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Session Presentation**

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Virtual Engagement Experience through ZOOM



Relationship between the Protection of Linguistic Diversity & Access to Justice for All through Pro Bono : Case Study of selected countries (Nigeria)

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By: Rebecca E Badejogbin *Phd*

Director (Academics), Council of Legal Education, Nigerian Law School//Board of Advisers, Roya Institute of Global Justice



The right to legal assistance is contained in the Nigerian Constitution. However, people access these differently in the various states.

Pro bono legal services are rendered through government initiatives and private initiatives

The Legal Aid Council under the Federal Ministry of Justice set up in 1976 through the Legal Aid Act 2011

The National Human Rights Commission established by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Act, 1995, as amended by the NHRC Act, 2010.

Law Firm Pro bono Programs in Nigeria.

Nigerian Bar Association (average of more than 20 hours per lawyer per annum to pro bono activities)

International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)



Case Studies will specifically cover pro bono activities by the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria in the Six Geopolitical Zones of Nigeria



'FIDA Nigeria is a Non-Governmental, Non-Profit Organization made up of women lawyers which was formed in 1964 in Nigeria.

Primary role: 'To protect, promote and preserve the rights of women and children in Nigeria'.

'FIDA Nigeria actualizes its objectives through free legal representation for indigent women and children, advocacy and policy campaigns, education and training, mediation and counseling services, and publishing information resources. FIDA Nigeria has formally inaugurated branches in 36 states of the federation as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

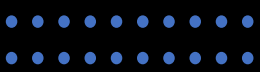
Mission

FIDA Nigeria's mission is to promote, protect and preserve the rights, interests and well-being of women and children through the use of legal framework to ensure that they live free from all forms of discrimination, violence and abuse in the society.'

See <https://fida.org.ng/about-us/>

The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria is FIDA is the acronym for the Spanish name "Federación Internacional de Abogadas"



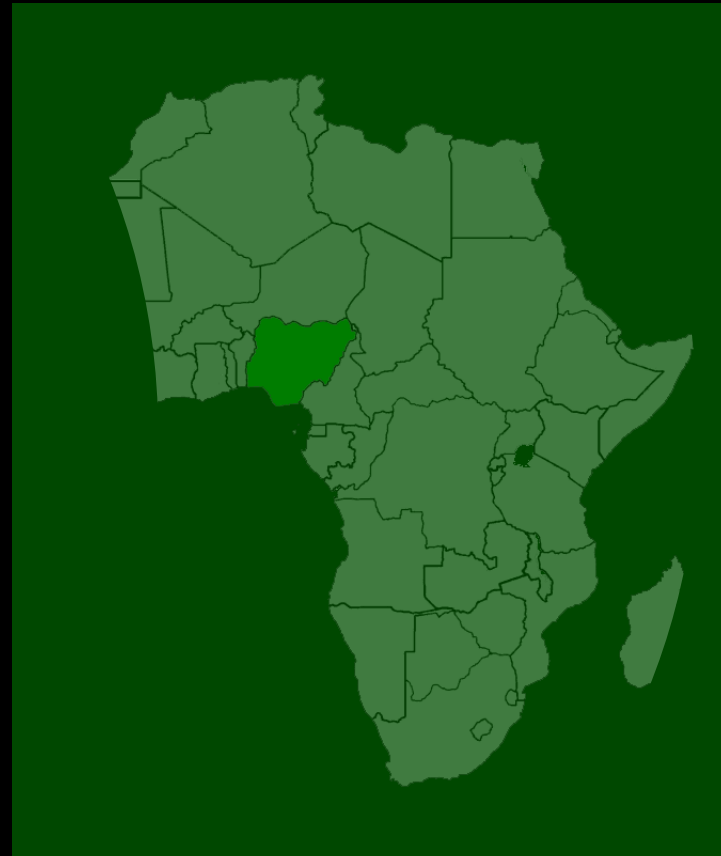
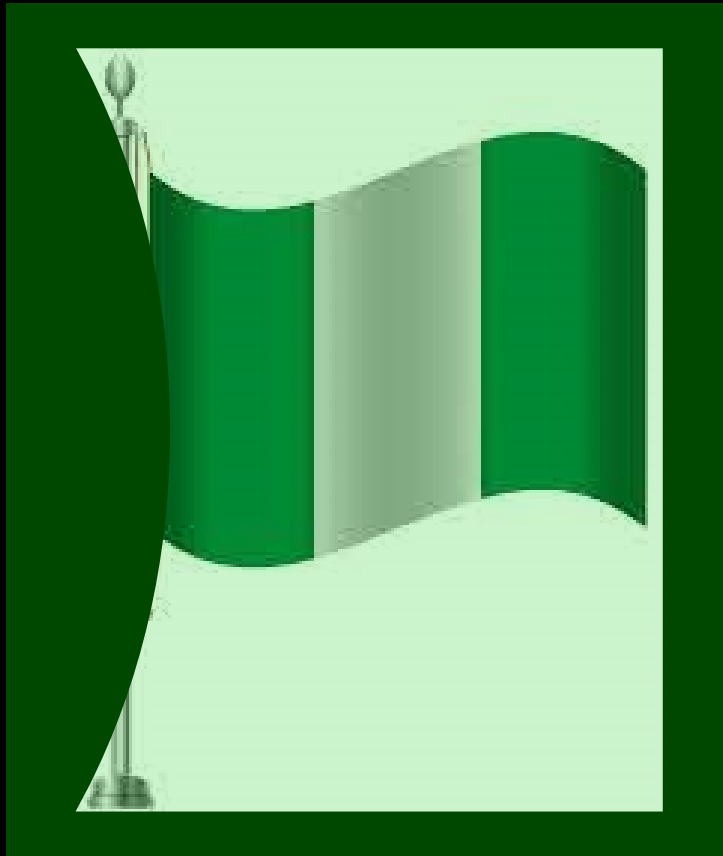


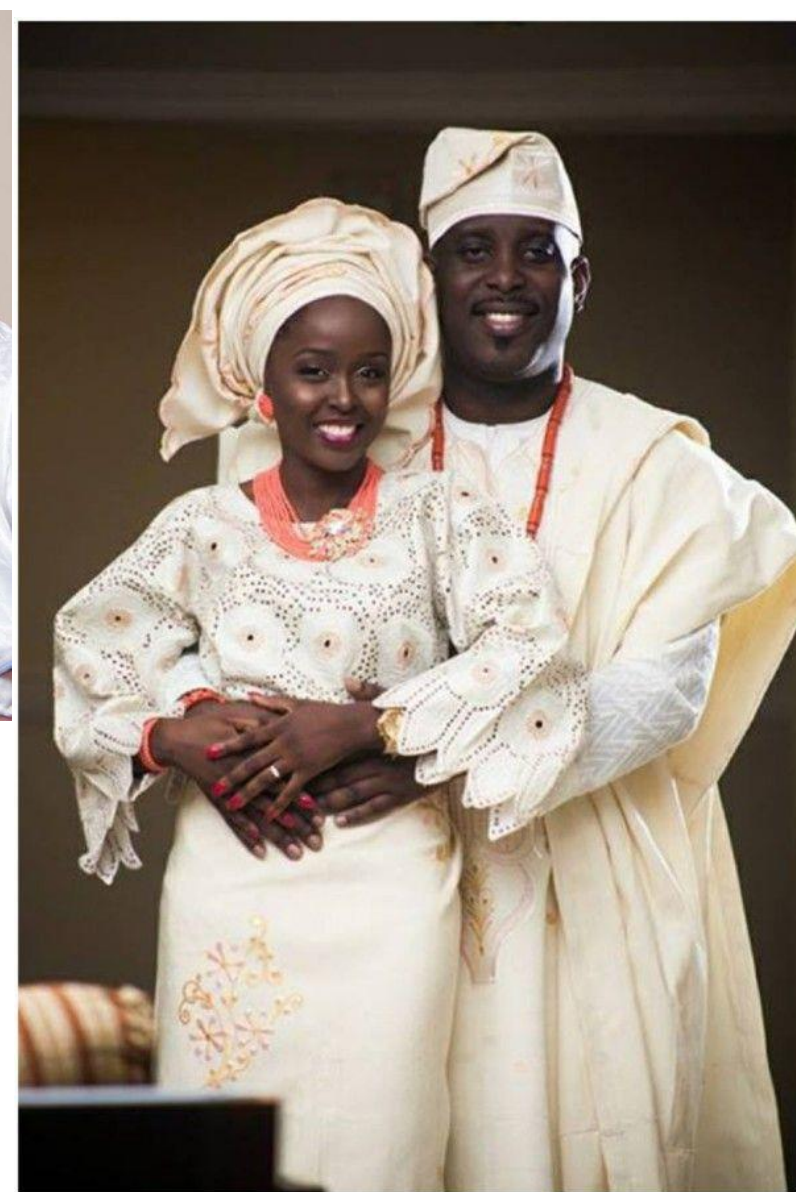
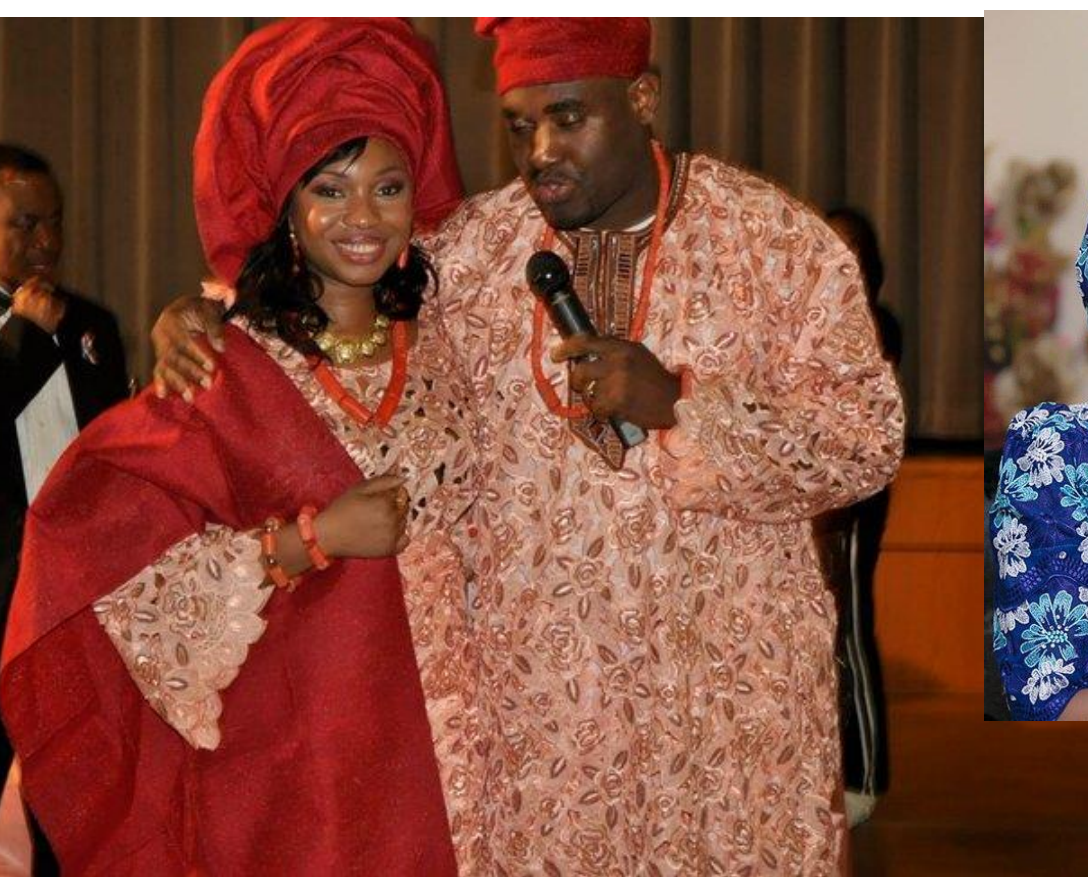
POSITION OF NIGERIA IN AFRICA:

❖ LOCATED IN SUB-SAHARA AFRICA

❖ MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY IN AFRICA

- **POPULATION IS ESTIMATED AT: 208,104,486**
- GAINED ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITISH RULE IN 1960





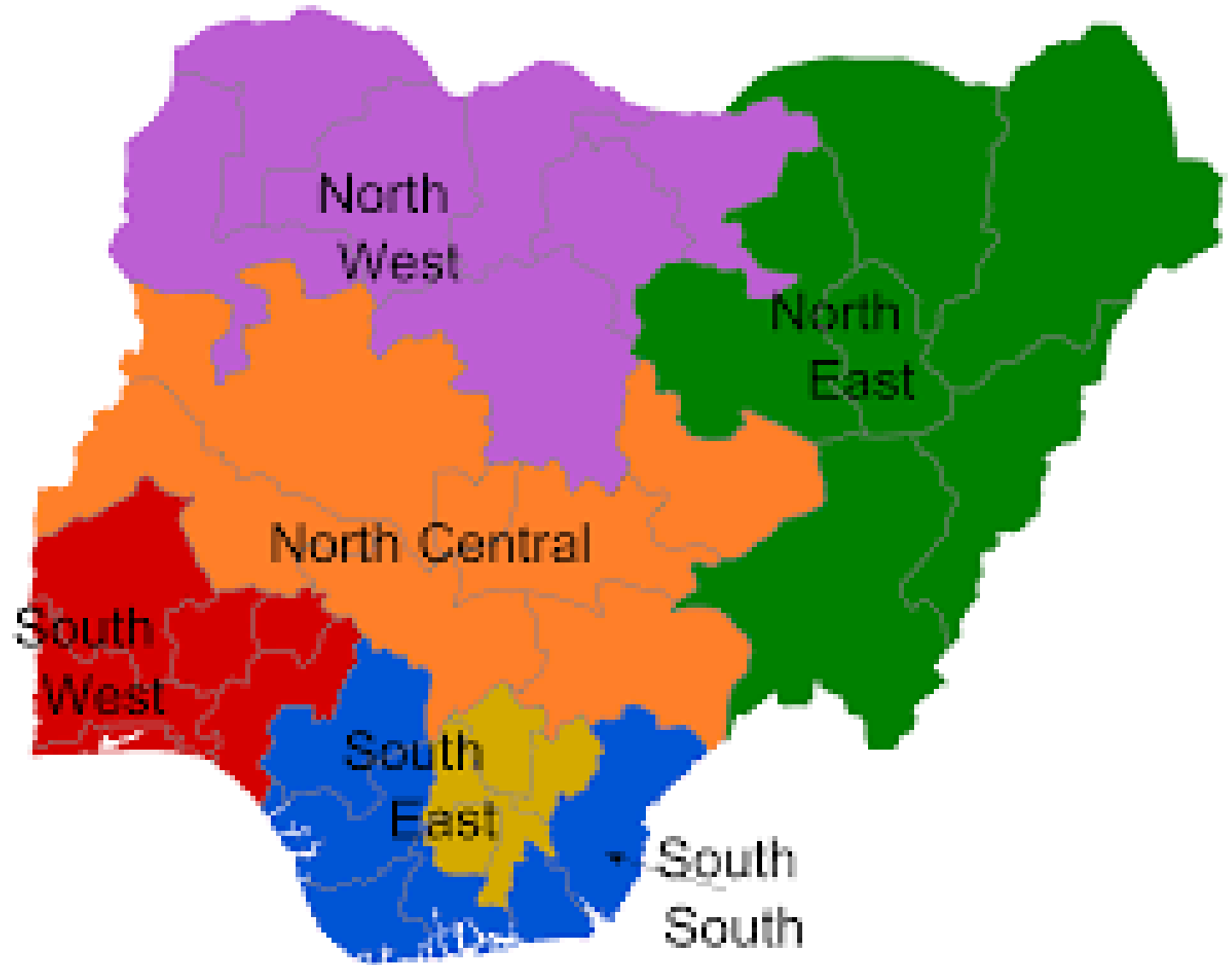
Has over 400 ethnic groups
and languages

Three main ethnic groups:
Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo



Nigeria's six geo-political zones are mainly defined by language, culture and location

North West
North East
North Central
South West
South East
South South



Globally, Nigeria is one of the countries with the most diverse languages.

It has over 400 languages

Official language: English

However, it is not really spoken by people in rural communities and with less education – Targets of FIDA

As at 2019 was 98,156,651 i.e. 48.84%

There are three main languages concentrated in specific zones spoken mainly through commerce and other socio-economic interactions.



- Section 15(1). Promotes unity in diversity.
- 2. promotes national integration of **ethnic or linguistic diversity amongst others**.
- 3. For the purpose of promoting national integration, it shall be the duty of the State to:
 - a. provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods and services throughout the Federation;
 - b. secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation;
 - c. encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties;
 - d. promote or encourage the formation of associations that cut across ethnic, linguistic, religious and or other sectional barriers



- Section 35 3. Any person who is arrested or detained shall be informed in writing within twenty-four hours (and in a language that he understands) of the facts and grounds for his arrest or detention. •

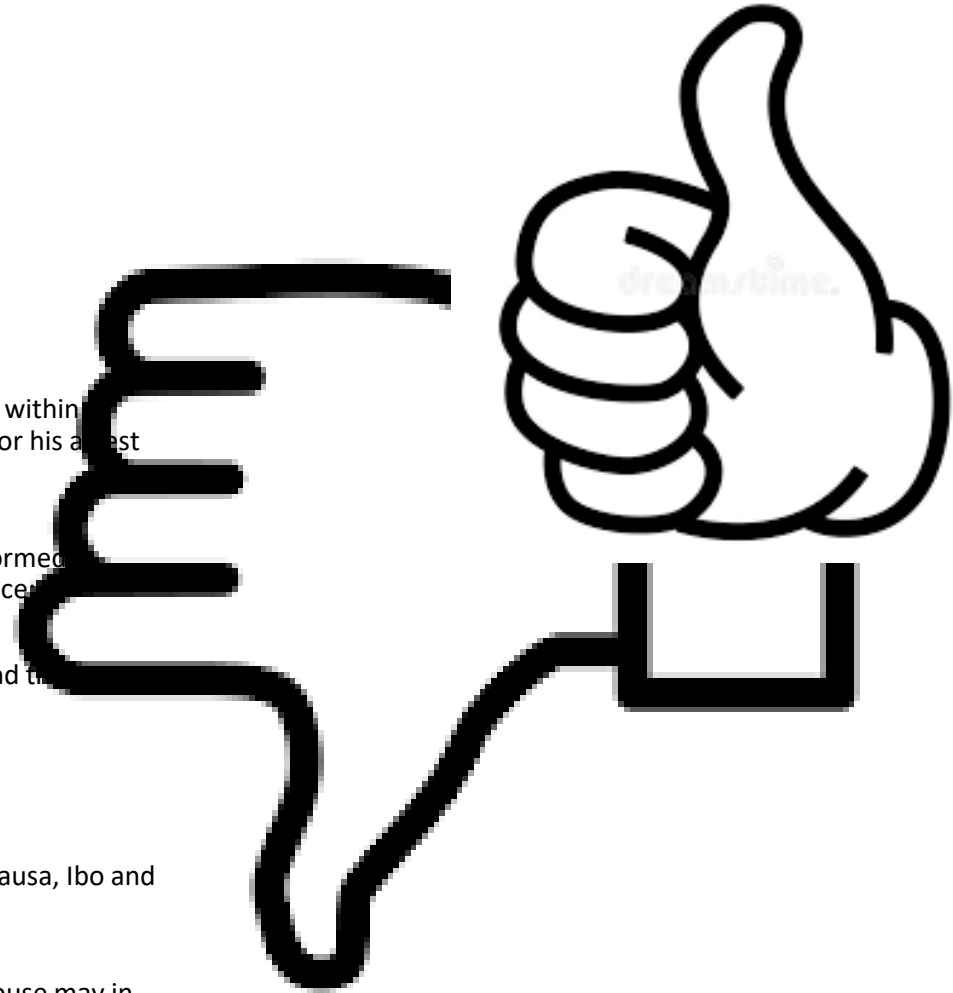
- 6. Every person who is charged with a criminal offence shall be entitled to be informed promptly in the **language** that he understands and in detail of the nature of the offence.

- e. have, without payment, the assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand the language used at the trial of the offence.

- • Official or national languages

- 55. The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore

- 97. The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve.



FIDA: Activities & Methods

They provide free legal representation for indigent women and children in cases covering sexual abuse, violence, divorce and separation, child custody, child abuse, other forms of abuse, employment termination, intimidation, defilement, adoption, abandonment, etc

- Visit Schools, markets and suburban communities through the traditional leaders to carry out sensitization and awareness of their activities, and also through the media – radio and television, Partner with NGOs and other organizations such as Association of female journalist National Council of Women Societies etc who also make referrals. Communication is through the languages they understand.



Target Communities:

THE TARGET:

IT IS THE IMMEDIATELY LOCAL COMMUNITY WHERE THE FIDA OFFICE IS LOCATED WHICH MAY BE TO:



INDIGENIOUS COMMUNITY; OR



TO A BROADER COMMUNITY OF PERSONS RESIDENT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE INDIGEOUS TO THE COMMUNITY; OR



TO A SPECIFIC GROUP E.G. PRISONERS, MARKET WOMEN, VULNERABLE PERSONS SUCH AS DOMESTIC WORKERS, MODERN DAY SLAVERY, SEX WORKERS ETC.

Of necessity, language is the main means of communication in order to have any impact.



Language Challenge!

The people feel intimidated by the physical and official structure of the court and law firm and their not understanding English adds to the intimidation and they may be discouraged from seeking help.

No official interpreters in the prisons.

Most FIDA members do not speak the indigenous languages

Too many languages to get interpreters for. There were instances where the people could not speak English, pidgin or any of the major languages and it was challenging to get a warden who could speak such a language.

- **FIDA North West (Taraba State):**

Language: English, Hausa, Fulfude, Mumuye and other indigenous languages.

- **FIDA North East (Kaduna State):**

Language: English, Hausa, pidgin and other indigenous languages.

- **FIDA North Central (Plateau State):**

Language: English, Hausa, and other indigenous languages.

- **FIDA South West (Oyo State):**

Language: Yoruba, pidgin and other dialects of Yoruba.

- **FIDA South East (Enugu State):**

Language: English, Ibo, pidgin and other external languages.

- **FIDA South South (Delta State):**

Language: English, pidgin and other indigenous languages.



The right to communicate

There have been conversations that 'people cannot talk of national growth and development without language at the forefront' – A C Amaechi

In the quest for National integration, at least one indigenous language is taught in school at the primary and secondary level.

The National Policy on Education that sought to ensure that early education is conducted in the indigenous language of a community had not been feasible.

The challenge is huge and there is lack of political will. Civil societies can take this on.



Pragmatic approach

Chiefs are sometimes educated and can understand English. They often work with other community leaders and members who do not necessarily understand English. They arrange for their own interpreters.

Police are educated and understand English. The women and children may understand English, pidgin English.

Sometimes where indigenous languages are used, some FIDA members understand these indigenous languages and are therefore useful communicators

More courts should hear cases in indigenous languages especially at the lower courts in the grass roots. The government should support this.

- The community chiefs and leaders arrange for their own interpreters,
- FIDA members provide interpreters
- Court provides official interpreters (Challenge to get for all languages)
- Courts or FIDA may arrange for private interpreters around the premises provided they take an oath.
- Court may adjourn to arrange for interpreters at their cost if there is none for the particular language officially or within the premises
- Court officials who can speak the particular indigenous languages serve as interpreters in their personal capacities.
- Encourage FIDA members to begin learning basic sentences in the indigenous languages.
- The Government should officially engage interpreters however limited the situation might be



FIDA pro bono services has had very good impact on the communities and targets of their services and one of the main factors that contributed to this is the ability to communicate with the beneficiaries in their respective indigenous languages which has fostered trust, helped to build confidence especially when the locals see those offering help speaking their language. Being addressed in their languages helps to put them at ease, enables thorough communication of what challenges they are having and may help them open up and give very useful information to help in the next cause of action. Sometimes these people come to FIDA as a last resort but it still leaves much room for a lot to be done in reaching those who are still plagued by language barriers.



Acknowledgements

- Thank you to Bukola Ajao, Esther Tata, Folake Ajayi, Nkiru Nwabueze Past Chairs of respective FIDA Chapters and Kangkemua Gonzwak offering free legal services to women and children under FIDA for very useful information on the activities and challenges (language)of pro bono services experienced by the various FIDA Chapters.



