

Arbitrate rather than litigate: Resolving differences quicker at the Lagos Multi-Door Courthouse



Nigerians no longer have to put up with long delays, congested courts and high legal costs to resolve relatively simple disputes. The concept of Multi-Door Courthouses is spreading through the country, giving people access to an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism by which their case can be settled within two weeks.

What is an ADR?

Alternative dispute resolution is a non-adversarial way of resolving disputes that is being increasingly used in the public and private sectors, especially in developed countries. ADR helps parties resolve their differences without resorting to litigation. Instead it looks at needs, interests and solutions, and can promote healing. It is voluntary, timely, confidential, and based on mutual agreement.

Unlike the conventional courts, it is designed to yield solutions that are adapted to the particular circumstances of individual cases, as it is about solving problems rather than imposing solutions through litigation.

“ The Multi-Door Courthouse approach increases access to justice for the poor ”

What is a Multi-Door Courthouse?

The Lagos Multi-Door Courthouse, initiated in 2002, is a justice reform programme – a court-connected alternative dispute resolution centre attached to the High Court of Lagos. It aims to provide enhanced, timely, cost-effective and user-friendly alternatives to litigation in resolving disputes.

The term 'multi-door' refers to the alternative paths to resolving disputes that it makes available. So, instead of the traditional 'mono-door' of litigation leading to the courtroom, the Multi-Door Courthouse offers other alternative ways or options (such as arbitration) by which citizens can resolve their disputes.

How does arbitration differ from litigation?

Arbitration offers a win-win situation – there are no lawyers' fees to pay as most people can do it themselves and the process is quick. It is most useful in commercial or property-related disputes. Cases are 'front-loaded', which means that each side collects together all their claims and evidence plus statements from witnesses and the police, and then exchanges the package with the other side.

Following discussions between the two sides, points that both sides agree on and that are not in dispute are discarded and only those points that they cannot agree on go forward to the judge. Technical support is provided to the claimants by professional and experienced mediators and conciliators from the NGO the Nigerian Conflict and Negotiation Group. This differs from the court which involves only the judges, the lawyers and the litigants. The judge for the Court of Arbitration is appointed by the Chief Judge of Lagos State.

Where else is this happening?

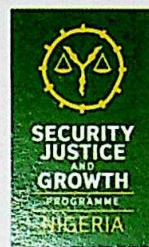
Similar Multi-Door Courthouses have been set up in Abuja and Kano. In Kano, unlike in Lagos where 75% of the staff come from the private sector, the

“ Arbitration offers a win-win situation ”

courthouse has been superimposed on the existing judiciary system, using existing staff. Consequently, the Kano Multi-Door Courthouse is funded entirely by government.

Who supported this work?

Multi-Door Courthouses in Nigeria are supported by the UK Department for International Development's Security, Justice and Growth Programme, through the British Council.



For more information on Multi-Door Courthouses, please see the Security, Justice and Growth Programme's new publication "Alternative Dispute Resolution" which is available at: www.sparc-nigeria.com/SJG1

What lessons have we learned?

- Public-Private sector collaboration in justice delivery results in quick dispensation of justice.
- The Multi-Door Courthouse approach increases access to justice for the poor, by providing a lower cost option.
- There is greater acceptance of the judgement of the Multi-Door Courthouse as parties are involved in the arbitration and conciliation process.

For more information

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