

**INSTITUTIONAL REPORT PRESENTED BY THE INSTITUTE SECRETARY, OLUMO ABDULAZEEZ ESQ, ON 16TH NOVEMBER, 2023 AT THE ALL NIGERIA JUDGES' CONFERENCE OF THE SUPERIOR COURTS, HELD AT THE ANDREWS OTUTU OBASEKI AUDITORIUM, NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, ABUJA**

My Lords, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I welcome you all to Day Four of the All Nigeria Judges' Conference of the Superior Courts of Records. I am hopeful that your stay has been peaceful and that the engagement has been most fruitful and rewarding thus far. I especially want to seize the opportunity to welcome and formally congratulate all newly appointed judicial officers of the Superior Courts of Record. While we look forward to hosting you during the 2024 Induction Course, we have no doubt that you will impact the Judiciary greatly with the investment of your personalities.

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, when I reflect on the mandate given to the National Judicial Institute (NJI) as the focal point for all judicial activities relating to the promotion of efficiency, uniformity and improvement in the quality of judicial services, I am constantly reminded of the fact that with great power comes great responsibility. Consequently, it behooves us and indeed every Institution whose activities impact Nigeria's polity, to be steadfast in the fulfilment of our objectives, placing a premium on probity and accountability at all times.

In light of the foregoing, it gives me immense pleasure to present to you the Institute's Report for the year 2023. This report covers different aspects ranging from the Institute's Curricula and Content, to its Faculty, Collaborative Efforts, Emerging Issues and other Developments.

## **1.1. Mandate of the National Judicial Institute**

Although the mandate of the Institute is well known and not at all in contest, you will agree with me that this does not preclude same from being restated. Accordingly, by virtue of its enabling Act (the National Judicial Institute Act, Cap. N55 LFN. 2004), the Institute is empowered to conduct courses for all categories of judicial officers and their support staff, with a view of expanding and improving their overall knowledge and performance in their different sections of service. The institute is further empowered to undertake, organize, conduct and facilitate study courses, lectures, seminars, workshops, conferences and other programmes related to judicial education and to promote or undertake any other activity calculated to help achieve the purpose for which the Institute was established.

## **1.2 2023 Programmes of the National Judicial Institute**

### **1.2.1 Curriculum and Content**

The Curriculum of the Institute covers an array of well-thought out engagements and programmes primarily built around issues of substantive and procedural law, judicial ethics and skills as well as other emerging areas of law. In addition to the All Nigeria Judges' Conference which is a statutory programme meant to be organized by the Institute for judicial officers of the Superior and Lower courts biennially, the Institute set out a total of thirteen (13) programmes for the year 2023. This is of course with the exclusion of other collaborative efforts undertaken by the Institute with relevant agencies and stakeholders. Accordingly, the programmes slated for the extant year include:

1. Hybrid Refresher Course for Judicial Officers of the Superior Courts of Record (for Judges of the Federal High Court, National Industrial Court &

- State High Courts; Kadis of the Sharia Courts of Appeal and Judges of the Customary Courts of Appeal)
2. Hybrid Refresher Course for Judges of the Lower Courts (for Magistrates, Judges of the Sharia, Area and Customary Courts)
  3. Hybrid National Workshop on Legal Research and Information Communication Technology (for Legal and Research Assistants, Registrars and Information and Communication Technology Officers of the Judiciary)
  4. Induction Course for Newly Appointed Judicial Officers of the Superior Courts of Record (for Newly Appointed Judges of the Federal & State High Courts, National Industrial Court, Kadis of the Sharia Courts of Appeal and Judges of the Customary Courts of Appeal)
  5. Induction Course for Newly Appointed Magistrates and other Judges of the Lower Courts
  6. Workshop for Judicial Officers on Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism (for Justices of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal; and Judges of the Federal High Court)
  7. Hybrid National Workshop on Court Management and Administration (for Chief Registrars, Secretaries, Judicial Service Committee/Commissions, Deputy Chief Registrars, Directors, and Assistant Directors)
  8. National Workshop on Practice and Procedure in the Area/Sharia/Customary Court
  9. Hybrid Biennial National Workshop for Judicial Librarians and Library Officers
  10. National Workshop on Court Services (for Filing and Process Section of the Courts, Court Registrars, Commissioners of Oath, Court Clerks, Bailiffs and Process Servers)

11. Hybrid National Workshop on Management of Judicial Financial Resources (for Directors of Finance, Deputy Directors, Chief Accountants, Auditors, Procurement & Budget Officers and other Staff Handling the Finances and Resources of their Respective Judiciaries)
12. Roundtable for Heads of Courts (for the Honourable, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, President of the Court of Appeal, Chief Judges of the Federal and State High Courts, President of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria, Grand Kadis of the Sharia Courts of Appeal and Presidents of the Customary Courts of Appeal)
13. Workshop for Judiciary Correspondents

Additionally, in organizing the bulk of our trainings, the Institute has taken into cognizance the constitutional powers of each Court which invariably impacts their functionalities. Accordingly, in addition to general issues which are relevant to all categories of judicial officers, the Institute has ensured that the content of its programmes reflects an understanding of this distinctiveness. For instance, the content of the 2023 Refresher Course for Judicial Officers of the Superior Courts embodied the peculiar interests of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria as well as the Sharia and Customary Courts of Appeal.

### **1.2.2 The Institute's Faculty**

The Institute's Faculty of Moderators and Resource Persons comprises of a rich spread of intellectual giants, experts and authorities in various fields. Seeing that that the Institute places a premium on the judge-led approach to judicial training, our Faculty is primarily made up of seasoned jurists from both the Superior and Lower Courts. While there is no special criteria or bias motivating the selection of judicial officers as part of the Faculty, nonetheless, thought is often given to active and all-

inclusive participation during programmes, an even spread across the geo-political zones as well as an evident possession of knowledge or expertise in certain areas.

Recognizing that the Institute may not be fully furnished with adequate information reflecting the knowledge base and expertise of judicial officers across the board, through the development of a compendium which will lay out profiles of all judicial officers, the Institute seeks to form a Skills Registry in the coming year, which will also double as a readily available pool of Moderators and Resource Persons.

In light of this, the Institute has sent out letters to the Heads of various courts to provide us with the relevant information on officers within their jurisdiction. While most jurisdictions have already done the needful, others are yet to take necessary action. We therefore use this platform to request for maximum cooperation across board to enable us achieve our aim.

### **1.2.3 Collaborative Efforts**

To cover the field by ensuring the building of capacities in diverse areas of law, including emerging issues and trends in such areas, the Institute in the usual fashion engaged in numerous collaborations with prominent agencies and stakeholders in the year 2023. On this note, there is no gainsaying that the bulk of these collaborative efforts have greatly helped in strengthening synergies and consistency within the justice sector since they often provide a platform for judicial officers and key integrants in the system (particularly the investigative and prosecutory arms) to interface and interact.

Nonetheless, certain valid concerns with reference to some of the collaborations have been raised over time by Judicial Officers and these concerns have been duly noted and taken into cognizance by the Institute. Accordingly, while due consideration has been given to resolve some of the most pressing and immediate

issues, with a forward-thinking mindset, the Institute is working towards setting up a functional system that will guarantee the organization of only the most favorable collaborations with tested and trusted agencies.

I will also like to seize this opportunity to restate the fact that in exploring these collaborations, protecting the interests and integrity of judicial officers at all times and in all cases is the Institute's primary objective.

### **1.3 A Top to Bottom Approach: Roundtable for Heads of Court**

Of all the top-notch engagements organized by the Institute, worth singling out for its import and strategic objectives is the Roundtable for the Heads of Courts which has as its participants the Honourable, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, President of the Court of Appeal, Chief Judges of the Federal and State High Courts, President of the National Industrial Court, Grand Kadis of the Sharia Courts of Appeal and Presidents of the Customary Courts of Appeal.

Recognizing the heads of the various courts as first among equals, capable of representing the divergent interests of the judicial officers in their courts, through the use of strategically planned plenaries, the Roundtable gives participants free rein to steer discussions with a focus on issues which are considered most relevant to all and sundry. Additionally, communiqués reflecting pertinent concerns and resolutions and which are issued at the conclusion of other core workshops for judicial officers such as the Induction and Refresher Courses are equally tabled before the Honourable Heads of Courts during this engagement.

Consequently, this engagement has become a recurring feature on the Institute's calendar of programmes with great hopes that action points outlined and agreed upon will be streamlined and given greater vent in the various courts for the overall benefit of the Judiciary.

#### **1.4 Gender Dimensions in Justice Administration: Biennial Conference of the National Association of Women Judges in Nigeria (NAWJN)**

World over, there is an increased incline towards spotlighting gender specific issues and interests in almost every field and sector. Accordingly, the Judiciary is not left out of this emerging tide which is centered on the enhancement of inclusivity and more prominent representations for women judges with efforts in this regard been spearheaded by NAWJN. With a membership base of over three hundred (300) members, NAWJN aims among other things to provide a forum and resource centre to disseminate information affecting women judges and to address other important issues relating to the improvement and advancement of women in the legal and judicial system.

Giving vent to the foregoing, in addition to proudly accommodating the Association's Secretariat, the Institute has consecutively played host to the Biennial Workshop for NAWJN with the 2023 edition held from 27 to 28 April 2023 and will continue to do so in subsequent years.

#### **1.5 Strengthening Synergies Between the Judiciary and the Media**

The fact that skewed narratives or accounts of the Judiciary and indeed the performance of judicial officers are often presented to the world at large, cannot be gainsaid. Left unchecked, the foregoing has a blighting effect on the Judiciary and adversely impacts how it is perceived by the general public. In this regard, the media plays a most crucial role since they have the ability to shape the public's opinion and indeed their apprehension of diverse issues including the workings of the justice system.

Consequently, leveraging on its position as the focal point for all judicial activities relating to the promotion of efficiency, uniformity and improvement in the quality

of judicial services and the power to promote or undertake activities calculated to achieve this purpose, the Institute, with the approval of the Education Committee of the Board of Governors has made a Workshop for Judiciary Correspondents a prominent feature on its calendar of programmes.

The Workshop, has as its participants, the component of the media primarily concerned with the reportage of judicial proceedings and other related activities, and discussions held during this engagement are aimed at strengthening the relationship between the media and the Judiciary as partners in progress. Additionally, by bringing to the fore global best practices, the Workshop also provides an avenue to recapitulate the importance of adhering to the law and ethical principles in media reportage and to address issues arising from this.

## **1.6 Infrastructure Development**

With the welfare and comfort of judicial officers and their support staff being foremost in our minds, the Institute undertook strategic projects in the extant year. Notable among these are the extensive renovations done on the NJI Clubhouse, the fitness centre, shopping complex as well as the Chapel and the Mosque. The Institute also took up the construction of an ultra-modern hospital which upon completion is set to run 24/7 for the benefit of the Judiciary and indeed the general public.

Also in the pipeline, is the renovation of the hostels and the Institute Library. In line with global best practices and flowing from one of its statutory requirements laid out in Section 4 of its enabling Act, the Institute is set to equip its Library with state of the art facilities and all-inclusive resources.

## **1.7 Conclusion: Charting A Course for 2024**

Considering the need to improve the quality of judicial education programmes of the National Judicial Institute, the Education Committee of the Board of Governors of



the Institute at its meeting of 28 October 2021, set up a Sub-Committee of Curriculum and Contents of Continuing Judicial Education Programmes of the National Judicial Institute. Working in Consultation with experts, specialists and other professionals within the Judiciary as well as other selected justice sector institutions and stakeholders to review the existing Curriculum of the NJI, the Sub-Committee in its draft report came up with a total of Thirty-Six (36) recommendations.

In light of the foregoing, the Management of the Institute, working in conjunction with the Sub-Committee has begun a review of these recommendations to see how they may be streamlined and incorporated into the Institute's programmes and also implemented in conformity with its mandate. It is my firm belief that this will greatly impact the quality of our trainings and enhance the efficiency of the Institute.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, in concluding this report, I will like to once again assure you of our unwavering commitment to improving the performance of judicial officers through capacity building. My Lords, please rest assured that you are and will continue to be our priority. Consequently, the Institute looks forward to receiving and acting on all the invaluable contributions and resolutions that will be arrived at in the course of this Conference.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

**Olumo Abdulazeez Esq.**  
**Institute Secretary**