**A PAPER PRESENTATION ON CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COURT EMPLOYEES**

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**CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COURT EMPLOYEES**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION.**

Every group, organisation, agency and institution either of government or privately owned, has laid down rules and regulations that guides the conduct and behaviour of its staff and people and the Judiciary, a very vital arm of every government cannot be left out.

The judicial system stands as a pillar of justice and democracy, and its effectiveness hinges on the ethical conduct of all its members, not just the Judges. In Nigeria, the behaviour and professionalism of court employees play a crucial role in ensuring the judiciary's integrity and public trust. However, challenges such as corruption, inefficiency, and lack of accountability amongst court staff have raised concerns about the overall functionality of the judicial system.

This paper succinctly analyses the Code of Conduct for court employees in Nigeria and provide recommendations thereto. It shall also outline the principles and guidelines that should govern the actions of these employees, aiming to promote ethical behaviour, enhance transparency, and build public confidence in the judiciary.

By proposing a robust and holistic Code of Conduct, this paper aims to contribute to ongoing judicial reforms, ensuring that court employees uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. Such reforms are essential not only for the effective administration of justice but also for reinforcing the judiciary's role as a cornerstone of democracy in Nigeria.

However, before delving into the crux of the topic, it is necessary to understand the meaning of a code of conduct and to identify who the court employees are by defining these key terms.

**2.0 DEFINITION OF SOME KEY TERMS**

**2.1 Code of Conduct;**

The oxford advanced learner’s dictionary defines Code of Conduct as a “statement setting out guidelines regarding the ethical principles and standards of behaviour expected of a professional person or company”.[[1]](#footnote-1)It has also been defined as “a set of rules about how to behave and do business with other people”.[[2]](#footnote-2) Therefore Code of Conduct can basically be defined as a set of rules, guidelines or regulations established to direct the conduct and behaviour of a certain group of people or professionals.

**2.2 Court Employees;**

 Court Employees are individuals who work within the court system and are responsible for supporting its operations. This can include a wide range of roles such as clerks, stenographers, bailiffs and administrative staff. These individuals can work in Local, State or Federal Courts and their duties can vary, depending on the specific court and its needs[[3]](#footnote-3).

Having defined the necessary key terms, it is only fitting that we get to know who these Court employees are, the integral role they play and why their involvement is crucial to the dispensation of justice.

**WHO ARE THE COURT EMPLOYEES?**

The Judiciary is regarded as the last hope of the common man, where justice is dispensed without fear or favour. It is the impartial arbiter of disputes between citizens inter se, and between citizens and the Government[[4]](#footnote-4). One must therefore, consider working in the Court as a privilege. It is to this end that establishing a Code of Conduct for Court Employees is essential to the effective administration of justice in Nigeria or any given nation state.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Court Employees are regarded as the engine room that keeps the Nigerian Judiciary running[[6]](#footnote-6) as they are vested with the power and discretion to protect, preserve, safeguard, manage and even prepare some court documents. They are the image or better put, the mirror of the Judiciary and the yardstick in which members of the public measure the Judiciary.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Court employees as the machineries running the temple of Justice should also consider themselves ministers called to serve this divine temple. As such they must take utmost pride in the job they are called to do for without them, there sure will be no court to dispense Justice. A simple example to drive home this point and to show the importance of court employees as a fundamental and integral part of the justice administration process is the two-month old national industrial strike of the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria embarked on in April, 2021 which completely paralysed and shut down the entire judicial system of the Nation for 64 whole days.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is recorded to be the longest industrial action the Nigerian Judiciary has ever witnessed.[[9]](#footnote-9) and as we all know, the effect of delaying justice, is tantamount to denying Justice. It therefore means that without the court staff, there is no court. Who then are these special class of people that wields such enormous power in the administration of Justice process?

**Registrars;**

Generally, a registrar is “a person who keeps the official records”[[10]](#footnote-10) of an organisation. However, in legal parlance, a registrar is regarded as an officer of Court, entrusted with the day-to-day administration of Court, subject to the overriding authority of either a Judge or a Magistrate as the case may be[[11]](#footnote-11). He is directly responsible for the staff attached to each of the Courts such as the court clerk, the bailiff and messengers amongst others. He sits with the Judge or Magistrate and tends to the need of the presiding officer and the lawyers. He ensures compliance of processes, payment of fees and fines as the case may be. The Court Registrar also keeps reports of happening in the Court from time to time and minute same to the Chief Registrar for his information and necessary action when needed. He is the most central officer in any Court Registry; therefore, if Registrars can successfully perform their duties to the latter, then they are an asset to the judiciary, as they would have succeeded in aiding quick dispensation of Justice[[12]](#footnote-12).

The primary functions of Registrars are as follows:

1. To attend at such sittings of the Court as the Court shall direct;[[13]](#footnote-13)

2. To fill up or cause to be filled up Summons, conviction warrants, recognizance (for bail), Writ of Execution and other documents, and submit same for the signature of the Judge. A Registrar should at all times co-ordinate the issuance and service of Court processes, hearing notices, warrant of arrest, summons of whatever nature such as Writ of Summons, Originating Summons among others.

3. To make or cause to be made copies of proceedings when required to do so by the Judge, and to record the Judgments, convictions and Orders of the Court;

4. To receive or cause to be received all fees, fines and penalties emanating from matters before the Court and act upon such order (or orders) made by the Court; all such monies paid or deposited in respect of proceedings in Court shall be deposited in the Court’s account by the Registrar;

5. To perform or cause to be performed such other duties connected with the Court as may be assigned him by the Judge;

6. To ensure that the Registry and other Staff therein on a daily basis perform their functions cautiously without inhabitation. This explains the fact that the Registry is considered as the life wire of the Court;

7. A Registrar can also perform custodial duties such as marking and safe keeping of exhibits tendered in Courts, and keeping proper inventory of attached properties.

8. A Registrar ought to put in place proper and necessary arrangement towards ensuring a conducive Court sitting session on daily basis. He/she should be of a tremendous assistance in administering oath on a witness during Court session or affirming of witnesses.

9. A Registrar must at all times keep and guard the Record books which contain record of proceedings in each assigned matter and Court diaries from every form of manipulation.

10. A Registrar supervises the preparation of a neat register wherein details of newly assigned matters, transferred matters, court processes filed are registered.

11. A Registrar receives application from Litigants, counsel and other members of the Public. This could be application for the Certified true Copy of a Record of proceedings, Ruling, Judgment among others[[14]](#footnote-14).

12. To ensure, through the Bailiff of Court, that orders or Judgments are complied with, respected or obeyed (execution);

 13. In the case of a probate matters, the Probate Registrar must ensure that the proper and necessary steps are taken before the issuance of Letters of Administration, and also keep proper custody of all Wills deposited in Court.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The functions enumerated above, are by no means exhaustive as there are several other duties required of the Court Registrar to make for the smooth management of the Court Registry. The proper management of the Court Registry also amounts to proper management of court documents.

**Court Secretaries;**

Judicial officers as well as the Court Registrar rely on their secretaries to maintain and retrieve legal documents required for specific cases. This career requires strong organizational and communication skills in addition to an ability to refrain from divulging confidential information. All secretaries must be familiar with the working and operation of computers and must be conversant and understood the handwriting of the Judge or Magistrate they work with. Court secretaries also conduct a range of administrative duties, like answering phones and stocking office supplies. It is also very important to note that a competent, hardworking and an organized court secretary always enjoy the trust, confidence, and commendation of Judges/ Magistrates, litigants and lawyers.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Secretaries have no statutorily defined duties but work directly with the Judges assisting in administrative and legal tasks. Secretaries are generally responsible for:

1. Keeping and safeguarding confidential files[[17]](#footnote-17)

2. Ensuring that proceedings of the court are neatly typed

3. Typing of copies of confidential and top secret documents, orders, rulings and judgments

4. Typing of other correspondence such as speeches and letters

5. Receiving and attending to visitors who require the audience of the Judicial Officers and or Magistrate they are attached to

6. Receiving of phone calls from visitors, members of the public and other Judicial Officers on behalf their judicial officers and effectively relying the information received to same and

7. Performing other duties as may be assigned[[18]](#footnote-18).

**Court Clerks;**

This is an official in charge of the records of the court. He is tasked with maintaining the schedule of cases, files and documents used by the court[[19]](#footnote-19). A Court clerk sits in the Court with the Court Registrar and a Presiding Judge/Magistrate and attends to the need of the presiding Officer and the Lawyers[[20]](#footnote-20). His work is done under the supervision of the Court Registrar and includes:

1. Preparation of the cause list

2. Arrangements for court sitting

3. Mention of cases

4. Keeping in safe custody record books, register of cases filed, exhibits, cases disposed of amongst others

5. Endorsing case files after court sitting

6. Marking of all exhibits

Court Clerks are encouraged to be friendly and polite to and try to portray the best image of the judiciary at all times. They may also be of tremendous assistance in the interpretation of Court proceedings to litigants or witnesses in Court whenever the need arises.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**Bailiffs;**

Black’s Law Dictionary defines a bailiff as “A Court Officer who maintains order during court proceedings”.[[22]](#footnote-22) It alternatively defines it as “a sheriff’s officer who executes writs and serves processes”.[[23]](#footnote-23) The Federal Capital Territory High Court Civil Procedure Rules has charged Bailiffs and other special categories of court staff with the service of originating processes when it stated that service of originating processes shall be made by a Sheriff, Deputy Sheriff, Bailiff, Special Marshals or other officers of the Court[[24]](#footnote-24). The Sheriffs are empowered to appoint such number of bailiffs as may be necessary[[25]](#footnote-25) which goes to show the indispensability of bailiffs in the administration of justice. The duties of Bailiffs in the various courts are as follows;

1. To effect the service of all court processes on litigants, counsel or an established body be it a Writ of Summons, Originating Summons, Petitions, Applications, Affidavit, Statement of Claim, Statement of Defence amongst others appropriately.
2. To effect service of Court Order(s) on parties to a suit even on appeal.
3. To make depositions of proof of service of any court process served by him, stating vital information as to who accepted service of the process(es), place and time service of the said process(es) were effected promptly.
4. To keep a daily record in a Court Register of all the processes issued and served by him.
5. As an officer in the temple of Justice the bailiff is to ensure that Orders and Judgments of the Court are duly executed.
6. The Bailiff must be an honest and diligent officer of the Court as he may from time to time be summoned to the open Court by a Judge or Magistrate to give account of the service of court processes.
7. As an officer of the Court he/she is expected to assist during auction sale of the attached properties of a Judgment Debtor.
8. A Bailiff in carrying out the order of the court to vacate a premises or building, must take inventory of all the property found in the premises in the presence of a Police officer especially where the door or doors of the premises was forcefully opened.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In **EMEKA V. OKAFOR & ORS[[27]](#footnote-27)** Honourable Justice KUDIRAT MOTONMORI OLATOKUNBO KEKERE-EKUN of the apex court on the importance of a bailiff carrying out his statutory duty in accordance with the Rules or Order of Court, stated as follows;

“I refer to Odutola Vs Kayode (1994) 2 NWLR (pt.324) 1 @ 19 - 20 G - A, where Olatawura, JSC (of blessed memory) stated thus: "This case has brought out clearly the statutory and honest duties required of a bailiff: to serve in accordance with order of Court. Where personal service is ordered, he must serve that person personally. Where a substituted service either by pasting at the last known abode of the person required to be served, or by publication in a newspaper is ordered, any other service which is not in accordance with the clear and unambiguous language of the Court is ineffectual. Bailiffs are officers of the Court. Any dereliction of duty in the discharge of their duties will cause unnecessary delay in the administration of justice. A false return of service on the part of the bailiff may lead to an attempt to deceive the Court. This in itself is an abuse of that order." Per **KUDIRAT MOTONMORI OLATOKUNBO KEKERE-EKUN, JSC (Pp 54 - 55 Paras B - A)**

Having effectively outlined the various court staff and the duties they perform, it is pertinent at the juncture to consider the Code of Conduct governing them.

**CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COURT EMPLOYEES;**

The Code of Conduct for Court Employees came into force on 1st day of March, 2004; the Code was designed to regulate the conduct of court employees throughout the Federation. All judiciary staff are duty bound to observe the Code of Conduct for Court Employees during and outside their workplace.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The fundamental values of the Code are as contained in the Preamble of the Code, which provides that: “Court Employees hold highly visible positions of public trust and it is desirable that a standard conduct, which a Court Employee should observe be prescribed and published for the information of the Court Employee and the public in general so that the objectives set out in this Preamble may be achieved”.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The Code under its explanatory notes and applicability provides that it shall apply to all categories of Court Employees in all Courts in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and that in the Code the term Court Employees shall mean all categories of employees involved in the day-to-day administration of the Court, other than Judicial Officers (i.e Judges).[[30]](#footnote-30)

It also provides that: The applicability of the Code shall include employees of all special Courts, Tribunals, Commissions of Enquiry, Staff of the respective Federal and State Judicial Service Commissions and Federal Capital Territory Judicial Service Committee and such other bodies set up to perform Judicial and quasi-Judicial functions.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Court employees are a specialized and technical set of public servants; hence, every officer of this category is important in his or her own right. The aim of the Code of Conduct is to ensure an independent, strong, respectable and responsible judiciary as an indispensable instrument for the quick, efficient and impartial administration of justice in Nigeria.[[32]](#footnote-32) The Code provides that: “Whereas Court Employees are complementary to and supportive of the role of Judicial Officers in the administration of justice, the duties of a Court Employee, which include all statutory duties prescribed by law, take precedence over all his personal activities.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The reason for this Code is not far-fetched for as workers who assist Judges in determining disputes and dispensing justice, court employees must ensure not to engage in any activity that will bring down the reputation of the very institution they represent which is revered by all society.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Therefore, a Court Employee in the performance of his duties, shall observe and maintain the Code of Conduct for judicial employees these which are divided into four major rules to wit; ***Accountability, Relationships, Abuse of Position, Decorum and Comportment.***

**RULE 1: ACCOUNTABILITY.[[35]](#footnote-35)**

This Rule consists of two Sub-Rules of Rule A and B. Rule A involves Resources, Property and Funds Management while Rule B relates to Confidentiality of information.

**A. Resources, Property and Funds;**

By the provision of this Sub-Rule, a Court employee is accountable for the resources, property and funds entrusted to him. Accordingly, a Court employee shall;

1. Use the resources, property and funds under his/her official control judiciously, transparently and solely in accordance with prescribed financial regulations and other applicable rules.
2. Be accountable for his/her decisions and actions to the public and must submit him/herself to whatever scrutiny is required of his/her office by proper authority.
3. Not to place his/herself under any financial or other obligations to outside individuals or organizations that might influence the performance of his/her official duties.
4. Where applicable, declare his/her assets on appointment and subsequently, as may be required by the law. This is in tandem with the section of the Constitution which provides that:

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, every public officer shall within three months after the coming into force of this Code of Conduct or immediately after taking office and thereafter-

1. At the end of every four years; and
2. At the end of his term of office;

Submit to the Code of Conduct Bureau a written declaration of all his properties, assets and liabilities and those of his unmarried children under the age of eighteen years. And a public officer includes all staff of Courts of law.

**Guidelines to the Sub-Rule**;

The guideline of Rule 1 (A) which is resources, property and funds expresses that a Court Employee is a custodian of the public resources that are placed at his/her disposal. That funds are expected to be used or expended carefully and only for their intended purposes by the funding unit. For instance, the violation of this Sub-Rule could include such temptations as personal telephone calls at funding unit expense, personal use of government property, such as pens, pencils, paper, printer, computer, vehicles, etc[[36]](#footnote-36)

**B. Confidential Information;**

Under this Sub-Rule, a Court Employee is accountable for confidential information entrusted in him/her; hence, the Court Employees shall not;

1. Speak to the media or grant interviews in their personal capacity as free citizens in a way that may be injurious to the collective integrity of their employment.
2. Disclose to any unauthorized person any confidential information, which may have come to their knowledge in the course of their employment.
3. Give out any official document of the Judiciary in any form without authorization.[[37]](#footnote-37)

**Guidelines to Rule 1;**

The guidelines to this Sub-Rule suggest that sensitive information acquired by Court employees in the course of performing official duties should never be revealed until it is made a matter of public need. That even when the information becomes public, a great deal of discretion is required before such can be revealed. The Code of Conduct recognizes that sometimes breaches of confidentiality do not involve intentional disclosures of official Court records. Some are the result of innocent and casual remarks about pending or closed cases, or about parties in litigation, which could give lawyers, litigants and reporters confidential information. Such remarks can seriously compromise a case or a person’s standing in the society. If Court employees must discuss cases, this must be only for legitimate reasons. Court employees are therefore, expected to handle sensational or sensitive cases with great care and discretion. Sometimes breaches of confidentiality do not involve intentional disclosures of official Court records. [[38]](#footnote-38)

Some are the result of innocent and casual remarks about pending or closed cases, or about parties in litigation, which could give lawyers, litigants and reporters confidential information. Such remarks can seriously compromise a case or a person’s standing in the community. Court employees should discuss cases only for legitimate reasons and should handle sensational or sensitive cases with great care and discretion.[[39]](#footnote-39)

**RULE 2: RELATIONSHIPS**

This Rule is subdivided into Sub-Rules A, B and C with Sub-Rule A Standing for Association, Sub-Rule B for Membership in Associations and C for Impartiality.

**A. Associations**

1. Avoid close personal association with individuals, lawyers, litigants, and members of the public, where such association may reasonably give rise to suspicion or appearance of partiality or favouritism.
2. Refrain from lobbying or attempting to influence official decisions including posting to a particular place by reason of a relationship with a superior officer, or resisting a transfer to another jurisdiction.[[40]](#footnote-40)

**B. Membership in Organizations**

A Court Employee shall not be a member of, belong to or take part in any society, club and or organization the membership of which is incompatible with the function and dignity of his office.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**C. Impartiality**

A Court Employee shall;

1. Not discriminate on the basis of, nor display by words or conduct, a bias or prejudice based upon tribe, religion, colour, nationality, gender or other protected group, in the conduct of service to the Court and public.
2. Carry out his responsibilities to the public in a timely, impartial, diligent and courteous manner. [[42]](#footnote-42)

**Guidelines to Rule 2**

Rule 2 (A) Associations- A Court Employee, in the course of his employment, comes into frequent contact with lawyers, litigants, and other members of the public who have dealings with the Court. However, he must be very cautious not to become overly familiar with these individuals since doing so would give the appearance of partiality. This means that a Court Employee must limit his social activities to prevent the “close personal associations” mentioned.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Likewise, a Court Employee should not use any personal relationship that he might have with a Judge or other superior officer at the Court to lobby or influence official decisions that affect him or others.

Rule 2 (B) Membership in Organizations – A Court Employee’s participation in societies or organizations should not intrude into the workplace through the displaying of literature, badges, signs or other material advertising a cause, party, or club membership. Soliciting or receiving funds at the workplace is not appropriate. In addition, no government equipment or resources of any kind are to be used for promoting any club or organizational activities in the workplace before, during or after working hours.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Rule 2(C) Impartiality –Court Employees should treat everyone with the same courtesy, tact and respect. The giving of special privileges or exemptions by an employee to certain people gives the impression that they are more favoured than others and reflects poorly on the notion that the judicial system and its employees are impartial. The official actions of an employee should not be affected or appear to be affected by kinship, rank, position or influence of any party or person. Each day Court Employees are called upon to assist lawyers, litigants and the general public. It is each Court Employee’s responsibility to provide these Court users with the utmost service, regardless of the individual’s race, religion, gender, nationality etc. No form of discrimination is acceptable from a court staff or employee. [[45]](#footnote-45)

**RULE 3: ABUSE OF POSITION**

Rule 3 is subdivided into Sub-Rules A and B and while 3(a) succinctly captures Personal Enrichment, Sub-Rule B talks about conflict of interest.

**A. Personal Enrichment**

A Court Employee shall not:

1. Use or accept to use his position or office to secure unwarranted privileges, gratify or confer any corrupt or unfair advantage upon himself or any relation or associate.
2. Solicit, request or accept any compensation or fee beyond that received from the employer for work done in the course of his duty.
3. Use the resources, property and funds under his control for purposes other than those for which they are meant.
4. Solicit patronage from litigants or members of the public for purposes of preparing affidavits or other processes for monetary consideration or utilize the Court’s resources or property for such purposes.
5. Engage in any type of trade or business in Court premises during office hours, or encourage others to do so.
6. Offer legal advice, canvass, tout, and or present himself in such a manner as to give the impression of being capable of influencing the course of justice.
7. Appropriate to himself or disburse by way of loan to himself or any person, court fees, fines or other funds in his custody.
8. Demand or accept any gift or benefit of any kind, as a condition for the performance of his duties, for himself or on behalf of any person on account of anything done or omitted to be done by him in the discharge of the duties of his office.
9. Accept any gift on the understanding that such gift would influence official action by him or that other person on whose behalf benefit is sought or accepted.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The code however provided some exceptions where a Court Employee is permitted to accept gifts:

1. Personal gifts or benefits from relatives or personal friends to such extent and on such occasions as are recognized by custom.
2. Books supplied by publishers on a complimentary basis.
3. A loan from lending institution in its regular course of business on the same terms generally available to people who are not Court Employees.
4. A scholarship or fellowship awarded on the same terms applied to other applicants.

**B. Conflict of Interest;**

A Court Employee shall not:

1. Put himself in a position where his personal interest conflicts or appears to conflict with the interest of the Court.
2. Engage in any business which may conflict or appear to conflict with the performance of his official duties. [[47]](#footnote-47)

**Guidelines to Rule 3**

Rule 3 (A) Personal Enrichment –This Rule addresses the concept of the using one’s Court position to secure “privileges” or “exemptions”. Generally, these would be special considerations given by others to the employees specifically because of his position as a Court Employee. The solicitation or acceptance of a gift with the understanding that something will be done in return contravenes the ideas expressed in this Section. Public Service should be delivered impartially, with equal service to all users. The administration of justice is subverted if employees appear to deliver service in exchange for a reward. All users of the justice system must be treated equally sadly which is not the case of the present day court staff.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Gifts of any sort raise a question as to the independence of the employee, and are therefore discouraged. An understanding may be tacit on the part of the donor that the employee will look favourably upon the donor in the future. It will certainly seem so to observers. Seemingly small and innocent gifts may soon lead to larger ones, more and more threatening the integrity of the employee. The compensation of Court Employees is to be provided by their funding unit through their salary and other benefits. An employee should not request or accept any additional compensation for doing his duty as a Court Employee. Acceptance of any additional compensation for doing his duty gives rise to the impression that the Court Employee will be responsive to the needs of the donor.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Rule 3 (B) Conflict of Interest –A conflict of interest exists when the employee’s ability to perform his duty is impaired or when the Court Employee, his family or business would derive some benefits as a result of his position within the Court system. it is, therefore, required that employees avoid situations that would impair their ability to fulfil that obligation. [[50]](#footnote-50)

The employee’s position within the Court system must be his primary employment. Outside employment must be fulfilled outside the normal working hours of the Court and must not be in conflict or interfere with the performance of the employee’s duties and responsibilities in the Court. No form of private business shall be performed utilizing the resources of the Court nor shall the private business require or induce the employee to disclose information acquired in the course of his official duties. Such private business should not reflect adversely on the integrity of the Court. Court Employees should not take up employment with private chambers or any other agencies.[[51]](#footnote-51)

**RULE 4: DECORUM AND COMPORTMENT**

This Rule discusses the manner in which court employees should compose[[52]](#footnote-52) themselves in the performance of their duties. The Rule states as follows;

A Court Employee shall:

1. Attend to all enquiries from lawyers, litigants and members of the public with the utmost courtesy and without employing foul or indecent language;
2. Carry out promptly any official directive or instruction from a superior officer and be committed in the discharge of his duties;
3. Study and comply with the laws, Rules of Court, and schedule of duties and should conduct himself at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence of the judiciary;
4. Be punctual to work and not absent himself from duty without leave or permission from his superior officer, first sought and obtained;
5. Be formally dressed while on duty and avoid all forms of inappropriate and indecent dressing; and
6. Promote ethical conduct in the discharge of his duties as prescribed by this Code and report any improper conduct by any person to the appropriate authorities. [[53]](#footnote-53)

**Guidelines to Rule 4**

Court Employees are highly visible in action and conduct and these reflect upon not only themselves, but the Court as well, improper behaviour or the appearance therefore may compromise an employee’s professional integrity. Before taking a particular action, Court Employees must consider its propriety. Employees should conduct themselves in a manner that commands public trust and confidence.[[54]](#footnote-54)

**SANCTIONS RESULTING FROM NON COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE**

A breach and/or violation of any Rule contained in the Code of Conduct for Court Employees shall constitute a gross misconduct and may attract disciplinary action, and this shall be without prejudice to the penalty, which may be imposed by any law where the breach is also a criminal offence.[[55]](#footnote-55)

It is worthy to note that aside the Code under reference, the Judiciary staff of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is also mandated to comply with other Laws, Rules and Codes such as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended(specifically the 5th Schedule of the Constitution), the Public Service Rules, The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct and the Rules for Professional Conduct for Court Staff called to the Nigeria Bar.

**RECOMMEDATIONS FOR BETTER SERVICE DELIVERY AND PERFORMANCE OF COURT EMPLOYEES.**

As earlier stated, court employees are a vital and integral part of the Nigerian Judicial system as they serve as the intermediary between the court users and the court, from the point of initiating court processes on through the service of the processes on designated recipients, to the finalization of the entire process. The employee is critical to the administration of justice and the public perception of the integrity of the judicial branch.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The holding of public employment in the judiciary is a public trust justified by the confidence that the citizenry reposes in the integrity of the judiciary. A court employee, faithful to that trust, must observe high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of the court may be preserved.[[57]](#footnote-57) Here are some recommendations for the effective performance and service delivery of the Nigerian Court Employees;

**1. A Review/Amendment of the Code of Conduct for Court Employees;** there is an urgent need for a review/amendment of the Code of Conduct for Court Employees 2004 to provide for more specific and stringent sanctions ranging from query to dismissal, to be meted on defaulting staff with an internal disciplinary body empowered by the Code to hear and determine cases arising from same. This body should also be empowered with the right to administer the sanctions imbibed in the Code where necessary. This will ensure that the judiciary staff performs his/her duties diligently and dutifully in order to avoid being sanctioned.

**2. An Improved Salary Structure;** an improvement in the salaries, emoluments and welfare of the judiciary staff will go a long way to ensure diligent and effective performance of work. Just like a happy wife produces a happy home, a happy staff transcends to a happy work place. A staff who is well paid and taken care off will have no use for the pennies handed him as bribe or as it is called “mobilisation fee” from individuals for the performance of their duty.

**3.Employment of sufficient Staff;** it is no news that the Nigerian Judiciary is highly under staff which is why the average administrative and support staff of judiciary is usually overwhelmed with the work load he/she is forced to deal with on a daily. This lack of personnel is very dangerous to the dispensation of justice as it affects the effective productivity of court employees and the fast delivery of justice.

4. **Better work Environment;** to ensure for better performance and service delivery of the court employee, it is essential to provide a decent and conducive environment of the performance of their duty. Ensuring that all necessary tools and materials required for work is made available to the court staff at all times.

**CONCLUSION**

It will be ill mannered of me to leave this podium without first acknowledging the Administrator of the National Judicial Institute Hon. Justice Salisu Garba, the members of the Education Committee of Institute, the Institute Secretary, Director of Studies, Management Staff and fellows of Institute and other Staff of the Institute for this rare privilege to address a very vital and integral aspect of our judicial system and I consider myself greatly honoured to be part of this intellectual gathering of judicial staff. As earlier mentioned, Court employees are the front door of the justice system, the way they act is critical to ensuring members of the public honour the law and system of justice. It is expected of court employees to maintain accountability and uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary. For their performance, court employees need to have a solid understanding of what is expected of them from their very first day of employment and hence should be introduced to the Code of Conduct for Court Employees as soon as they are granted employment. The Code of Conduct is designed as a quick and easy reference for the court staff that work directly with members of the public. Therefore, it is also required of court employees to familiarize themselves with its content for better service delivery and performance of duty.

Finally, it is often said that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well therefore court employees should take great pride in their work as the machineries running our temple of Justice and ensure to perform same with integrity, accountability, cheer, and with great honour.

Thank you for your time.

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