

Rivers State Court Automation – the journey so far

The Rivers State Judiciary kicked off its one year anniversary celebration of e-Filing and Court Automation on Tuesday, March 9 with a Press Conference hosted by the Chief Judge and Members of the ICT Committee, with the Judicial Press in full attendance.

In a press release signed by the Chief Registrar, on behalf of the Chief Judge, the Chief Judge, Hon. Justice I.A. Iyayi-Lamikanra stated that, “Good justice systems are independent, transparent, accountable and efficient. Citizens depend on the judicial arm of government for key decisions that affect their daily lives and the society they live in. A good justice system is an inalienable right of the citizen.”

“In order to initiate lasting reforms in the justice sector and to replace the archaic procedures and outmoded administrative and management systems, information and communications technology (ICT) solutions have been deployed holistically at the Rivers State Judiciary to provide end-to-end automation of the case-flow system.”

“I believe that Information and communications technology have brought a turning point in the history of human civilization. It has brought about numerous changes and innovations in all fields of human activity. It has resulted in enhanced efficiency, productivity and quality of output in every walk of life, and the Justice sector is not an exception.

The last 365 days in the Rivers State Judiciary has been a journey of automating processes for improved speed in the administration of justice. The journey has been experiential with a lot of positive feedbacks and improvements on an ongoing basis.

Most of the Rules that operate in our courts today date back to decades of manual and analogue practices that always require human intrusion to achieve the desired goal of effective justice administration.

More than ever before, the pandemic revealed most of the inadequacies of the manual system and informed how the use of technology can greatly improve the access to justice and speed up the delivery of same. The all-round support from

the State Government gave the needed impetus for us to embark on the audacious journey of automating the Rivers State Judiciary. Some of the achievements in this first year are as follows:

E-filing

Lawyers can now file cases online from wherever they are. Beyond filing cases, they can also track the progress of their case files and receive regular notifications from when it is acted upon by the registry to when it is assigned to a judge or magistrate and afterwards, as hearing notices issue.

E-Payment

Payments are also made online and can be tracked easily.

Virtual / Remote Court Hearing

Remote case hearing is also another feature that has been integrated into the CoMiS platform. Judges and Counsels can agree to hear cases physically or virtually. A couple of cases have been heard virtually.

e-Affidavits

The public can now access, file and pay for general affidavits from the system.

e-Lis Pendens Registry

Cataloguing of all land related matters has been done; this is such that upon conducting a search, the system would give the status of the land to be transacted on, especially to help buyers know if a parcel of land is encumbered.

The public can now get information on disputed land cases before the High court and magistrate courts in the State.

Capacity Development

For the effective, efficient, and sustainable implementation of the RivCoMiS platform, capacity development of the various users of the platform were carried out; Lawyers, Registrars, Magistrates, Judges, Bailiffs, etc.

Migration of Old cases

Another feat achieved so far is the migration of all cases filed in 2019. As at the time of this report, over 90% of the cases in the high courts have been migrated and these cases can now be easily accessed by the Lawyers, Registrars, and Judges from the CoMiS platform.

Effective Virtual & Physical Support

Both physical and virtual support is available for all users of the platform to ensure business continuity within and after work hours.

Deployment of Court Room Technology (CRT)

The courtroom technology with verbatim reporting has been deployed in two (2) pilot courts to help the Judges and Magistrates to effectively record proceedings without the tedium of writing in long hand.

Deployment of Hardware, Local Area Network & Internet Bandwidth

Over five hundred laptops, active and passive devices with STM1 internet bandwidth was deployed in Magistrate and High courts in Rivers State.

1st year Statistics

ITEM	QTY
Affidavits	8,343
Users	7,591
New Filings	6,776
Applications	6,013
Forms & Letters	4,359
Old Filings	3,818
Defence filing	2,391
CTC	1,991
Lis Pendens	960
Interlocutory	50

Some detailed analysis of the activities of the Courts within the period has been tracked as follows:

Business Type	Judges	Magistrates	Grand Total
Adjournment	149	132	281
Adoption of Final Address	7	6	13
Concluded	163	75	238
Hearing	480	153	633
Judgement	38	45	83
Mention	950	157	1107
Motion	866	124	990
Pending	448	160	608
Plea	300	147	447
Pre-Trial Conference	95		95
Report of Service	9	73	82
Report of Settlement	37	57	94
Ruling	46	14	60
Sine dine	4	5	9
Struck Out	95	88	183
Grand Total	3,695	1,256	4,951

Conclusion

To get to this point, Rivers State led by the Executive Governor H. E. Nyesom Wike; CON **GSSRS**, **PoS** Africa has left no stone unturned in funding the project even as His Lordship, the Chief Judge of Rivers State, Honourable Justice A. I. Iyayi-Lamikanra took ownership of the implementation and gave direction to its adoption and domestication in the Rivers State judiciary through a well composited Judiciary ICT committee led by Hon. Justice Elsie Thompson.

Part of our implementation strategy was to ensure that the Bar in Rivers State was carried along and they have cooperated thus far, making useful input that has helped in the improvement of deployment to the benefit of all stakeholders. We appreciate their partnership and support.

Today, the journey which began over a year ago has turned into the country's leading online court management system.

This is just the beginning