

Kluwer Arbitration Blog

Interview with Our Editors: Nigeria and Lagos Chamber of Commerce International Arbitration Centre in the Spotlight with Abimbola Akeredolu SAN

Titilope Sinmi-Adetona (Assistant Editor for Africa) (Aluko & Oyebode) · Friday, December 15th, 2023

Abimbola Akeredolu, SAN is a partner in the Litigation, Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution practice at the Nigerian law firm Banwo & Ighodalo and the Chairman of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce International Arbitration Centre. She has more than 30 years of experience in commercial, intellectual property, tax, insolvency, labour and industrial disputes. Her experience extends to international and domestic commercial arbitrations, building and construction industry arbitrations, and arbitrations in the oil and gas industry. She is a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, a Notary Public for Nigeria and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (UK) and the Institute of Construction Industry Arbitrators. She was also the Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice in Ogun State Nigeria between 2013 and 2015.

Welcome to the Kluwer Arbitration Blog, Mrs. Akeredolu! We are grateful for this opportunity to introduce our readers to the Lagos Chamber of Commerce International Arbitration Centre (LACIAC), an independent full-service alternative dispute resolution centre and a part of the “Arbitration in Lagos Project” which aims to ensure that arbitrations conducted in Lagos are efficient, expeditious and equitable. This interview is particularly timely in light of the implementation of Nigeria’s long-awaited 2023 Arbitration and Mediation Act, which replaces Nigeria’s 35-year-old Arbitration and Conciliation Act 1988.

1. *Please give our readers a concise introduction about yourself and the path that led you to assume the role of Chairman of LACIAC?*



I am a lawyer admitted to practice law in Nigeria, and I joined Banwo and Ighodalo as Partner 16 years ago. In 2018, I joined the Board of Directors of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce International Arbitration Centre (LACIAC) and in December 2020, I was appointed as Chairman of the LACIAC Board of Directors. My role as Director and Chairman includes supervising the day-to-day operations of the Centre, organising and planning events, projects, and initiatives hosted by LACIAC, and overseeing the operations of the Board.

2. Could you tell us about the kind of parties LACIAC would usually see in arbitrations?

The disputes that come to LACIAC are not focused on any specific sector. The Centre has administered disputes relating to diverse sectors including construction, maritime, oil and gas, manufacturing, technology, and financial services. The LACIAC Board of Directors, through its technical committees, strives to build capacity in different sectors including energy, construction, finance and technology, international trade, telecoms, media and entertainment, MSMEs, among others. The aim is therefore to ensure that LACIAC has the ability to cater to unique disputes and disputes within diverse sectors.

3. The LACIAC was established in 2016 and during this time there have been significant developments in Nigeria in relation to arbitration. What role has LACIAC played in supporting the development of Nigerian arbitration law and in ensuring that local lawyers develop arbitration-related skills and expertise?

Aside from the volunteer initiative, one major way that LACIAC has promoted the development of arbitration-related skills and expertise is through LACIAC's flagship events and training programmes. These include the regional training workshop on [Dispute Management in Africa Infrastructure Projects \(DiMAP\)](#) which focuses on dispute management and resolution, claims management, etc. in infrastructure projects. The Centre has had four editions since 2019, with the fourth being a hybrid event with physical participation in Accra, Ghana. The [LACIAC Live Debates \(LLD\)](#) series is also one of LACIAC's initiatives. The LLD focuses on developing and emerging trends/issues within the international arbitration community and provides a platform for arbitrators and arbitration practitioners to reason and discuss these issues.

Beyond its initiatives, LACIAC also endeavours to promote and support events aimed at capacity building for local practitioners. For instance, LACIAC was one of the four arbitral centres that collaborated with the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in cooperation with the African Legal Support Facility to organise [a counsel in arbitration skills-based training](#) in 2022.

4. *We understand that LACIAC has recently entered into cooperation agreements with the Mauritius International Arbitration Centre (MIAC) and the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) to collaborate on facilitating arbitration hearings, the exchange of information and holding of other events and conferences. Can you tell our readers briefly about these agreements and the driving factor behind the alliances?*

In 2021, LACIAC commenced a dialogue with African arbitral centres, which was referred to as African Arbitral Centres' Collaboration Roundtable Discussions (ACCORD). Given the potential disputes that may arise from the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) and the recognition of arbitration as one of AfCFTA's dispute resolution agreements, there is an attraction in establishing a unified institutional framework for arbitration. The objectives of ACCORD were to explore the value proposition and various models for operational collaboration and agree on a strategic plan. This dialogue resulted in a proposal which recognises that dispute resolution proceedings administered under the auspices of LACIAC may be held in other locations where other African arbitral centres are based, and vice versa. The cooperation agreement therefore proposes that in such situations, the parties will assist each other in the organization of hearings. The cooperation agreement also gives room for the parties to engage with each other in capacity building, knowledge exchange, and trainings; to engage in joint business development efforts; and to consult on the availability of dispute resolution experts as may be required.

5. *Can you tell us a little bit about the Adjudication Rules which LACIAC introduced on 9 December 2020? What was the motivation behind adopting the Rules and how do they improve upon the previously existing options?*

The LACIAC Adjudication Rules were established to provide a quick, fair and transparent process for the interim resolution of disputes in projects of significant duration such as construction contracts. The Adjudication Rules were a vital part of the Centre's 2021 "ROAD" Map. The acronym "ROAD" stands for Rules, Online Dispute Resolution, Africa Vision and Diversity. In 2020, while reviewing its suite of rules, LACIAC's intention was to cater to unique disputes and as such it expanded its suite of rules to include Adjudication Rules, Expert Determination Rules, a dispute resolution for MSMEs (the Integrated Dispute Resolution Scheme) and a protocol for virtual proceedings. Prior to this, the suite of rules only included the Arbitration Rules and Mediation Rules. The main advantage of the Adjudication Rules is that parties have a structured procedure for the resolution of their dispute through adjudication and are able to have their resolution process administered under the auspices of LACIAC. The Rules include provisions on the referral process, duties and powers of the adjudicator, conduct of the adjudication, consolidation and joinder among other things.

6. *Are there any other services that LACIAC provides that you would like to highlight?*

Aside from the dispute resolution services provided and administered by the Centre identified above, LACIAC also provides registrar services for ad hoc arbitrations. This gives parties the option of having their arbitration process managed by the Centre even when their arbitration agreement does not provide for arbitration under LACIAC Rules.

7. We understand that some of the LACIAC Secretariat staff operate on a voluntary basis. Could you tell us more about the LACIAC organizational structure and this volunteer initiative for Secretariat staff?

LACIAC has, over the years, had different practitioners and aspiring practitioners take interest in its organization, operations, and initiatives. To provide a platform where individuals, particularly young and aspiring arbitration practitioners, are able to benefit through direct learning and hands-on experience, the volunteer initiative was established under the regime of the previous chairman. The volunteers are given the opportunity to coordinate and / or contribute to the coordination of initiatives, such as the LACIAC Live Debates, and the Centre's newsletter events and seminars. By immersing themselves in LACIAC's operations and initiatives, the volunteers have the opportunity to network and gain informal knowledge and experience from senior members of staff in the Centre and from members on the Board of Directors. The volunteers also gain first-hand knowledge of certain principles and practices, applicable in arbitration and other alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

On the other hand, LACIAC is able to capitalise on broader perspective and a larger staff base in implementing its objectives. As the volunteer initiative is also open to practitioners beyond the borders of Nigeria, the Centre is also able to benefit from practitioners within the African continent. The volunteer initiative also gives LACIAC the advantage of retaining talent and maintaining relationships with practitioners that may have passed through the Centre.

8. As mentioned, Nigeria has recently seen the implementation of its long-awaited 2023 Arbitration and Mediation Act, which includes some notable features, such as the Award Review Tribunal, legitimation of third-party funding and the Arbitration Proceedings Rules 2020. Looking toward the future, how is LACIAC aligning its practices with the new law to further promote arbitration in Nigeria?

LACIAC is proactively aligning its practices with the new 2023 Arbitration and Mediation Act in Nigeria to further promote arbitration in the country. One major step that was taken upon the implementation of the new Act is the organisation of a webinar highlighting the objectives of the new provisions in the Act and their effect for the education and capacity building of arbitration professionals. Additionally, we currently considering proposals for a review of the current arbitration rules as well as the establishment of new rules relating to the Award Review Tribunal under the 2023 Act.

9. What is your perspective on the continental focus in relation to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and African arbitration right now, and what role do you see Nigeria playing in this, given its significant experience and developed legislation?

I believe the focus on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and African arbitration is an incredibly exciting and pivotal development for our continent. There is growing emphasis on African arbitration as a means of ensuring the smooth resolution of trade and commercial disputes within the AfCFTA framework. Nigeria, being one of the largest economies in Africa and

possessing well-developed arbitration legislation and extensive experience, is uniquely positioned to play a significant role in this context by contributing to the economic integration and promotion of African arbitration.

10. *You have been the Chair of LACIAC for the past three years while simultaneously continuing your role as an active partner in a prestigious practice in Nigeria. What are some of the challenges and lessons learned, and what are your top three tips for emerging African arbitration practitioners?*

Balancing being Chairman at LACIAC and a Partner at Banwo & Ighodalo has certainly been challenging particularly in the area of time management. It has, however, been incredibly rewarding. One thing I have learnt is to employ the help of those around me, practise delegation of tasks, and mentor younger ones around me.

My top three tips for emerging African arbitration practitioners would be:

- Continuous learning: Stay updated on the latest developments in international arbitration. Attend seminars, webinars, and seek mentorship from experienced practitioners.
- Networking: Build a strong network within the arbitration community. Attend conferences, join arbitration associations, and connect with professionals in the field.
- Persistence: Don't be discouraged by initial challenges. Arbitration is complex, and persistence is key. Keep honing your skills, and success will follow.

Thank you very much for your valuable insights, Mrs. Akeredolu. I am sure our readers will have appreciated your input!

This interview is part of Kluwer Arbitration Blog's "Interviews with Our Editors" series. Past interviews are available [here](#).

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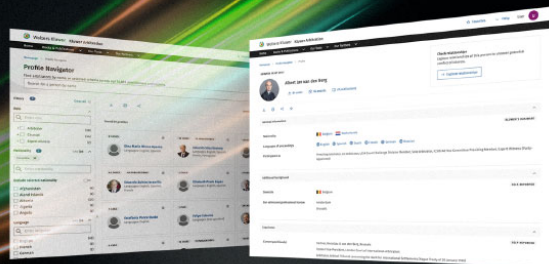
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