

ONE DAY VIRTUAL CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP FOR NOA STATE DIRECTORS, STATE DIRECTORATES FREEDOM OF INFORMATION DESK OFFICERS AND FOI COMMITTEE MEMBERS HELD ON TUESDAY 20TH APRIL, 2021 AT THE NOA CONFERENCE HALL GARKI ABUJA

Introduction

Some years ago, the State Directors of the Agency (National Orientation Agency) were trained on the provisions and application of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 2011. Apart from the fact that most of them (Directors) have retired from the service, there has not been any follow up refresher capacity building on the subject. Until recently, the State Directorates had no Freedom of Information Desk Officers to attend to requests by information seekers and sensitize the citizens on the Freedom of Information and Open Government Partnership (OGP) related issues at that level.

To bridge the gap, the State Directorates had to appoint capable officers of Grade Level 10 or 12 as FOI Desk Officers to interface with the public on FOI requests and develop a Dialogue Mechanism on Transparency, Accountability and Good Governance between citizens and government to facilitate a culture of openness.

To be able to function well as sensitizers and information givers on the subject, these officers need to have full grasps of the subject matter. It is in this vein that the Director-General directed that the capacity of the Directors and the newly appointed State FOI Desk Officers be built through virtual engagement, in which the Participants were taken through the subject as follows:

- (i) Overview of the FOI Act.
- (ii) Fundamental Principles of Disclosure.
- (iii) Obligations of Public Officers/Institutions
- (iv) Proactive Disclosure of Information.
- (v) Exceptions to Disclosure of Information.
- (vi) Application for Information/Right to Information under the FOI Act.

Objectives

- (i) To understand and appreciate the objectives of the FOI Act, 2011.

- (ii) To identify compliance issues under the FOI Act.
- (iii) To respond to all the applications and Requests with ease.
- (iv) To apply the provisions of the FOI Act, 2011 without infractions.
- (v) To achieve pro-activeness in the disclosure of frequently asked questions.

Participants

The Director-General was represented by Mr. Samuel Soughul (Director; Planning, Research and Strategy). Other dignitaries were Mr. Bonat Tagwai, (Resource Person), Mrs. Ngozi Ekeoba mni (Director, Political, Civic Education and Values), Mrs. Mette Edekobi (Director, Special Duties and State Operations), Mrs. Remi Afolabi (Director, Procurement), Mr. Kehinde Ogunkuade (Director, Human Resource Management), Mrs. Ruth Ogun (Director, Public Enlightenment and Mass Mobilization), Mrs. Mope Hammed (Director, General Services), Mrs. Margaret Lawrence (Representative of the CEO, Public & Private Development Centre), Mr. Sam Attah (Head; Reform Coordination and Service Improvement), Barr. Juliet Achebe (NOA FOI-Act Desk Officer), FOI Committee Members, NOA Federal Capital Territory FOI Officers and NOA Headquarters Staff. State Directors and State Freedom of Information Desk Officers participated virtually.

Strategy

The occasion was conducted through Onsite and Virtual fora.

Welcome Address:

The welcome address was given by the Head (Reform Coordination & Service Improvement) Mr. Sam Attah. He welcomed the participants to the programme and made it known that several programmes on the FOI had earlier been executed by the Agency. He listed the Programmes thus:

- a. Dialogue on Evaluating the Application of the freedom of Information Act (FOI-A) and its Impact on the National Development, held on 18th February, 2020.
- b. Roundtable Engagement with FOIA Desk Officers of MDAs on Review of the Application of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011, held on 3rd March, 2020.

- c. Stakeholders’ Engagement on Understanding the Application of the Freedom of Information Act beyond the Frontiers of Accounting and Contract, held on 23rd September, 2020.
- d. A Seven-Day Motorized Campaign on “National Security” Understanding and Application of FOIA around the Area Councils of the FCT, from 28th September – 6th October, 2020.
- e. A Live Radio Discussion Programme on “Understanding and Application of Information Act, 2011, on 95.5 Nigeria Info FM.

He said that the above-listed programmes afforded Nigerian Citizens the opportunity of better understanding of the provisions of the Act. He also said that the Agency has translated the FOI-A into 23 Nigerian Languages, produced several copies and distributed them in all the States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory.



Head, Reform Coordination & Service Improvement (RC&SI) Mr. Sam Attah gives his Welcome Address

Goodwill message

The Goodwill message was given by Mrs. Margaret Lawrence who represented the CEO, Private and Public Development Center (PPDC). According to her, PPDC has been occupied with promoting access to information, open government and integrity in public sector process through their programmes and activities. She also said that it has supported and collaborated with several government agencies and

stakeholders. One of such programmes is the Annual Freedom of Information Compliance and Transparency Rankings. PPDC's partnership with government stakeholders has enabled them to build a strong collaboration with the National Orientation Agency

Finally, she welcomed the development as an act of reaffirmed commitment of the Agency (NOA) in promoting and enforcing citizen's right to information as enshrined in the FOI ACT 2011.

Opening Remarks

The event was flagged off by the Director General, represented by the Director (PRS) Mr. Samuel Soughul. In his opening remarks, he stated that since signing the Freedom of Information Act into law, the National Orientation Agency has been creating awareness and enlightening of Civil Society Organizations, Stakeholders and Public Officers on the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. He added that the Freedom of Information Act Desk Officers and Freedom of Information Act Committees have been established in most of the Ministries, Departments and Agencies as demanded by the Act.

He pointed out that Feedbacks from previous engagements with the Desk Officers revealed that Citizens mostly used the Act to demand for financial and contract award records from Ministries, Departments and Agencies. This necessitated the Agency to shift its notion and expand the knowledge of the Act to enable the Public to apply the provisions of the Act in other areas of life that will ensure transparency, accountability and national development.

He stated that the retraining of these critical officers of the Agency is to enhance the delivery capability of staff in the subject of FOI so that they will be better equipped to interface with members of the public on FOI related matters.

Finally, he said that the programme will enable participants have a grasp of the subject matter and will be better equipped to facilitate access to government's information, pave way for Citizens, Civil Society Organizations and the Private sector to better understand the workings of

government and the decisions being made on their behalf. According to him, this will promote transparency, Accountability and Stewardship in governance.



Representative of the Director-General of NOA; Mr Samuel Soughul delivering DG's Opening address

Vote of thanks

The vote of thanks to end the first segment of the capacity building workshop was delivered by Mrs. Helen Ekeh. She, on behalf of the organisers expressed gratitude to the Director-General for making the event a reality. She also thanked the CEO of Public and Private Development Center (PPDC) and her team for being part of the occasion. Also, she thanked the Resource person, Mr. Bonat Tagwai for always being readily available to share his in-depth knowledge of the FOI subject matter with staff of the Agency whenever called upon. She appreciated all the Directors of the Agency in attendance, participants and the Reform, Coordination and Service Improvement Department for their various contributions in ensuring the success of the event.

Paper Presentation:

The Paper presentation was done by Mr. Bonat Tagwai (former NOA Director, Planning, Research and Strategy PRS), in two segments.

The first segment featured the following topics:

- Overview of the FOI Act

- Fundamental Principles of Disclosure
- Obligations of Public Officers/Institutions

After the first segment, a short break was observed to entertain comments and questions from the participants, both physical and virtual (Webinar and WHATSAPP Group). Subsequently, the Resource Person responded to the questions appropriately.

The second segment of the Paper Presentation featured the following topics;

- Proactive Disclosure of Information
- Exceptions to Disclosure of Information
- Application for Information/Right to Information under the FOI Act.

This segment was also rounded off with comments, questions and answers by participants and responses by the Resource Person.

