

Lawyers Alert and the Decriminalization of Petty Offenses in Nigeria

Background

Petty Offenses are offenses other than felonies or misdemeanors, primarily targeting the poor and underserved in any society. They are offenses that are the relics of colonialism and include hawking, loitering, alms-seeking, etc. Nigeria's justice system has been burdened over the years, with government resources stretched thin by prosecuting petty offenses, thus diverting attention from crucial areas like governance and economic development. A total of 77,623 individuals make up the total inmate population as of the 5th of February 2024, with 54,124 individuals awaiting trial, which accounts for 70% of inmates. [link](#). Of the 69% awaiting trial inmates, a staggering number of people are caught in the web of the justice system for petty offenses. These minor acts which are often non-violent are often said to “wear the face of Poverty”, given that they disproportionately impact the poor and vulnerable due to economic reasons and the nature of the offenses.

The legislative response to calls for reforms and review has been slow, hindered by a lack of evidence and limited recourse to the law courts by lawyers seeking redress for vulnerable individuals facing petty offenses. The result is a justice system burdened with unnecessary investigations and prosecutions, leading to congestion in prisons. Petty offenses extend beyond legal consequences, contributing to social discrimination and tragic consequences. For instance, individuals engaged in activities like hawking face harassment, and sometimes arrest, with incidents such as a hawker of wares jumping off a flyover in Abuja to his death to escape arrest highlighting the severity of the situation. Commercial drivers also risk imprisonment for minor traffic violations, hindering their ability to earn a living. Security agencies, charged with enforcing these laws, conduct night raids targeting sex workers and individuals based on their sexual orientation, exacerbating social tensions.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has provided principles for the decriminalization of petty offenses in advancing human rights in Africa. These principles emphasize the need to uphold fundamental human rights, promote social justice, and ensure equality before the law. By decriminalizing petty offenses, the ACHPR aims to address systemic inequalities and reduce the overburdening of criminal justice systems. The ACHPR's principles emphasize the importance of alternative approaches, such as diversion programs and community-based solutions, to address the underlying causes of petty offenses and promote rehabilitation rather than punitive measures. Overall, the ACHPR's advocacy for the decriminalization

of petty offenses reflects its commitment to advancing human rights and promoting dignity and justice for all individuals in Africa. Lawyers Alert recognizing the need for reform, has carried out several interventions to implement these principles in Nigeria. Additionally, Lawyers Alert's argument for decriminalizing petty offenses in Nigeria lies in the potential for redirecting government focus and resources toward developmental issues, promoting good governance, economic empowerment, and combating corruption. Lawyers Alert's petty offenses decriminalization efforts represent a critical step towards a more just and equitable Nigeria, where the focus shifts from punitive measures to meaningful development and inclusion.

Lawyers Alert's Petty Offenses Decriminalization efforts in Nigeria.

1. Provision of Reliable and Variable Data on Petty Offenses in Nigeria.

Lawyers Alert provided the first data on Petty Offenses in Nigeria via our web-based rights tool styled “LadockT” for the systematic documentation of Human Rights violations associated with Petty Offenses. For over four years, we have monitored and documented reported instances of Petty Offenses violations to address the gap of lack of reliable and verifiable data and to provide evidence-based advocacy interventions aimed at the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria. [Link](#).

In populating LadockT, our partners were trained to utilize the tool for capturing and documenting Human Rights violations. Partners across the country submit violation reports, which are interrogated and confirmed before being uploaded. This tool not only captures violations but also facilitates in-depth analysis based on various parameters such as location, age, type of violations, sex, etc., evidencing discernible trends. The analysis of these violations provides a scientific and accurate representation of petty offenses in Nigeria.



Fig 1: Pictures from training of partners on the use of LadockT to capture and document human rights violations associated with Petty Offenses in Nigeria.

Lawyers Alert has released several reports on Human Rights violations associated with Petty Offenses, contributing significantly to advocacy efforts for the decriminalization of Petty Offenses in Nigeria. These reports, available [here](#), are increasingly being used for engagement with the legislature. These violation reports are actively shared with organizations, both local and international, working towards the decriminalization and declassification of petty offenses in Nigeria. Recipients include state actors such as the National Human Rights Commission, State Legislatures, and the National Parliament, to support programming and advocacy for policy and legal reform in Nigeria.

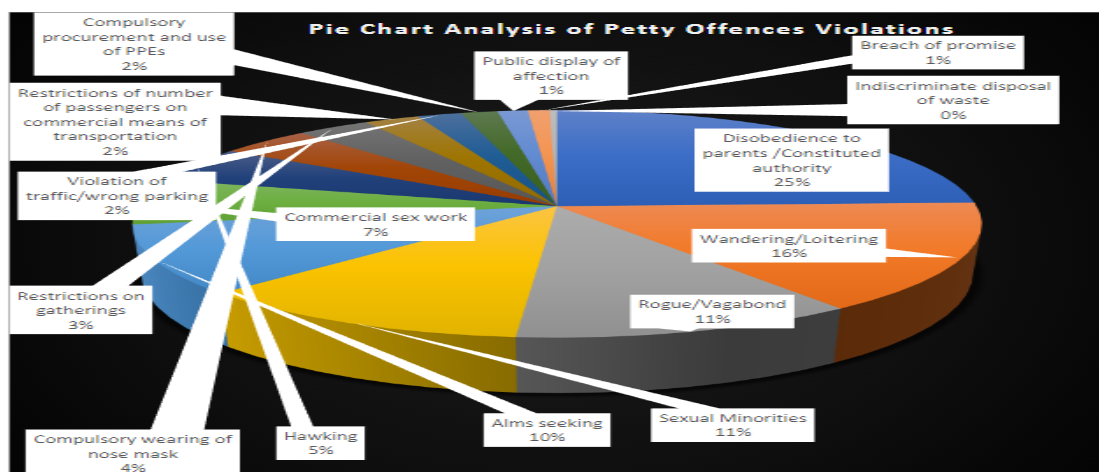


Fig 2: Pie Chart Analysis of Petty Offenses Violations.

LadockT has evolved into a pivotal hub where the interests of various petty offenses organisations and actors come together, organically building a movement in Nigeria, especially at the grassroots. Networks and Coalitions have embraced this initiative, constantly submitting reports, with the resultant effect of a movement in gathering data and evidence for effective advocacy. This has culminated in the formal establishment of the Alliance for the Decriminalization of Petty Offenses in Nigeria (ADPON). The impact of LA's scientific data provision on petty offenses violations in Nigeria amongst others includes the introduction of Bills in Bauchi and Benue states. Lawyers Alert, through this web-based documentation, is making a tremendous contribution to the campaign for the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria.



Fig 3: Pictures from Presentation of Proposed Bill to Decriminalize Petty Offenses in Benue State, Nigeria.

2. The Existence of a Movement to Decriminalize Petty Offenses in Nigeria.

Lawyers Alert also facilitated the creation of a movement of both state and non-state actors with a shared goal towards the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria. The process for the creation of this Movement started with our mapping of petty offenses actors and organizations across Nigeria in the year 2019. Through tailored training sessions for human rights advocates and CSOs, Lawyers Alert provided insights on what Petty Offenses are, how they impact the poor, violate Human Rights, and deepen poverty. These training sessions served as a catalyst for networking and collaborative partnerships amongst these organizations on Petty Offenses issues and the eventual movement-building facilitated by LA.



Fig 4: Pictures from ADPON Meeting and Training.

A total of Fifty-two (52) petty offenses actors/organizations are pulled into a basket of similar organizations to drive reforms and policies towards the decriminalization of petty offenses. A convening of these organizations was thereafter facilitated by LA where organizations shared their visions, revealing a shared commitment to the cause for the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria.

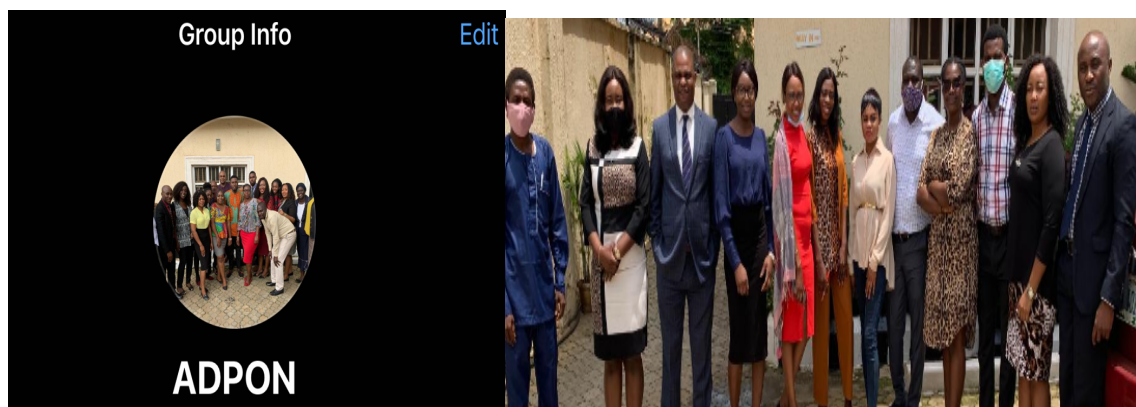


Fig 5: A screenshot of ADPON virtual platform and a picture of some ADPON Members.

Additionally, Lawyers Alert created a comprehensive directory encompassing petty offenses actors/organizations across the country. This directory serves

as a valuable resource for referrals and enhances accessibility for vulnerable groups seeking assistance. Members of the Movement (ADPON) have developed a joint advocacy plan. This Plan is being implemented collaboratively at various levels to advance the shared objective of the decriminalization and declassification of petty offenses in Nigeria.

ACTION PLAN FOR ALLIANCE ON THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF PETTY OFFENSES IN NIGERIA					
1. RESEARCH					
ACTIVITIES	OBJECTIVES	OUTPUT	INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	ORGANISATIONS RESPONSIBLE
A study on the areas/regions with high level of petty offenses and punishments/imprisonments thereof.	1. To enable mapping of areas with high level of petty offenses in Nigeria. 2. To enable informed interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of areas with high level of petty offenses in Nigeria Developed strategic plan for interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of areas (geographical scope) mapped. Total no. of petty offenses recorded A copy of strategic plan developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of visibility study Compiled record of petty offenses as mapped Report from Study 	ALL Lawyers Alert LAID
A study on the available institutions (if any) for child victims of petty offenses	To develop a directory of institutions available for the protection of child victims of petty offenses in Nigeria.	Establishment of directory of institutions on the protection of child victims of petty offenses in Nigeria	Draft of directory of institutions of petty offenses	Dummy copy of directory of Institutions	ALL NHRC Sterling Law Center Lawyers Alert
Expansion of Lawyers Alert online web-based tool (LADOCKT) to accommodate petty offenses in Nigeria.	1. To have a central collation point for petty offenses in Nigeria. 2. To ensure accuracy in petty offenses areas of intervention. 3. To ensure guidance on how to go about the decriminalization of petty offenses. 4. To monitor the successes and failures of the Alliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institution of Petty offenses' Collation hub Develop implementation strategies on the areas of intervention of petty offenses. Develop methodology on the decriminalization of Petty Offenses. A Designed Monitoring & Evaluation tool for effective project implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total no. of petty offenses documented Draft copy of implementation strategies on areas of intervention Record of step by step methodology developed Total no. of monitoring carried out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports of petty offenses collated Activity reports Schedule of program & activity/ Report Reports of M & E Officer 	Lawyers Alert ALL
A study on the juvenile	To enable the Alliance have	Established record of	Total no. of petty	Reports of analysis	NHRC

Fig 6: A snapshot of ADPON's Joint Action Plan

3. Literacy Campaigns and Media Engagement

Lawyers Alert has been actively implementing extensive legal literacy campaigns on petty offenses at the grassroots level. The main aim of these campaigns is to impart knowledge and build the capacity of particularly the poor and vulnerable groups at the grassroots. This was also aimed to equip them to transfer knowledge and more significantly, challenge violations of their rights and of others as they occur from a standpoint of knowledge and power. Community settings, marketplaces, churches, etc., serve as fertile grounds for building change at grassroots and have literacy campaigns at this level. At the last count, over 10 markets across 5 states are beneficiaries, with several community groups within our networks replicating the same modus in their environs. Lawyers Alert's focus on the poor and vulnerable groups is deliberate, recognizing their economic disadvantage.



Fig 7: Petty Offenses grassroots/community outreach.

Complementing our physical efforts, our online literacy campaign which began in 2018, takes place every Thursday via Lawyers Alert's Facebook page. To date, this literacy campaign has reached over two million persons.



Fig 8: Petty Offences Online Engagement.

<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CjVO2jPD3r3/?igshid=MWI4MTIyMDE=>

The success of these initiatives is further amplified through media engagements, with media outlets like Albarka radio in Bauchi state providing Lawyers Alert with free airtime to advocate for the decriminalization of petty acts in Nigeria. Our media engagement encompasses radio, TV, and newspapers, creating a comprehensive and impactful approach to disseminating information and fostering positive change.

<https://www.facebook.com/hotfm983/videos/769508066788974/>

<https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/285208/lawyers-alert-intensifies-push-for-decriminalization-of-pett.html>

<https://theeagleonline.com.ng/lawyers-alert-pushes-further-for-decriminalisation-of-petty-offences-in-nigeria/>

<https://go.shr.lc/2HnSF9y>

<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/lawyers-lament-criminalisation-of-petty-offences-in-nigeria.html>

<https://newsnowonline.com.ng/2020/02/14/lawyers-alert-insists-on-decriminalization-of-petty-offences-in-nigeria/>

4. Free Legal Representation

Lawyers Alert's provision of free legal representation for persons accused of petty offenses in Nigeria reflects a commitment to ensuring access to justice, particularly for the poor and vulnerable persons. This aligns closely with Lawyers Alert's vision of a world free from injustice.

Lawyers Alert has so far rendered free legal assistance to over three hundred and fifty (350) victims of petty offenses. This has enhanced access to justice, created avenues for the underserved to access legal representation, and contributed to a more equitable legal system.

We have provided free legal representation via the prison decongestion project across various correctional centers and Police stations detainees assigned to lawyers offering free legal assistance to represent them. Some petty offenses cases can be found [here](#).



Fig 33: Picture of lawyers and some beneficiaries of Lawyers Alert's prison decongestion program

We have also provided international training on legal representation and Strategic Impact Litigation for Lawyers with regard to strategies and best practices for representing marginalized groups.



Fig 7: Pictures from Lawyers International Training, Abuja, Nigeria

A directory of human rights lawyers providing free legal services across Nigeria for persons accused of petty offenses was developed by Lawyers Alert and is constantly updated. Persons accused of Petty Offenses in Nigeria now have free legal services.

Lawyers Alert free legal representation contributes to the broader goal of legal and judicial reforms, highlighting the importance of addressing petty offenses within the legal framework and advocating for fair and proportionate responses to such offenses.



Fig 8: Pictures from Lawyers Brainstorming Sessions.

5. Strategic/Public Impact Litigation

Lawyers Alert's provision of legal representation goes beyond individual cases to public impact litigation contributing to a more just and equitable system, while addressing systemic issues and advocating for legal reforms towards the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria. In line with its mandate and movement on decriminalization of vagrancy laws and petty offenses in Nigeria filed actions in court.

- The first is an action in *LA V Federal Republic of Nigeria* before the Community Court of ECOWAS in Abuja, FCT. By the action, Lawyers Alert seeks the interpretation of Sections 405, 406, and 407 of the Penal Code of Nigeria, Cap. 89, Laws of Northern Nigeria, 1963, and seeks the court's pronouncement on the sections as vagrancy laws that should have no place in our statute books. The suit further seeks the court's determination of the compatibility of the aforesaid sections with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) and other International Human Rights Instruments applicable in Nigeria. It is even more strategic that the matter is being heard by the Community Court of ECOWAS. A positive outcome will impact the lives of every vulnerable person and help to decriminalize certain vagrancy laws. Action is still pending at the ECOWAS court, [click](#) for updates.
- In the case of *LA V Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) & 2 Ors*, Lawyers Alert instituted an action against the Abuja

Environmental Protection Board and 3 Others. The action hinges on the incessant reports on violations of the rights of women (Female Sex Workers) by the Abuja Environmental Board (AEPB) and its cohorts. The suit seeks the interpretation of sections 6 and 35 of the AEPB Act and a declaration that the provisions of sections 6 and 35 of the AEPB Act, 1997, or any other provision for that matter do not give the AEPB powers to arrest women suspected to be Sex Workers. This suit further seeks a declaration that the functions of the AEPB do not include the harassment, arrest, and raid of women in Abuja. It is believed that the suit will broaden the frontiers of the law by seeking the decriminalization of petty offenses in the context of female sex workers in Nigeria and protect the rights of women from violations. The case is still pending in court, [click](#) for updates.

6. Advocacy campaigns

In advocating for the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria, LA conducted several phone-in radio programs and online literacy sessions, reaching an audience exceeding two million individuals. These sessions emphasize the need to decriminalize/declassify petty offenses, fostering public awareness and understanding for engagement.

During the last review of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Lawyers Alert facilitated intensive advocacy alongside members of ADPON across the 12 zonal centers towards ensuring that constitutional amendment be done incorporating the decriminalization of petty offenses in all states of the federation.



Fig 9: Pictures from Public Hearing in Bauchi, Niger, and Kaduna.



Fig 10: Pictures from Public Hearing in Akure, Enugu, and Imo.

Lawyers Alert conducted advocacy visits to various House of Assemblies, Commissioners of Police, and Attorneys-General in different states. Utilizing data/findings from LadockT as evidence, these visits provided compelling reasons for the decriminalization of petty offenses. LA has also continuously sensitized the populace on petty offenses and the need to decriminalize the same.

In Kano State, Lawyers Alert engaged the Hisbah Board to establish a collaborative working relationship. The focus was on facilitating synergy towards the decriminalization of petty offenses and advocating against the criminalization of poverty status in the State. The visit also emphasized the importance of adopting a human rights approach in the conduct of cases by the Board.



Fig 11: A Pictures of our visit to Hisbah Kano with CID Sulaiman Abba Isa.

7. Capacity Building of the Judiciary

Lawyers Alert engaged the judiciary in Bauchi and Benue states respectively on the Advisory Opinion of the African Court Judgement on the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria. This was aimed at knowledge-sharing and securing the buy-in of the judiciary toward the decriminalization of petty offenses in their states. Most Magistrates in attendance alluded to the

fact that much more needed to be done regarding promoting and protecting the rights of the poor and vulnerable who are usually victims of petty offenses violations. This resulted in a commitment from Magistrates across both states to look out for cases of petty offenses and pledged to always treat them as human rights cases. LA has so far maintained a sustained dialogue with them regarding the Advisory Opinion of the African Court Judgement towards the decriminalization and declassification of petty offenses in Nigeria. This has so far resulted in positive updates from magistrates across both states on petty offenses cases they have presided over.



Fig 12: Pictures from engagement with the Judiciary in Bauchi State, Nigeria.



Fig 13: Pictures from engagement with the Judiciary in Benue State, Nigeria.

Lawyers Alert's Petty Offenses Interventions During COVID

Before COVID, Lawyers Alert had been actively engaged in addressing issues related to petty offenses and their impact on vulnerable communities as in the above. The COVID-19 pandemic which disrupted not only the health sector, also had far-reaching consequences on the criminal justice system. The attendant lockdowns and restrictions meant that poor and vulnerable individuals were more susceptible to being charged with petty offenses, often stemming from their attempts to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic.

During the pandemic, Lawyers Alert intensified its efforts, recognizing the heightened vulnerability of marginalized communities. LA identified context-specific approaches in dealing with petty offenses during these unprecedented times which include:

- Expansion Lawyers Alert documentation Tool “LadockT” to capture Petty Offenses Violations occasioned by COVID-19** – With the advent of COVID, Lawyers Alert mapped and identified new petty offenses occasioned by COVID-19. This was occasioned by the militarization of the civic space in enforcing lockdowns and COVID-19 containment measures by security agencies which did not take into concern human rights approaches. Consequently, new offenses emerged as a result of stringent lockdown enforcement, including measures such as the enforcement of PPE, detentions, etc. LadockT was thereafter expanded to include newly identified petty offenses, given that it was developed in the pre-COVID era, necessitating the preceding action to address emerging concerns. In the COVID-19 period, LA intensified its efforts and incorporated these violations that arose from the COVID-19 lockdown which criminalized poverty, to enhance advocacy initiatives and provide insights into trends within the context of the pandemic.

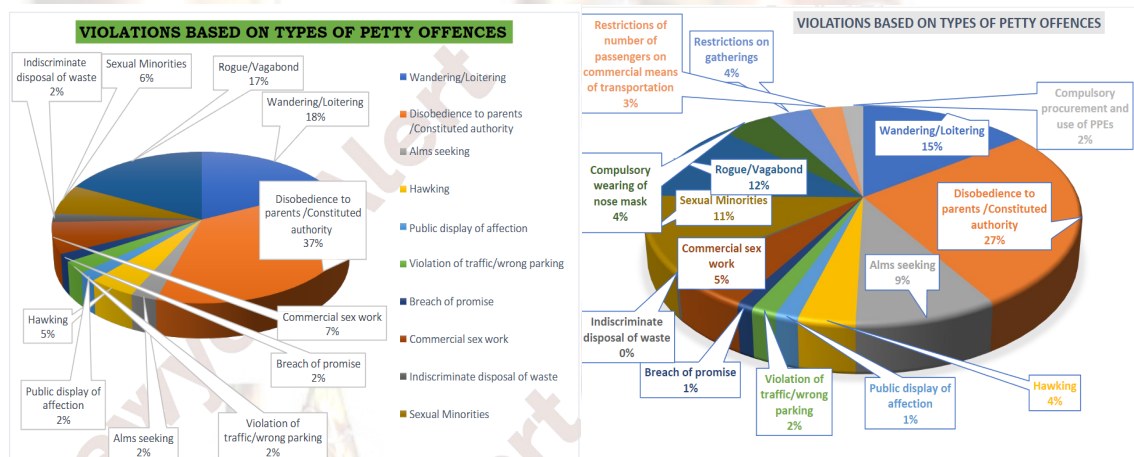


Fig 13: Screenshot showing types of Petty Offenses captured before and after COVID-19 on LadockT.

- Prison Decongestion** – In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the heightened risks faced by persons accused of petty offenses within our prisons owing to congestion, Lawyers Alert engaged the Federal Government with the aim to decongest the prisons, particularly for individuals awaiting trial or those convicted solely due to inability to pay fines associated with petty offenses. Our collaborative efforts with other CSOs and ADPON resulted in directives from the Federal Government explicitly to decongest prisons, with a specific focus on persons accused of “minor offenses” being identified as the primary beneficiaries. This directive was issued to be implemented at both the Federal & State levels. To ensure that the Federal Government’s directive was not rhetoric, Lawyers Alert established a dedicated monitoring team to see to its implementation.

The team actively engaged in monitoring the implementation of the directive, ensuring accountability and adherence at all levels.

<https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/286198/covid-19-govt-urged-to-address-congestion-in-correctional-c.html>

<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/covid-19-decongest-custodial-centers-now-lawyers-alert-tell-govt.html>

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/04/covid-19-buhari-orders-release-of-2600-prison-inmates/>

<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/70-percent-inmates-in-nigeria-awaiting-trials-lawyers-alert.html>

<https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/286510/covid19lawyers-alert-to-monitor-prison-decongestion.html>

<https://t.co/Sn1K4oyPKW>

<https://www.independent.ng/covid-19-implement-fgs-directives-on-prison-decongestion-groups-tell-bauchi-govt/>

<https://tribuneonlineng.com/bauchi-govt-gets-5-days-ultimatum-from-fg-to-decongest-prison-or-face-legal-action/>

<https://dailypost.ng/2020/04/15/covid-19-rights-groups-issue-5-day-ultimatum-to-bauchi-govt-to-implement-directives-on-prison-decongestion/>

- **Mobile Courts and Free Legal Representation** – In response to the imperative of enforcing COVID-19 measures, the Government established mobile courts for the prompt adjudication of persons found violating the COVID lockdown regulations. Recognizing the potential vulnerability of the poor and disadvantaged in the society, Lawyers Alert took proactive measures to station Lawyers offering free legal representation within these mobile courts. This strategy by LA was aimed at upholding the rights of the marginalized in the society, preventing their inadvertent confinement to detention centres.

Lawyers Alert pushes further for decriminalisation of petty offences in Nigeria



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Fig 14: Lawyers Alert' push for the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria.

- **Partnership with Security Agencies** - In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, Law enforcement agencies faced the delicate task of balancing public health concerns with individual rights. Lawyers Alert engaged in dialogues with these state actors, advocating for policies that would ensure a fair and equitable administration of justice during the pandemic. Additionally, Lawyers Alert facilitated a meeting with the top echelon of the Nigeria Police Force to enable Lawyers and Human Rights Advocates to be seen as providing essential services. This strategic engagement resulted in the Passes being secured, facilitating unrestricted movement and seamless provision of services to poor and vulnerable persons during the lockdown.

Lawyers Alert's Petty Offenses Interventions Post COVID

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 lock down and subsequent years, Lawyers Alert has continued providing free legal representation to persons accused of petty offenses. At the end of the lock down, LA conducted an assessment of vulnerable groups in Nigeria of their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This assessment aimed to glean insights, lessons learned, and recommendations in the event of a future pandemic and lockdown, as detailed [here](#).

The findings from this assessment led to LA intensifying advocacy efforts for the decriminalization of petty offenses. This involved sustained engagement with policymakers, legislative bodies, and relevant government agencies, advocating for policy reforms aligned with human rights principles.

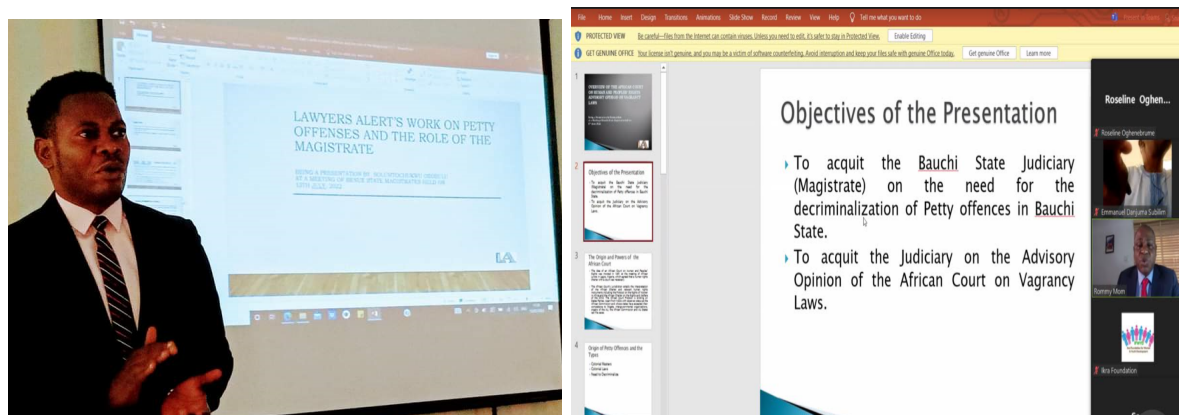


Fig 15: Lawyers Alert' advocacy efforts for the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Lawyers Alert actively participated in international forums and engaged with global bodies advocating for human rights and legal reforms. A notable instance of this engagement occurred at the Miami Law School where we shared our experiences and insights, and aligned our efforts with global standards. This collaborative participation led to a broader discourse on human rights and legal reforms at regional and sub regional levels.

[Petty Offenses Symposium Report_Final.pdf | Powered by Box](#)

2:25 PM A Conversation on Gender and Petty Offenses	27
Moderator	
Andrea Ritchie, Social Justice Institute, Barnard Center for Research on Women	
Speakers	
Pauline Green, Executive Director, Alliance for GLBTQ Youth	
Kate Mogulescu, Assistant Professor of Clinical Law, Criminal Defense and Advocacy Clinic, Brooklyn Law School	
Rommy Mom, Director, Lawyers Alert, Nigeria	
Joel Simpson, Founder and Managing Director, Guyana's Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination	

Fig 16: Snapshot from the Petty Offenses Symposium at Miami Law School.

Response of State Actors on Lawyers Alert's Petty Offenses work in Nigeria.

The response from state actors have so far varied across states in Nigeria. Some states such as Kogi, Benue, and Niger showed commendable efforts in aligning their legal systems with the changing circumstances, recognizing the need for flexibility in addressing petty offenses as seen during the pandemic. Others, however, struggled to adapt, leading to instances of unfair and arbitrary enforcement of laws.

Lawyers Alert, in collaboration with ADPON, remains committed to maintaining regular consultation with state actors and security agencies towards fostering long-term systemic partnerships that would address the root causes of petty offenses, and the eventual decriminalization of petty offenses.

Success/Achievement Recorded

Lawyers Alert in its efforts at decriminalizing petty offenses in Nigeria has recorded the following successes:

- The production and presentation of Bill to decriminalize petty offenses in Bauchi and Benue states presently before the States Houses of Assembly. Lawyers Alert's engagement of Parliamentarians in Bauchi and Benue State and the presentation of the Bill to both State Houses of Assembly has sparked legislative interests and heightened their interest on issues of petty offenses. Parliamentarians in both locations upon been engaged called for indebt training on the subject towards decriminalizing petty offenses.
- The Federal High Court of Nigeria, in Abuja, groundbreaking decision against law enforcement agencies that violated women's rights. The judgement upheld the rights of Female Sex Workers and stated that just like other citizens' rights of FSWs should be protected.
- Existence of scientific data/findings on human rights violations associated with petty offenses in Nigeria. This has been occasioned by our monitoring, documentation and publication of findings on these violations associated with petty offenses. This has enhanced scientific and evidence-based advocacy on petty offenses by advocates and organizations.
- There is now enhanced awareness on petty offenses in Nigeria. Citizens are now better informed of how to respond to issues around petty offenses upon arrest by security officials. Ths has led to high reportage of violations for documentation.
- Access to justice and services for victims of petty offenses in Nigeria, occasioned by free legal services provided to more than 1315 persons, with 3 on-going strategic impact litigations.
- Lawyers are empowered with best practices in representing marginalized groups and many more lawyers are showing interest and providing free legal representation for victims of petty offenses.
- The case before the Federal Court to challenge acts of the AEPB as ultra vires and which dehumanize women found on the street of Abuja has garnered interest.
- The case filed by LA before the ECOWAS court has also sparked interest in international communities leading to amplified voices on the case and towards the decriminalization of vagrancy laws in the State.
- Organizations/Activists from other states requesting to join the campaign to decriminalize petty offenses in Nigeria under the umbrella of the Alliance for the Decriminalization of Petty Offenses in Nigeria (ADPON).

- Inclusion of the Lawyers Alert personnel in the government teams to assist in visits to detention centres and the identification of some of the petty offenses' detainees.
- Advocacy across the 12 zonal centers for constitution review towards ensuring that constitution amendment be done incorporating the decriminalization of petty offenses.
- The Benue State Judiciary (Judges) have undertaken and publicly committed to end detention and incarceration owing to petty offense but to strictly resort to non-custodial sentencing.
- Strengthened petty offenses network under the auspices of ADPON jointly implementing actions based on a developed advocacy plan towards the decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria.
- Heightened interest of Hisbah in Kano on petty offenses and a resultant call for human rights training for Hisbah.
- The media owning issues of petty offenses decriminalization and carrying out independent stories on the issues. This is a major advocacy win. Journalists voluntarily picking up stories around Lawyers Alert petty offenses work & reporting same on print & online media as news, with no patronage as is often the case in Nigeria.

<http://ireporteronline.com.ng/human-rights-and-petty-offenses-in-nigeria-by-ellen-onugha/>

<https://www.newsmonger.com.ng/nigerian-news/88010/covid-19-decongest-custodial-centers-now-lawyers-alert-tell-govt/>

<https://www.sunnewsonline.com/covid-19-pains-of-prisoners/>

Challenges

As of now, the response to Lawyers Alert's efforts reflects varied outcomes. While there have been positive developments in certain regions, challenges persist. Petty offenses continue to be a contentious issue, and the need for sustained advocacy remains crucial. Lawyers Alert remains at the forefront, navigating the legal landscape to ensure a fair and just system for all, and advocating for legal reforms to ensure that petty offenses are treated with more nuance, considering the socio-economic context of the offenders.

Challenges experienced so far include:

- Turnaround time from Government bodies can take too long as letters submitted to correctional service centres towards harvesting & documenting cases of petty offenses towards provision of free legal services has to pass through various desks for approval. Bureaucracy.

- Trials in court in Nigeria can be very frustrating and lengthy as Matters sometimes drag on for too long. Some filed cases are in court still undergoing preliminary processes. This may demotivate victims.
- The need for more Lawyers to attend to victims. Increase in calls from victims of petty offenses in some states where lawyers are inadequate, or non-project states. This has led us to the painful decision to sometimes decline where it is difficult to find volunteers. We are however partnering with organisations providing free legal services in these states towards mitigating the situation.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic – physical meetings were not possible sometimes. LA struggled with numbers to be in line with WHO guidelines and national regulations. There was also the added number of detainees owing to new offenses, breach of stay at home restrictions, etc. which stretched the legal support that was available.
- Virtual courts post COVID – This posed a challenge as not all judges had reliable access to the necessary technology or stable internet connection. Additionally, security concerns of using virtual court platforms such as data privacy and the potential for cyberattacks impacted our petty offenses work.
- The Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria had embarked on the longest strike with regard to judiciary in Nigeria that lasted 64 working days. Within this period, the court & judiciary were no longer working, with implications that citizens could be detained indefinitely at the mercy of the police for offenses like sex work, being a sexual minority (LGBTI), etc. which also meant no free legal representation within the courts at that period. We resorted to mediation, meetings with the police with regards to arrest of our target groups, legal advice, etc. in a bid to still offer free legal services.
- The suspension of Twitter by the FG owing to disagreements on issues of National security and sovereignty. LA resorted to other online social media outlets like Facebook, Instagram, etc., limiting our reach as most Nigerians & organizations have twitter handles and strive to react real time to issues raised on twitter.
- General election and other elections– relevant stakeholders focused on the general elections and give topmost priority to issues concerning their re-election. This will be a reoccurring challenge as elections are time bound.

Conclusion

Lawyers Alert remains resolute in navigating these challenges and adapting strategies to ensure sustained advocacy towards the decriminalization of petty

offenses in Nigeria. LA will continue to engage state actors, security agencies, the legislature, and international forums, firmly committed to the vision of a more just and equitable Nigeria where the focus shifts from punitive measures to meaningful development and inclusion. The goal of the eventual decriminalization of petty offenses in Nigeria is continuous for Lawyers Alert, marked by resilience, strategic interventions, and a commitment to justice for the poor and marginalized persons in Nigeria.

