

An examination of the legal status, powers and roles of the Justices of the Peace in the Nigerian legal system

Abstract

It is not uncommon to hear of State governments in Nigeria appointing people as Justices of the Peace or of people adding 'JP' as a suffix to their names. Justices of the Peace are judicial officers appointed to conserve peace and perform *quasi-judicial* and administrative functions. They are appointed as officers of the courts and form part of the actors and drivers of the nation's legal system. However, it appears that, over time, their relevance within the Nigerian context is fading away and that the office is gradually being reduced to political patronage. Consequently, this article seeks to raise awareness of the roles of Justices of the Peace in resolving minor disputes and fostering peaceful coexistence among citizens. It also highlights some of the challenges in the system with the aim of proffering a holistic reform. The article argues that the nature of the appointment and the poor capacity development of Justices of the Peace are the major banes of their effectiveness in Nigeria. Following the comparison of the Nigerian regime with the position in Jamaica, the article recommends how Justices of the Peace can be better equipped to be more effective within the context of the Nigerian legal system.

1. Historical development

The history of the office of Justices of the Peace can be traced to England as far back as 1195, when Richard I (Richard the Lionheart) commissioned some knights to safeguard the peace in disorderly areas of his domain. These knights were commonly referred to as the "keepers of the peace", "commissioners of the peace" or "conservators of the peace".¹ The office of the keepers of the peace was then an unpaid office, undertaken voluntarily and sometimes simply to confirm the justice's standing within the community.² Accordingly, legal knowledge was not a requirement for the office; rather, a person of reputation or member of the gentry³ was the major criterion. Being a

1 Beard 1967:1.

2 Maudsley & Davies 1964:518-19; Lambert 2011:5: "JPs are often referred to as the great unpaid ... presumably because for centuries most JPs were well-to-do landowners who would not bother about expense accounts. As landed gentry, they often prioritised laws that favoured their own interests, for example, taking a tough stance on poachers."

3 A member of the gentry means a high social or upper class.

person “of reputation” or “member of the gentry” generally meant wealth, as the office was confined mainly to members of the landowning class, knights, squires, or gentlemen of the land.⁴

The title ‘Justice of the Peace’ was, for the first time, given in England to replace the keepers of the peace in the *Justice of the Peace Act* of 1361. The *Act* recognised Justices of the Peace as magistrates. Under the *Act*, the principal duties of Justices of the Peace consisted in committing offenders to trial before a judge and jury when satisfied that there is a *prima facie* case against them; convicting and punishing summarily in minor causes as well as granting of licenses.⁵ The Lord Chancellor was then vested with the power to nominate candidates with local advice for appointment by the Crown.⁶

As noted earlier, the office of Justice of the Peace was originally an unpaid one. In the years leading up to the 18th century, Justices of the Peace were entitled to receive certain fees. Some, however, used their office to make corrupt profits.⁷ Their lack of legal knowledge also led to many legally erroneous and contradictory decisions. The rising corruption and erroneous judgements necessitated a move to replace some of them with legally trained and qualified lawyers, who were later known as the stipendiary magistrates.⁸

2. Historical development in Nigeria

The Nigerian legal system has been tremendously influenced by the English legal system as a result of colonisation and the attendant incidence of reception of the English law into the country. Nigeria continued to adopt most of the legal legacies left by its colonialists. One of such legacies is the appointment of persons into the office of Justice of the Peace. Justices of the Peace are appointed as public officers, albeit voluntarily, to collaborate with the government in promoting peace and justice in society.

The English judicial institutions were introduced in Nigeria, after the British assumed a direct and absolute control of the Colony of Lagos in 1861. *Ordinance* No. 3 was promulgated in 1863 to set up a Consular Court, Equity Court and the Supreme Court for the Colony.⁹ Following the *Proclamation of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria* on 1 January 1900, new courts were formed, namely the Supreme Court of the North, Provisional Courts (one for each province), Customary Courts, and Native Courts. On 1 January 1914, the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated. This amalgamation brought about a judicial

4 ACT Justices of the Peace Association Incorporation n.d.:1.

5 Simpson & Weiner 1989:326.

6 Lambert 2011:7; Maudsley & Davies 1964:529.

7 ACT Justices of the Peace Association Incorporation n.d.:2.

8 ACT Justices of the Peace Association Incorporation n.d.:1.

9 Badejogbin 2012:101-105.

reorganisation, and the following courts were adopted: a Supreme Court, Provincial Courts, and Native Courts.¹⁰

Sir Donald Cameron, who later became Governor of Nigeria in 1931, established High Courts for all the provinces after abolishing the Provincial Courts.¹¹ Each High Court had a Chief Judge. By the provision of sec. 7 of the *Protectorate Court Ordinance* No. 45 of 1933, Cameron established Magistrate Courts above the Native Courts in the cadre, but below the High Courts.¹² These magistrate courts were presided over by legal practitioners and administrative officers who were lay people.¹³ The introduction of administrative officers as magistrates led to the introduction of the lay magistrate (Justice of the Peace) within the context of the Nigerian legal system.

Akin Alao confirms that those who served as magistrates during this time were “administrative officers” who had limited knowledge of the law.¹⁴ Alao, however, justified their appointment on the ground of the dearth of capable Africans and professionally qualified personnel.¹⁵ Ever since Nigeria was divided into regions and later into States, magistracy had followed alongside the political division of the country. Every State regulates, with minor modifications, its magistracy including stipendiary and lay magistrates.

Long after Nigeria obtained her independence, the laws governing the appointment of Justices of the Peace have not been substantially altered in many States. However, it seems that the citizens’ knowledge and awareness of the roles of Justices of the Peace are dwindling. People and governments barely access their roles, despite the appointment of many of them by the successive State governments.¹⁶ The office has now almost been reduced to a mere status symbol, a suffix after one’s name that can garner respect and provide social and political mobility. Their impacts are now scarcely felt in society and in the Nigerian legal system.

This article aims to highlight the historical relevance of Justices of the Peace, their roles under the extant laws, the limitations relating to their appointments and functions, and recommends how their functions can be more beneficial to the Nigerian society.

To achieve the above objectives, this article is structured as follows. The next section discusses, in brief, the meaning and types of Justices of the Peace. This is followed by a critical examination of the appointment of Justices of the Peace under the Nigerian law, using some States’ laws as

10 Fawehinmi 1992:2-11.

11 Ogundere 1994:12-13.

12 Ogundere 1994:12-13.

13 See also CSO/26/29257, Vol. 11, *Administrative Officers with Magisterial Powers*; CSO 26/29257, Vols. 1-5, *Administrative Officers with Judicial Powers*; Omoniyi 1977:229.

14 Alao 2003:208.

15 Alao 2003:208.

16 Ahon 2010; Osuyi 2017; Osakue 2015; *Vanguard* 2017.

references. The article then examines the powers and roles of Justices of the Peace, and compares the Nigerian legal regime with that of Jamaica. This is followed by recommendations towards the reform of the system, the summary, and the conclusion.

3. Meaning and types of Justices of the Peace

The *Magistrate Courts Laws* of the majority of the States generally make provisions for the appointment and functions of Justices of the Peace. However, most of these statutes do not provide a definition of the phrase 'Justice of the Peace'. For instance, sec. 2 of the *Lagos State Magistrate Courts Law 2009*¹⁷ merely defines Justice of the Peace as "a Justice of the Peace appointed under the provision of this Law".¹⁸ It is submitted that this definition does not capture the nature of the status of who a Justice of the Peace is. A definition should be a clear statement of the nature, quality, and meaning of the subject matter. *Black's Law Dictionary*, however, defines a Justice of the Peace as a local judicial officer having jurisdiction over minor criminal offences and minor civil disputes, and authority to perform routine civil functions such as administering oaths and performing ceremonies.¹⁹ *Collins English Dictionary* defines a Justice of the Peace as:

a lay magistrate, appointed by the Crown [Britain] or acting *ex officio*, whose function is to preserve the peace in his area, try summarily such cases as are within his jurisdiction, and perform miscellaneous administrative duties; a person authorised to administer oaths, attest instruments, and take declarations.²⁰

From the above definitions, the features of a Justice of the Peace include a lay magistrate; a person who has specific jurisdictions, as prescribed by law, over minor offences and civil disputes and to preserve peace, and a person who performs other civil duties such as conducting marriage ceremonies, administering of oaths, and attesting instruments.

Justices of the Peace are also referred to as magistrates. Generally, there are two types of magistrates, namely *stipendiary* and *lay*. Both categories of magistrates are Justices of the Peace. A stipendiary magistrate is a qualified trained lawyer appointed as a full-time magistrate on an appropriate salary.²¹ A lay magistrate, on the other hand, is a judicial officer appointed without legal education – though a lawyer may

17 *Lagos State Magistrate Courts Law 2009*.

18 *Oyo Magistrate Courts Law 1997; Rivers Magistrate Courts Law 1999; Kano State Magistrate Courts Law 1987*.

19 Garner 1999:869; Black 1979:777: "[A] judicial magistrate (of English origin) of inferior rank having (usually) jurisdiction limited to that prescribed by statute in civil matters (e.g. performance of marriages) and jurisdiction over minor criminal offences, committing more serious crimes to higher court."

20 *Collins English Dictionary 2005:880*.

21 Garner 1999:962-963. A stipendiary magistrate is defined as a salaried magistrate that forms either in the place of, or along with Justices of the Peace and is appointed from barristers and solicitors of seven years' standing.

be so appointed – and without remuneration, and usually on a part-time basis. Lay magistrates are appointed on the ground of their integrity and exemplary conduct to perform specific judicial functions such as the summary trial of minor civil and criminal cases, administrative duties such as the administration of oaths, taking declarations, and conducting marriages. Lay magistrates usually exercise their duties voluntarily without remuneration. This is the reason why the scope of their duties is reduced. This article focuses on lay magistrates.

4. Appointment and qualification of the Justice of the Peace

In Nigeria, the office of a Justice of the Peace is usually regulated by the *Magistrate Courts Law* of each State. Under these statutes, a person may become a Justice of the Peace in two ways: either by appointment or by virtue of the office that a person occupies. For the purpose of this article, statutes of some selected States will be used as references.

In Lagos State, for example, sec. 12 of the *Magistrate Courts Law* provides for the appointment of the Justice of the Peace as follows: “The Attorney-General may by notice in the Gazette, appoint any respectable person to be a Justice of the Peace in and for the State, and may in like manner remove person so appointed from the office of Justice of the Peace.” In Kano State, sec. 10 of the *Magistrate Courts Law*²² vests the power to appoint and remove a Justice of the Peace in the State Judicial Service Committee.

There are major differences in the mode of appointment of a Justice of the Peace in the above States. First, in Lagos State, the power to appoint a Justice of the Peace is vested in the Attorney-General of the State, whereas, in Kano, it is the State Judicial Service Committee.²³ Secondly, the *Lagos State Law* provides for the qualification of the appointee to be a “respectable person”. The *Kano State Law* is silent on the issue of qualification. Although the two States provide for the removal of the Justice of the Peace, they fail to provide for the circumstances under which such a person may be removed.

Other questions that may arise from the issue of appointment, as it relates to Lagos State, will include: What are the criteria for determining a respectable person? Is the Attorney-General alone capable of knowing respectable persons in every region of Lagos State? Furthermore, it should be noted that, in politics, the Attorney-General, who is usually a political appointee, would consult with party leaders in the particular areas of candidates for nominations. The issue, in fact, is whether it is ethical to vest,

22 *Magistrate Courts Law* 1987.

23 The Attorney-General is also empowered to appoint and remove a Justice of the Peace under sec. 8 of the *Rivers State Magistrate Courts Law*. However, in Oyo State, the Governor is empowered to appoint the Justice of the Peace by virtue of sec. 12 of the *Oyo State Magistrate Courts Law*.

in a card-carrying member, the power of appointment to a quasi “judicial office” that requires neutrality and detachment. In this context, therefore, the Kano State approach seems better, since it may be presumed that the Judicial Service Committee charged with the responsibility of appointing the recipient may include persons from different regions of the State.²⁴

As noted earlier, persons may also become Justices of the Peace by virtue of the office they occupy at a particular time. For example, the majority of the States’ Laws provide that magistrates (stipendiary) and administrative officers of the States are Justices of the Peace *ex officio*. Thus, sec. 14 of the *Lagos Law* and sec. 7 of the *Kano Law* provide that each magistrate shall, by virtue of his/her office, be a Justice of the Peace for the State. Sec. 8(2) of the *River State Laws*²⁵ also stipulates that every administrative officer shall be *ex officio*, a Justice of the Peace for the area of the State in which s/he is appointed as such an officer. The following questions also arise: What makes an administrative officer qualify for appointment as Justice of the Peace? Is it “integrity” that may be lacking in an institution riddled with corruption and nepotism, or level of education that does not guarantee moral integrity? Either way, we draw the same negative conclusion.

Once a person is appointed as a Justice of the Peace, s/he is vested with some powers and responsibilities under the law. The examination of the powers and duties of a Justice of the Peace will now be considered.

5. Powers and roles of a Justice of the Peace

The powers and functions of a Justice of the Peace are provided for in the *Magistrate Courts Law* of each State. Thus, sec. 11 of the *Kano State Law* provides that the power of a Justice of the Peace shall include:

- a. power to preserve the peace, to suppress riots and affrays, and to disperse all disorderly and tumultuous assemblies, and for any of those purposes, to call in aid and assistance, any police officer or any person, who shall be bound to obey any or all such directions of the Justice of the Peace;
- b. all the powers, rights and duties of a magistrate under this Law or any other law to:
 - i. issue summonses and warrants for the purpose of compelling the attendance of accused persons and witnesses before the court;
 - ii. issue summons and other processes in civil causes and matters;
 - iii. remand in custody, persons who are accused but not convicted of a crime or admit such persons to bail;

24 The Edo State approach also offers a better idea as to where recipients are selected and recommended by the State Ministry of Justice for the office. See Osakue 2015.

25 See *Oyo State Magistrate Courts Law 1997:sec. 12(2)*.

- iv. issue search warrants;
- v. take solemn affirmations and statutory declarations; and
- vi. administer any oath which may be required to be taken before him in the exercise of any of the jurisdiction and powers conferred on him by law.

The provisions of sec. 13 of the *Oyo State Magistrate Courts Law* and sec. 9 of the *River State Magistrate Courts Law* are *in pari materia* with the above provisions. However, in Lagos State, a Justice of the Peace can perform all the functions stated above, but s/he cannot issue summonses and warrants for the purpose of compelling the attendance of accused persons and witnesses before the court. In addition, a Justice of the Peace cannot remand in custody those persons who are accused, but not convicted of a crime or admit such persons to bail under the *Lagos Law*.²⁶

In some States such as Oyo and Delta, Justices of the Peace are empowered to inquire by way of the inquest into the cause of death or direct *post-mortem* examinations for persons who died under disturbing circumstances.²⁷

In special circumstances, an appointed Justice of the Peace (lay magistrate) may be appointed to perform the roles of a stipendiary magistrate. To this end, sec. 11 of the *Oyo State Magistrate Courts Law* provides:

If a magistrate is not available for the court in any district, or where in respect of any district the Chief Judge for any reason considers it necessary to do so, the Chief Judge may by appointment confer upon any person being a Justice of the Peace the powers of a magistrate of such grade as he may think fit, or such of those powers as the Chief Judge may specify, and until the Chief Judge revokes the appointment, such person shall be deemed to be a magistrate with such powers in and for such district.²⁸

Sec. 17(1) of the *Lagos Law* also provides:

Where the Commission²⁹ considers it expedient so to do, it may by notice in the Gazette and for such time as it thinks fit, in any particular case, authorise a person holding office as a Justice of the Peace to act as a magistrate, and until the Commission revokes that notice such person shall be deemed to be a magistrate with such powers in and for the State.

The *Lagos Law*, however, provides in sec. 17(2) that any Justice of the Peace appointed to act as a stipendiary magistrate shall be a legal practitioner who is ordinarily qualified to be appointed as magistrate.

26 *Lagos State Magistrate Courts Law* 2009:sec. 16(b).

27 See, *Magistrate Courts Law of Oyo State* 2009:sec. 13(b); *Coroners Law of Delta State*:sec. 12.

28 See also *Rivers State Magistrate Courts Law* 1999:sec. 10.

29 In this instance, the Commission refers to the State Judicial Service Commission.

This particular provision is absent in most of the other States' Laws, such as Rivers and Oyo. The Lagos State provision is a better law and should be lauded, as it would be a judicial casualty for someone, who does not have a deeper knowledge of the law, to embark on such technical judicial voyage required of a stipendiary magistrate. It should be recalled that Justices of the Peace, being lay people, could not handle technical and serious legal cases effectively, thus leading to the appointment of the stipendiary magistrate.³⁰

From the above discussions, the roles of Justices of the Peace can be summarised to include collaboration with the state governments in bringing justice closer to the people through quality, coordinated and accessible justice services. They are also appointed to minimise crime in society, by participating in community policing and supporting the police to ensure peaceful co-existence among members of the community. In view of the above, it may be submitted that the office of a Justice of the Peace is not a mere title or honorary office, but a call to duty. A Justice of the Peace is a high-ranking office that confers on the holder the power to adjudicate on minor cases and disputes. Therefore, in carrying out their functions, Justices of the Peace need to be diligent, fair and firm in their actions and decisions, and must carry out their roles with integrity.

However, in view of the statutory roles of Justices of the Peace in the administration of justice, as discussed earlier, and the high numbers of them being appointed by the governments, some major questions that come to mind are: Why is the administration of the justice system in Nigeria still clogged with bottlenecks and unnecessary delays resulting from the huge number of cases?³¹ Are Justices of the Peace not supposed to be reducing these high numbers of docket files in the courts through adjudication of minor cases that need not find their way to the courts? Are Justices of the Peace really functional in modern Nigerian society? The answers to these questions may be subject to a number of factors. First, it may be said that, as a result of the poor awareness and knowledge on the part of members of the public as regards the roles and functions of Justices of the Peace, many do not access their services. Secondly, Justices of the Peace may not be well equipped with, or aware of the fullness of the *quasi*-judicial and administrative powers that have been conferred on them, thereby making them ineffective and inefficient.

The truth of the matter is that there is a poor public sensitisation on the functions and powers of the Justice of the Peace in Nigeria. The office of a Justice of the Peace is one of the existing few in-built mechanisms in the system for resolving minor disputes, one that is rarely used basically due to a lack of knowledge of the avenue. Similarly, some Justices of the Peace are not adequately equipped for the office to which they are appointed.

30 See fn. 8.

31 Akereolu 2018:15. For examples of delayed cases, see *Ariori v Elemo* (1981) 1 SC and *Shell Petroleum v Federal Board of Inland Revenue* (1996) 8 NWLR (Pt. 466) 256. Each of these lawsuits lasted for over two decades each.

The author is not aware of any forum in law or in practice whereby Justices of the Peace, particularly lay people, are trained, either before or after their assumption to the office, on how they are to carry out their roles more effectively. Another question may further be asked to wit: To what extent do the Justice Ministries believe or ensure that Justices of the Peace carry out their duties? It is submitted, at this juncture, that governments should make more efforts to ensure that the potentials of Justices of the Peace are fully utilised.

To ensure that Justices of the Peace are more productive, lessons may be gathered from other jurisdictions with regard to the workings of Justices of the Peace. For the purpose of this article, the Jamaican regime will be examined, in order to proffer some lessons that Nigeria may learn.

6. Justice of the Peace in Jamaica

In Jamaica, various pieces of legislation outline the roles and functions of Justices of the Peace. Some of the statutes include the *Judicature (Resident Magistrates) Act 1928*, the *Justice of the Peace Proclamation Rules 2006*, the *Justices of the Peace (Official Seals) Act 2004*; the *Jamaican Interpretation Act 1987*, the *Attestation of Facility Act 1944*, the *Oaths Act 1889*, and the *Jury Act 1980*.

In Jamaica, a formal legal education is not a prerequisite to be appointed to the office of Justice of the Peace. However, every Justice of the Peace is expected to be able to read and speak English fluently and must undergo a period of training before being commissioned into office.³² A Justice of the Peace must meet other requirements. S/he must:

- i. be a Jamaican citizen who is resident in Jamaica at the time of appointment;
- ii. be between the ages of 25-70 years;
- iii. be a person of unquestionable integrity and command the respect and confidence of the local community;
- iv. have a track record of given good service to the community and the wider Jamaica;
- v. who also demonstrates the potential for continued service; and
- vi. be able to communicate and interact at all levels and with all types of individuals in his/her community.³³

In order to ensure that the candidate to be appointed commands the respect and confidence of the local community, such a person must be

³² Ministry of Justice n.d.

³³ Ministry of Justice n.d. See also Munroe 2014.

recommended to the *Custos*³⁴ by any citizen, club, organisation or other such body or enterprise within the local community where the Justice of the Peace is to function. After receiving the recommendation, the *Custos* further makes inquiries into the background of the persons recommended, in order to confirm the suitability of the nominees. Following the *Custos*' inquiries, the Advisory Committee of every parish (region), comprising the *Custos*, Superintendent of the Police and the Resident Magistrate, further scrutinises the names of the candidates before the final recommendation for final appointment is made to the Governor-General through the Minister of Justice.³⁵ At their commissioning, Justices of the Peace are given the instrument of office and official seal, authorising them to discharge the functions of that office. Some regions have handbooks that further provide for how Justices of the Peace can effectively carry out their duties.³⁶

Once appointed, a Justice of the Peace in Jamaica is empowered to serve as a Justice of the Peace in a Court of Petty Sessions; attend Juvenile and Drug Court sessions; issue summonses and warrants; consider applications for bail; attend police stations; explain and sign legal documents; sit on licensing panels; give counsel, and advise citizens in the community. A Justice of the Peace also reads the *Riot Act* to a rioting crowd in a time of crisis.³⁷

In comparison with the Nigerian regime, the office of Justice of the Peace in Jamaica is also a voluntary office; hence, s/he is not expected to charge or accept any remuneration for services rendered in this capacity. However, the Jamaican regime seems preferable in terms of the procedure for the appointment of a Justice of the Peace, since people of the community are involved in the nomination or recommendation of who is to be appointed. Adequate measures are also taken to ensure that credible people who have track records of good deeds and perhaps service are appointed. In other words, persons who can be regarded as the 'men or women of the people' are considered for appointment. Members of the community know and can assess them. This is unlike Nigeria, where Justices of the Peace are selected on the basis of political affiliation, cronyism, and social connections. Many Justices of the Peace are not even known or associate with most of the members of their communities. Giving the sole power of nomination to a singular political office holder such as the Governor or the Attorney-General may not give room for the appointment of persons who command respect in a community. In the Jamaican regime, Justices of the Peace are adequately trained before and after they are commissioned. Surely, this will make them more effective and aware of the sense of responsibility. There is no platform for such training in Nigeria.

34 A *Custos* is the principal Justice of the Peace in a county, who has the custody of the rolls and records of the sessions of the Justice of the Peace. See Simpson & Weiner 1989:169.

35 Ministry of Justice n.d.

36 Department of Justice 2017.

37 Smith 2014.

7. Reform of the system

Following the limitations that have been identified as inherent in the Nigerian system, there is a need for a holistic overhaul of the system, in order to make it productive. Consequently, the following recommendations are proffered.

First, with regard to the appointment of Justices of the Peace, it is suggested that members of the community should be involved in the appointment, since they are supposed to work and relate to the local community. There should be a greater level of community consultation to ensure that there is a line of communication between governments and the communities which Justices of the Peace are meant to serve. Furthermore, the State Chief Judge (CJ) should be responsible in giving final approval to their appointment.

Furthermore, Justices of the Peace who have no legal knowledge should be made to have a basic level of academic qualification. A minimum of a Senior Secondary School Certificate may suffice in this regard. They should also be made to undergo qualifying training before they are finally commissioned into the office. An annual or bi-annual workshop may be conducted for them to enhance and update their knowledge on new developments relating to their functions. As in Jamaica, a training handbook can be developed for them to be more effective in carrying out their responsibilities.

The appointment and what should be the roles of Justices of the Peace should be incorporated in the curriculum and be taught by universities as part of the Nigerian legal system. With this, more people will know of their functions and be able to access them accordingly.

There should also be enacted a new law such as those establishing the customary and area courts. This will assist in making the appointment of Justices of the Peace relevant. In the same vein, basic facilities such as offices, official forms as well as summon booklets and seals that are similar to those provided for magistrate, customary and area courts should be made available to Justices of the Peace. These are needed to facilitate the performance of the functions assigned to them by different statutes. As “judicial officers” or “lay magistrates”, Justices of the Peace should also be integrated into the state’s judiciary, supervised and controlled by the judiciary, and maintained with public funds.

8. Conclusion

This article highlighted the historical and legal framework with regard to the legal status, appointment, and duties of Justices of the Peace in Nigeria. It is observed that the office of Justice of the Peace is created and developed as an in-built mechanism to bring access to justice closer to, and cheaper for members of the community and to complement governments’ peace initiatives.

It is observed, however, that, despite the high numbers of Justices of the Peace that are appointed regularly by the governments in Nigeria, their impacts are barely felt. Similarly, some limitations are observed in the legal and institutional framework for their appointment and operations. Some suggestions were made in this regard. It is hoped that the suggested reform, if implemented, will give meaning, recognition and relevance to Justices of the Peace as part of the judicial system in Nigeria.

In conclusion, the appointed Justices of the Peace should also know that the office they occupy is not a cosmetic one. They are, technically, 'judicial officers'. They are significant in the system of administration of justice in Nigeria. Accordingly, they must exercise their duties with all sense of purpose and responsibility because 'to whom much is given, much is also expected'. They are urged to live up to these special qualities and to uphold the high standard expected of the office and not to bring the administration of justice into disrepute.

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