



## HiIL POLICY BRIEF

# From challenges to successes: Four levers to enhance the enabling environment for people-centred justice innovation in Nigeria

## Executive Summary

People-centred justice is a globally emerging approach that supports the realisation of SDG 16 – promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. People-centred justice focuses on innovative approaches that rely on the perspectives, needs, strengths, and expectations of the justice users. The need for justice reform has been recognised also in Nigeria and its National Policy on Justice.

This policy brief examines what recommendations can be given for supporting an enabling environment for people-centred justice innovation. It extracts these recommendations from the experiences of actors in the Nigerian justice innovation space, from private to public sector innovators and decision-makers, who have been pioneering people-centred justice innovation in their States.

They all agree people-centred justice is essential in improving the current justice delivery in Nigeria, and that an enabling environment for people-centred justice comprises elements from financial, regulatory and legal regimes. To achieve this favourable enabling environment for innovative people-centred justice, the policy brief proposes the following recommendations:

- Initiate networks and task forces
- Empower all actors in the ecosystem
- Foster capacity-sharing
- Embrace an evidence-based way of working

We call on and encourage leaders in Nigeria and beyond to implement people-centred justice approaches in justice delivery, and take actions based on these recommendations to foster innovation within their own sphere of influence.

# Introduction

Lack of access to justice is a broad societal problem that touches all of us. This is recognised in the National Policy on Justice of Nigeria, which states that “justice delivery falls short of the expectation of Nigerians”<sup>1</sup>. According to HiiL’s Justice Needs and Satisfaction (JNS) study from 2023, approximately 81% of Nigerians experienced at least one legal problem in the past year, with more than half experiencing more than just one problem. Only a bit above half (55%) of these problems are partially or completely resolved. In total, this means that every year an estimated 102 million legal problems remain unresolved by the existing justice system.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the numbers lie the personal stories of people whose lives are impacted by unresolved issues related to work, family, land, and crime.

This challenge is not only specific to Nigeria, as recognised by the UN Secretary-General in the conclusion of his report ‘Our Common Agenda’ by stating that “Many justice systems deliver only for the few.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda and its 16th goal (SDG 16) recommends action to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”<sup>4</sup> As one of the key ways to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, the role of social innovation should be explored and expanded.<sup>5</sup> A field of social innovation – justice innovation – focuses on improving the wide justice system so that people can use the system more easily and with greater empowerment.

An approach that supports the realisation of SDG 16 through justice innovation is emerging: people-centred justice. People-centred justice can be defined as “a rule of

law approach that relies on the perspectives, needs, strengths, and expectations of the justice user to improve the quality of justice and reduce barriers to service delivery”.<sup>6</sup> Various stakeholders from the justice system in Nigeria have taken steps to apply the principles of people-centred justice to justice delivery through examination of the needs of people, what outcomes they need, and thinking beyond the ‘business as usual’ approaches. The goal is to co-design legal and justice services that involve providers and (potential) users and improve through feedback, learning, and people’s increased understanding and ability to contribute to the process.

This continuous development, however, demands an environment in which innovative ideas can be created, fostered, tested and scaled up. The widely recognised obstacles that prevent many social innovation initiatives from achieving their desired impact include social pressures, regulatory burdens, lack of resources (funding, people, knowledge), and inequitable power structures, which can be described as parts of the ‘enabling environment’.<sup>7</sup> With the right enabling environment, could social innovation be applied to address the justice gap and challenges recognised in the National Policy on Justice?

This policy brief examines seven stories of justice innovations and what recommendations can be extracted for supporting an enabling environment for people-centred justice innovation in Nigeria. It draws from the experiences of the actors in the justice innovation space, from private to public sector innovators and decision-makers, who have been pioneering people-centred justice innovation in their States. Through these experiences, we will present the key themes that arose in the experiences and reflections of respondents. In the end, this policy brief gives recommendations

1 National Policy on Justice. (2017).

2 HiiL. (2023). *Justice Needs and Satisfaction in Nigeria*.

3 The United Nations. (2021). *Our Common Agenda*.

4 The United Nations. *SDG16*.

5 OECD. (2023). *Social Innovation*.

6 Chemonics. (2023). *What Is People-Centered Justice Programming and Why Does it Matter To You?*

7 MacCleoud. (2023). *Cultural, Geopolitical, and Structural Barriers to Social Innovation*.

based on the respondents' experiences with challenges and opportunities in people-centred service delivery. This is an invitation to stakeholders across the justice delivery chain to join the conversation on how to make justice even more people-centred in Nigeria and beyond.

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THIS POLICY BRIEF

We interviewed seven (7) experts who have designed and implemented people-centred, innovative justice service delivery models. The respondents include justice start-up founders and stakeholders from civil society organisations, the judiciary, or the government who have applied innovative justice service delivery models. The respondents were from the States in Nigeria where HiIL has implemented activities, including Lagos, Ogun, and Imo States. They were selected through a purposeful sampling method<sup>8</sup>, recruiting voluntary respondents from HiIL's network.

The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes each and were open-ended thematic qualitative research interviews about respondents' professional experiences in the implementation of people-centred, innovative justice service delivery models. The interviews focused on successes and challenges they have experienced currently or in the past. Findings and recommendations presented in this policy brief are extracted from the most commonly mentioned successes and challenges.

We also recognise the context-specificity of different States in Nigeria. The recommendations aim to showcase ideas that can be implemented in Nigeria and beyond while taking context-specific applications into account.

## Findings

Four key themes were identified across all seven interviews. The themes capture the needs that designers and implementers of innovative justice service delivery models have. These themes emerge from both successes and challenges of existing models: successes capturing good examples of what has worked in the past, and the challenges that the respondents have experienced. The four themes that emerged are discussed below.

### Stakeholder networks support the success

All respondents emphasised the need for stakeholder networks – or, what can be called task forces – when trying to develop and implement innovative approaches. As one of the respondents said: “It is not necessarily about reinventing the wheel, but having the right stakeholders involved to make the change. ( . . . ) You need to ask the questions: How does it happen? Who does it? And have the collective willpower to execute the plan.” The respondents emphasised the need to form task forces that include actors across the justice chain, from the grassroots level to the legislative and executive branches. This collaboration enables participating stakeholders to see the same issue from different angles, navigate the top-down and bottom-up perspectives, and create innovative, people-centred justice service delivery models. Setting up networks collates resources and executive power into one task force, and also shares the successes as mutual.

A challenge for such task forces can be a lack of funding for implementation or a lack of drive to find funding if it is not readily available. If the task force is created only after frameworks and their funding are set, its capacity to assert new ideas can be limited. However, the respondents also

<sup>8</sup> Also known as purposive sampling; referring to a method that “is intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon.” Robinson, R.S. (2014). *Purposive Sampling*.

expressed that having a well-functioning task force can be a solution to these issues equally: if the task force houses all the relevant stakeholders, it also houses access to relevant resources. Therefore, the composition of the task force is crucial to its success. While the respondents discussed the balance of inviting people with a passion for people-centred justice, they recognised that all stakeholders joined the group from their own experience and might be in different places with their own planning and implementation efforts. Creating and running an efficient task force with mutually agreed goals demands time and commitment from all participants.

Having lawmakers engaged in the task forces can help in ensuring the enabling environment for new ideas. Essentially, the task force should operate from the perspective of what people need, rather than the members' individual organisational mandate. As one respondent said: "Stakeholders across the board should be engaged. For example, in my state, we meet monthly to compare notes on what can be done better to make life easier for the people and how to bring justice for the people."

The respondents leading their own justice start-up-like initiatives discussed how they navigate the space between multiple partnerships from the public and private sectors, however, in their experience the engagement with the public sector was low. While some mentioned regulatory frameworks as challenges for them, the interviews emphasised how these regulatory frameworks are often topic-specific, i.e. most impactful regulatory changes are related directly to the content of their work rather than overarching regulations about justice innovation. Therefore, the innovators leading their own initiatives would equally benefit from participation in topic-specific stakeholder networks.

## Leadership drivers

With the task forces, many respondents emphasised the need for leadership when implementing new solutions. As noted above, the interviews had two types of respondents: people who had set up their own initiatives within the private sector, and stakeholders of the public sector who have implemented people-centred solutions within their sphere of influence. In both groups, getting ideas to implementation, and if successful to eventually scale, faces similar challenges and demands persistence. This persistence looks similar regardless of the type of innovation; the 'champions of change' are people in the process who run their own organisation, take leading roles in task forces, keep networks functioning optimally, and/or use their place of influence to drive change.

In the public sector, one leader in a high decision-making position can use their influence to enable all innovative service models to operate and grow. One of the respondents, who has a long career as a judge, emphasised how this leadership can create positive change around them by motivating and empowering others. The same respondent mentioned how especially leaders in the justice sector should look into the wider ecosystem<sup>9</sup> and empower citizens around them: "We need to tap into people's consciousness, to give back to the system. Have an enabling environment, so people have opportunities to improve themselves and their community and country."

Examples of people who have taken the initiative to improve their community include respondents who have personally set up start-up-like initiatives. In relation to leadership, they discussed the regular challenges of leading an organisation – difficulties in decision-making, obtaining funding, securing highly skilled staff, and monitoring and learning. The key proposed solution for these challenges included improving ways for people in leadership positions to support each other.

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8 An innovation ecosystem, that the respondents often referred to, can be defined as "the evolving set of actors, activities, and artefacts, and the institutions and relations, including complementary and substitute relations, that are important for the innovative performance of an actor or a population of actors." Granstrand, Holgersson. (2020). [Innovation ecosystems: A conceptual review and a new definition](#).

## Fostering the ecosystem through capacity-sharing

A thriving ecosystem of justice innovations will benefit everyone involved in improving access to justice. The ecosystem is a wider lens that encompasses the stakeholder networks, task forces, and all other actors and activities within the justice sector. As one respondent said: “You can’t scale up alone, you need sister organisations and partners to help you.” Although informal and ad-hoc collaborations and partnerships already exist, the innovators who lead their own initiatives encourage Nigerian stakeholders to work towards a more mature ecosystem that includes a wider range of stakeholders. Players from different levels can bring in expertise from different backgrounds and strengthen the ecosystem with a wide array of capacities, and as a result, create an active flow of knowledge and resources.

The ecosystem will also support the resilience of justice innovations by helping to mitigate and navigate risks, rebound from failures, and re-innovate when necessary. As one of the respondents said: “Covid-19 was a challenge for us, as it affected our operations directly. For us, one big success was that we were able to flexibly navigate the pandemic. Other successes are that we have been consistently able to sustain our team and the vision, as well as develop growth. We credit these successes to having people who understand us and support us.” Another respondent added: “Two areas have stood out as challenges: marketing, and finding the right talent. As an organisation, we struggle and juggle with this. And of course, as everyone says, funding is a challenge too. Availability of long-term support would be great, to face the current challenges and plan our growth.” Such an ecosystem can exist on multiple overlapping levels, from the state level to the national to the international level.

Several respondents who had set up their own initiatives outside of collaborative stakeholder networks expressed a desire for

more involvement of public sector actors in the justice innovation ecosystem. As one respondent said: “I have run the business now for four years. During this time, there has been no support from the government – no financing, information, nothing. – All the support we have gotten is from external investors.” This respondent recommended that the government should help innovators through capacity-building initiatives, such as coaching and mentoring, and create networks and partnerships.

Such involvement could simply start by getting to know the different startups and how they work to solve justice problems in Nigeria. The wider ecosystem can not only help people with their own initiatives but also help the public sector stakeholders see alternative models to support their work. As one of the individual innovators said: “The advice I would give to decision-makers would be to be more involved in the ecosystem through several initiatives or programmes for justice-based entrepreneurs. Be more involved in that space. Policies and regulations might help, but more involvement generally with key players and stakeholders within the industry would be a great start. There is nothing really there for start-ups in the justice sector. Get to know them, how they work and how they solve justice problems. Then, more concrete ideas would come.”

The respondents who lead their own start-up-like initiatives all agreed that different types of coaching, mentoring, and training had been instrumental to their growth and success, but also that such opportunities are relatively scarce, scattered, and sometimes expensive. A stronger and more diverse ecosystem would benefit everyone by strategically leveraging relationships and increasing the options for capacity and knowledge sharing. More concrete ideas for how public-private partnerships could be leveraged to improve access to justice could grow from there.

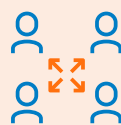
## Indicators for innovation success

Several respondents emphasised that working from high-quality data and ensuring continuous monitoring of indicators of success are crucial for the growth and improvement of innovative justice service delivery models. As one of the respondents shared: “We are taking data very seriously. We ensure that data is properly gathered so that we have data that can be used for research on justice problems.” A good way to improve evidence-based work would be to develop shared indicators between the different stakeholders that could help define mutual goals and measure success. Such indicators ideally focus on the outcomes that justice services provide for the people they help. This also helps to build feedback loops to measure whether the efforts taken are creating the intended impact.

An added benefit of shared indicators is that they could help showcase the successes of innovative justice services, highlighting how they help to resolve people’s most pressing legal problems. In the words of one of the respondents: “When you put in the work, there will be people who see results of what you put in.” Such success stories could help create a wider interest in justice innovation and elevate the entire ecosystem to a higher level.

## Recommendations

Focus on people and their justice needs is crucial to start closing the justice gap, through the reassessment of existing justice services and the development and scaling of innovative approaches. Significant untapped potential in people-centred justice innovation exists in Nigeria. Our findings show that unlocking this potential requires an enabling environment that goes beyond a favourable regulatory environment. On the right we highlight some of the key recommendations that emerged from the interviews.



### Initiate networks and task forces

Knowledge, experience and resources can be strengthened by bringing together people who have the leadership oversight and capacity to direct change across the justice system. These networks should observe their own goals and composition by asking whether everyone involved in people-centred justice delivery chains is involved, from the grassroots level to the legislative, judicial and executive branches. These networks should set evidence-based, people-centred goals, and formulate terms of reference to achieve them.



### Empower all actors in the ecosystem

Strong leadership and motivation to provide improved justice services can go a long way. Those who want to dedicate their professional life to people-centred justice should have opportunities to ideate and experiment with people-centred justice service delivery, develop sustainable financing models for their solutions, navigate the regulatory framework, and seek networks to participate in. There are often synergies between the efforts of individual innovators and the public sector; however, collaboration remains low.



### Foster capacity-sharing

Different actors and stakeholders in the justice environment can learn a lot from each other. Stakeholder networks should therefore focus on organising and fostering the sharing of knowledge and capacity between each other. This can take different forms, including coaching, mentoring, and training. Doing so means that diversity in terms of expertise and experience can become a real strength to the justice ecosystem in Nigeria. Especially younger entrepreneurs trying to build innovative justice delivery mechanisms could benefit from more of these support forms.



### Embrace an evidence-based way of working

Solid data and evidence are crucial to monitor improvements in the delivery of justice. Justice stakeholders in Nigeria should therefore collectively embrace an evidence-based approach to their work. To ensure uniformity in this approach and make sure it is people-centred, developing a set of shared indicators based on the types of outcomes that people need when they experience legal problems, is recommended. These indicators can be used to develop common goals and measure success.



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