



ADEBAYO ADELODUN & CO. · 8TH QUARTERLY ROUNDTABLE

Automation of Court Processes

in the Administration of Justice in Nigeria

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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What Delay Actually Feels Like

The litigant does not experience court delay as a constitutional abstraction

The ordinary Nigerian litigant experiences court delay as:

a wasted journey,
a transport fare that should have fed a household,
a witness who has come once too often and may not return,
a business opportunity lost while a file is being searched for,
and an adjournment that slowly turns justice into exhaustion.

Most lawyers in this room know that reality from the inside.



TRANSPORT

that should have fed a household



TIME

a witness who may not return



JUSTICE

slowly turned into exhaustion

Two Lessons from Building Systems in Nigeria

And why they lead to a clear position on court automation

LESSON 1

Technology does not heal institutional weakness by magic

A bad process digitised too quickly simply becomes a faster bad process.

LESSON 2

Honesty about bottlenecks, discipline about redesign

Files stop disappearing. Records become searchable. Dates stop depending on who knows whom.

“

Automation of court processes in Nigeria is no longer optional.

The real questions are narrower and harder:

what exactly should be automated, what must remain resolutely human, what legal and institutional conditions must be in place, and how quickly can Nigeria move **without buying expensive failure?**

Where Nigeria Actually Is Today

Progress is real — but uneven. Both parts of the picture matter.



WHAT EXISTS — AND WORKS

- 1 NICN**
Formal electronic filing rules since 2017
- 2 Lagos Judiciary**
LagosCoMiS — filing, affidavits, case processing
- 3 Rivers State**
RivCoMiS — e-filing & case-tracking platform
- 4 Federal High Court**
E-affidavit client portal
- 5 NJC (national)**
Nigerian Case Management System as a national push



BUT THE WIDER PICTURE IS UNEVEN

In one court,
counsel can initiate parts of a process online.

In another,
the same counsel must print several copies, travel to the registry, queue for assessment, go elsewhere to pay, return for stamping, and come back again because one officer is absent.

*A system like that is not merely slow.
It is brittle.*

A Technologist's Diagnosis

Why adjournment culture proves so stubborn — the workflow defect underneath

Nigerian courts operate a

HIGH-LATENCY, LOW-INTEGRITY *information environment*

HIGH LATENCY

Information moves too slowly — counsel to registry, registry to judge, trial court to appellate record.

LOW INTEGRITY

Record reliability depends on manual handling. Pages misplaced, dates entered wrongly, notices missed — with no dependable audit trail.

AND SO — THE ADMINISTRATIVE ADJOURNMENT

File has not arrived

Proceedings not transcribed

Service not confirmed promptly

Courtroom managed by habit

What Automation Actually Means

Six layers — administrative modernisation, not mechanical adjudication



01

Electronic Filing

Submit processes, motions, affidavits online; electronic acknowledgment; track status.



02

Case Management

The real engine — digital file, audit trail of every action, 'the file is missing' loses power.



03

E-Cause Lists & Notices

Generated live from the system; web and mobile; no more surprises on a notice board.



04

Digital Recording

ACJA already allows electronic recording with daily transcripts. End longhand burden.



05

Virtual Hearings

For mentions, CMCs, uncontested applications, procedural directions — not every trial.



06

Digital Evidence

Secure storage, chain of custody, retrieval of exhibits, audio, video, scanned records.

Why adoption is uneven

Theoretical Grounding

Technology enters institutions through culture, incentives and habit. Not through procurement alone.

01 DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS

Rogers (2003)

Some courts move first. Others wait for proof that the system works in a comparable environment.

Adoption depends on relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability. Nigerian automation passes advantage; compatibility and complexity are harder.

02 INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

DiMaggio & Powell (1983)

Rules, professional norms and peer comparison matter as much as technical efficiency.

Coercive (CJ, NJC, practice direction, statute), normative (professional expectation), mimetic (peer jurisdictions). Change requires all three to point the same way.

03 TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL

Davis (1989)

If the system is not useful and easy enough on a stressful day, people will work around it.

Users adopt when systems are useful and easy to use. The best legal technology is the one a busy person can use accurately on a stressful day.

04 ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Cappelletti & Garth (1978)

Automation is not merely an IT upgrade. It is part of making justice reachable, timely and affordable.

The normative anchor. A right to fair hearing in reasonable time rings hollow if registry friction and file loss make the route to hearing punishingly slow.

Applicable Frameworks

Theories explain behaviour; frameworks structure action

1

UN E-Government Development Index

UN DESA (2024)

Nigeria's 2024 EGD: 0.4815 — rank 144/193. The 'difficult middle': enough capacity to begin seriously, not enough to copy-paste from mature states.

2

McKinsey 7-S (adapted to the judiciary)

Waterman, Peters & Phillips (1980)

Strategy, Structure, Systems, Staff, Skills, Style, Shared Values must align. Most Nigerian projects overinvest in systems and underinvest in the other six.

3

Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation

Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock (2017)

Solve specific local problems in stages. Don't import a glamorous end-state. Begin with the launch ceremony and you will end at the procurement audit.

4

Interoperability & Service Design

Contemporary e-government practice

Court is one node. Police, prosecutors, prisons, banks, process servers matter. A digital court that cannot speak to them just moves the bottleneck.

Nigeria's Digital Government Baseline

Why court automation must begin without a fully digital state beneath it

NIGERIA · UN EGDI 2024

0.4815

E-Government Development Index

RANK

144

out of 193 countries

*Middle e-government
development group*

Source: UN DESA (2024)

WHAT THE NUMBER MEANS FOR COURTS

First — court automation cannot assume a uniformly mature digital public sector beneath it. The rails are not all laid.

Second — Nigeria is no longer at the stage where digital justice can be dismissed as premature. We have enough capacity to begin seriously.

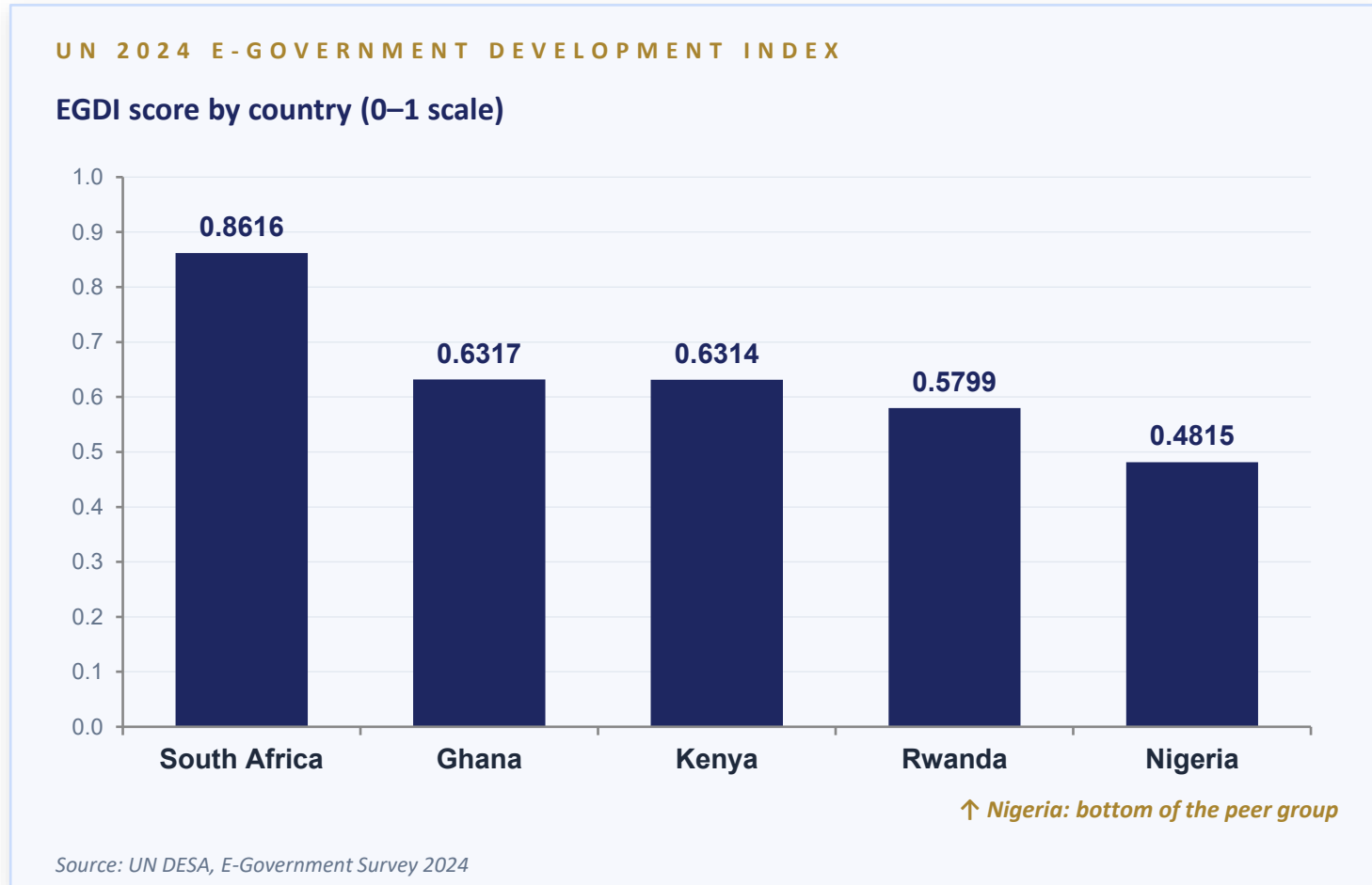
We are in ***the difficult middle***

— enough digital capacity to begin seriously, but not enough to copy-paste from highly digitised states.

Practical consequence: *systems must be designed for Nigerian infrastructure, not ideal infrastructure.*

Nigeria is not at zero — it is in the hard middle

UN 2024 E-Government Development Index — regional context



NIGERIA

0.4815

Rank 144 of 193

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE COURTS

Digital justice can no longer be dismissed as premature.
But Nigeria cannot copy-paste from states with far deeper digital public infrastructure.
Automation must be staged around real power, connectivity and skills constraints.

Prospects — What Automation Makes Possible

Seven practical gains directly experienced by lawyers and litigants



End of missing-file adjournments

Digital files + audit trails — the administrative mystery of file location shrinks dramatically.



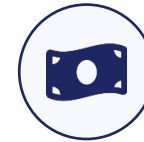
Transparent case scheduling

E-cause lists and automated notifications; fewer wasted appearances; calendars become intelligible.



Faster, more reliable records

Digital recording and transcription change appellate tempo; ACJA already recognises this logic.



Cleaner fee administration

System-calculated fees paid through traceable channels; informal discretion narrows.



Data for judicial administration

Filing-to-first-hearing time, repeated adjournments, bottlenecks — ask questions manual systems can't answer.



Wider geographic access

A practitioner in Ilorin, Lafia or Yenagoa needn't be physically present for every administrative step.



Resilience of records

Paper is vulnerable to fire, flood, misplacement. Digital can be backed up, mirrored, recovered.

What Integrated Thinking Looks Like

Kenya's 2024 rollout — the lesson isn't the platform; it's the design

KENYA DID THREE THINGS TOGETHER

01

Nationwide e-filing

Launched in all courts — the filing front door

02

Causelist portal

Listings visible to litigants and advocates in real time

03

Data-tracking dashboard

Court leadership sees how cases are moving — now, not quarterly

“

A court does not become meaningfully digital by placing

one service online

while leaving the rest of the workflow opaque.

TRANSFERABLE LESSON

The basic functions are now standard and achievable on the continent. Nigeria need not copy Kenya's platform — only its integrated thinking.

The obstacles are blunt

Five hard realities that a naive rollout cannot survive



Infrastructure

Power outages, uneven broadband and fragile hardware support can sink a good system.



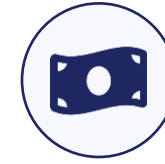
Skills

Judges, registrars and practitioners do not begin from the same digital baseline.



Law & trust

Electronic records, evidence custody and cybersecurity must be credible in law and in practice.



Funding

Projects fail when launch money exists but maintenance money does not.



Resistance

Opacity creates informal power. Some actors benefit from friction and will resist reform.

A naive rollout will not merely underperform. *It will damage confidence and drive people back to paper.*

Nigeria's Own Experience

Progress already in hand — both capability and caveats

Lagos Judiciary

LagosCoMiS

Live digital services around filing and related processes. Also shows digitisation is not a single event. It is an operating discipline requiring iteration and persistent backing.

National Industrial Court

2017 Civil Procedure Rules

Formal electronic-filing rules since 2017. Technology works better when procedure and platform are built to recognise each other.

Rivers State

RivCoMiS + 2019 Practice Directions

Portal combined with explicit procedural guidance.

Federal High Court

E-Affidavit Client Portal

Narrower but important. Shows it is easier to win confidence by digitising one painful service well.

NJC (2020)

COVID-era Virtual Proceedings Guidelines

Proof that resistance previously framed as constitutional impossibility was, in truth, institutional reluctance.

Lessons from African Jurisdictions

Four neighbours, four transferable lessons

ZA SOUTH AFRICA
CaseLines (Gauteng HC, 2020)

Solve a shared pain point

Document management and judicial access. When a platform solves pain felt by both judges and practitioners, adoption has a fighting chance.

KE KENYA
Nationwide e-filing (2024)

Leadership + coherence

Paired filing with a causelist portal and a data dashboard.
Integrated thinking

RW RWANDA
IECMS (integrated)

Reform beyond the court building

Greatest efficiency gains come when police, prosecution, corrections and courts stop acting like separate islands of paperwork.

GH GHANA
E-Justice / Paperless Courts

West-African proof-of-concept

E-filing, online/mobile-money payment, status tracking, SMS & email notifications. Meaningful automation in West Africa no longer belongs to distant exemplars alone.

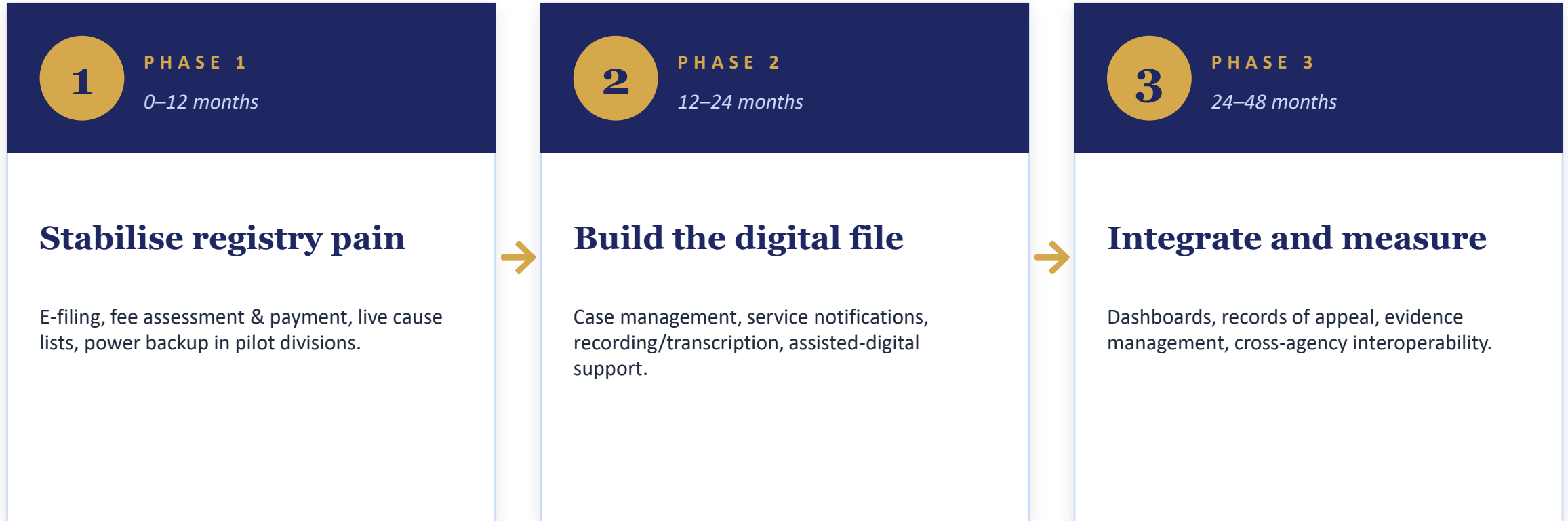
International Exemplars

Four jurisdictions and the best lesson from outside Africa is humility

JURISDICTION	SYSTEM	SCALE / SIGNAL	LESSON FOR NIGERIA
United Kingdom	HMCTS Reform Programme	4.1M+ cases digitised; video in 70%+ courtrooms	<i>Ran longer and more painfully than expected — a warning against fantasy timetables.</i>
Singapore	eLitigation	National architecture: filing + process + support	<i>Align filing, process design and user support inside a coherent national architecture.</i>
Estonia	e-File (inside wider e-governance)	Courts sit inside a national digital public infrastructure	<i>Easier to build digital court trust when there's a wider digital public infrastructure to sit within.</i>
United States	PACER + CM/ECF	Federal-wide e-filing & public records access	<i>Electronic access becomes most useful when it is an institutional norm, not an isolated experiment.</i>

A realistic path for Nigeria

Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation logic — start with pain, pilot, learn from user behaviour, then scale



PDIA logic: *start with pain, pilot in a limited environment, learn from user behaviour, then scale.*

Our (Plat Technologies Ltd) E-Filing System

The screenshot displays the user interface of the State Judiciary E-Filing Management System. At the top, the user is identified as Yusuf, with a last login time of 47 minutes ago. The user's role is confirmed as a LEGAL PRACTITIONER, and there are 9 notifications. The dashboard is titled "State Judiciary E-Filing Management System" and features a sidebar with navigation options: Dashboard, Create (with a "New Filing" button), Filings, Case Status, Case Directory, Payments, Reports, Chamber Registration, and Logout. The main content area includes a user profile for Yusuf Yakub (yusty27@gmail.com) with a "View Profile" button. A central grid of six cards shows the following counts: Pending (12), Claimant Suits (5), Defendant Suits (0), Motions (0), Affidavits (0), and Old Cases (0). Below this grid are two buttons: "New Filings" and "Ongoing Filings". A search bar is located at the bottom of the dashboard.

Category	Count
Pending	12
Claimant Suits	5
Defendant Suits	0
Motions	0
Affidavits	0
Old Cases	0

Who must do what

A strong system needs alignment across law, process, infrastructure, people and incentives



Judiciary

- ✓ Set a national minimum standard
- ✓ Phase execution honestly
- ✓ Own change management



Legislature / rule-makers

- ✓ Align rules & practice directions
- ✓ Modernise evidence law
- ✓ Match software assumptions



The Bar

- ✓ Treat digital competence as professional competence
- ✓ Not as an optional extra



Tech sector

- ✓ Build offline-capable, supportable systems
- ✓ For Nigerian conditions, not ideal conditions

The argument in one line: *a strong system needs alignment across law, process, infrastructure, people and incentives.*

Recommendations

Part 1 of 2 · Recommendations 1–4

01

REC.

Set a national minimum standard; allow phased execution

Actor: *NJC*

National baseline for e-filing, case tracking, notifications, cause lists, record security; with phased rollout based on local readiness.

02

REC.

Align law, rules and software

Actor: *Legislature + Rule-makers + Heads of Court*

Digital procedure is a legal design question, not just an IT procurement question. Engineers should not have to guess what procedure tolerates.

03

REC.

Build for Nigerian infrastructure, not ideal infrastructure

Actor: *Procurers + Designers*

Unstable power; uneven bandwidth; mixed user capability. Offline-friendly architecture is not optional. It is the difference between adoption and abandonment.

04

REC.

Invest seriously in change management

Actor: *Judicial leadership*

Role-specific support, refresher training, responsive help channels. Demonstration sessions are not training. Two-day workshops are not reform.

Recommendations

Part 2 of 2 · Recommendations 5–7

05

REC.

Create assisted-digital pathways

Actor: *Every court deploying digital services*

On-site support for users who lack devices, bandwidth or confidence. Digitisation that quietly excludes weaker users is not access to justice. It is selective convenience.

06

REC.

Fund maintenance as a recurring justice cost

Actor: *Budget authorities*

Annual budgets treat hosting, support, cybersecurity, equipment refresh and user help as ongoing operational needs. The life of a system begins after launch, not before it.

07

REC.

Treat transparency as a design objective

Actor: *The Bar + System designers*

Audit trails, access logs, traceable payments. This will make some actors uncomfortable. It should. Courts exist to administer justice, not to preserve administrative fog.

Automate Well, or Automate Badly

The direction is settled. The question is discipline.

✘ AUTOMATE BADLY (EASY)

- Buy an impressive platform
- Launch it before workflows are ready
- Undertrain the users
- Underfund maintenance
- Ignore power and connectivity
- *Blame “the technology” when it disappoints*

✔ AUTOMATE WELL (HARDER)

- Start from real bottlenecks
- Align rules and systems
- Build for local conditions
- Train seriously; support users
- Budget for maintenance
- *Expand in stages — learn while moving*

A court system runs on authority, trust and record. Automation does not replace those things. It strengthens them when done properly.

“

Automation of court processes in Nigeria is non-negotiable.

The real question is not *whether* — but *how*, and at *what pace*.

Do not automate confusion.

Do not import a fantasy of perfect infrastructure.

Build for Nigerian conditions — then scale with discipline.

T H A N K Y O U

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