can add to the workload of the state justice system.

VJS is a preferable alternative justice approach because of its strength over other justice systems in Nigeria. There is no any financial burden on the part of the committee and the litigants. The committee members are volunteers, while the litigants are free from any processing and counsel's fee. The process and the procedure are simple, devoid of technicalities and bureaucracy. The personnel and officials that would handle the procedure and operations do not require any legal training and qualifications to be a member of the committee. Hence, there is possibility of having enough volunteers as committee members. Having a coordinating desk officer at the local government will assist in streamlining operations and facilitating uniformity.

In constituting the VJS Committee, it is sacrosanct that all the members must be prepared to volunteer. However, the following steps are essential to the instituting of the volunteer's justice scheme (VJS):

1. Mobilizing public acceptability and confidence in the scheme like the other existing systems. The adoption and success of the scheme will depend on the extent, to which the public are willing to embrace the scheme. This can be done through the enactment of legal framework, engagement of various stakeholders and mass citizenship education through various media.
2. There is a need to create a strong, sustainable and durable structure that depends on volunteers. The following are suggested for its composition:

- i. A legal person that is prepared to render free service, to ensure that the committee does not operate outside the boundaries stipulated by the enabling law.
 - ii. 2 representatives of the community development associations, an elderly male and elderly female, due to gender related issues.
 - iii. Representative of the traditional ruler in the area due to issues relating to tradition and culture of the area.
 - iv. A representative of Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) to serve as secretary, and for general documentation because NUT has members in all towns and villages in Nigeria.
 - v. A representative of Muslim communities because of issues that are related to religion.
 - vi. A representative of the Christian community, for the purpose of applying religious doctrines to dispute resolution.
 - vii. A youth volunteer for the purpose of mentoring, and youth representation.
3. The third step is to adopt a procedure for the purpose of streamlining the operations of VJS. This may include setting boundaries like excluding criminal cases, linking each committee to the coordinating office at the local governments and granting referral power to refer unresolved issues and those beyond their power to state judicial institutions.
 4. For an effective VJS, there is need for central coordination. In this case, local governments' community development inspectorate (CDI) department can create a VJS inspection desk to liaise with VJS committees for central documentation and record keeping. The desk officer will be responsible for occasional joint meetings and trainings.
 5. Jurisdiction: there is a need to clearly demarcate the jurisdictions. Nigerian federal structure consists of the central, state, and local governments, and each local government has about 10 wards (smaller constituencies). Each VJS must be established in each ward to empower Community justice system, and to enable convenient accessibility.
 6. Accommodation is also essential. It is suggested that the meeting venue of each VJS be located in a public building like health center, community town hall, and various artisans' association buildings. This will remove the expenses for accommodation and guarantee safety and security.

Conclusion

Despite the 24 years of uninterrupted democratic dispensation in Nigeria, the Nigerian judicial system faces challenges in justice delivery, such as the delay in trials, executive high handedness and lawlessness, corruption, insufficient funding and financial dependence on the

executive arm of government, ethno religious bias and justice compromise, dependence on the executive arm of government for justice enforcement, and internal interference. If Nigeria is going to achieve the sustainable goal 16 by the year 2030, it has to consider adopting a Volunteer Justice Scheme, which is an alternative dispute resolution mechanism that more importantly can accommodate the community involvement and the Nigerian peculiarities.

Recommendations

The following suggestions will enhance the implementation of the scheme in the south-west region, and eventually, the Nigeria as a whole:

- i. Amendment of the constitution to integrate VJS into the justice system.
- ii. Mass public education to mobilize the citizens to embrace the scheme.
- iii. Empowering the local government to coordinate the scheme through a desk officer.

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