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AN APPRAISAL OF LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICES IN THE PROSECUTION OF CHILD OFFENDERS IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study provides a critical appraisal of the legal framework and institutional practices guiding the prosecution of child offenders in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Despite the domestication of the Child Rights Act (CRA) in Nasarawa State since 2005, the practical implementation of its core provisions especially those relating to juvenile justice remained largely dormant until 2023. This research investigates the reasons behind this prolonged lag, the impact on child offenders, and the emerging prospects following the recent establishment of Family Courts in the state. Employing doctrinal legal research and analysis of primary statutes including the CRA 2003 and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015, the study evaluates the extent to which the current prosecutorial mechanisms conform to international and domestic child justice standards. Findings reveal that prior to 2023, most child offenders in Nasarawa were prosecuted in adult courts, without due regard for child-specific protections such as confidentiality, child-friendly procedures, and non-custodial sentencing options. The study notes that although the CRA emphasizes rehabilitation over punishment, implementation gaps including lack of infrastructure, insufficient training for judicial officers, and poor awareness among law enforcement have hampered its effectiveness. The establishment of Family Courts in 2023 marks a significant milestone, offering specialized judicial processes for juveniles. However, challenges persist, including underfunding, absence of remand homes, and inadequate diversion programs. The study recommends increased budgetary allocations for juvenile justice

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infrastructure, continuous training for stakeholders, full operationalization of Family Courts across all judicial divisions in Nasarawa, and collaboration with civil society organizations for community-based reintegration programs. By bridging the gap between law and practice, Nasarawa State has the potential to serve as a model for effective child justice administration in Nigeria. The paper concludes that while legislative frameworks are largely adequate, the success of juvenile justice in Nasarawa hinges on sustained political will, institutional commitment, and a shift from retributive to restorative justice paradigms.

Introduction

Children who come into conflict with the law, often referred to as juvenile or child offenders, occupy a fragile legal and social position. Globally, juvenile justice systems are built on principles of rehabilitation, protection, and restoration rather than punishment (Adetona, 2024). In Nigeria, the Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003, domesticated by many states, and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015 lay the foundation for such an approach. However, challenges persist in translating high-level legal frameworks into meaningful practice, particularly in states such as Nasarawa where implementation delays have been profound.

At the heart of the federal legal regime, the CRA enshrines children's rights in alignment with international standards such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), establishing special procedural protections, prohibition of capital punishment, confidentiality, and the mandate for child-specific courts (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025). Complementarily, the ACJA 2015 reinforces these protections by requiring that criminal processes involving children reflect CRA values, including privacy and non-custodial alternatives (Umar, 2024). Yet the mere existence of statutes does not guarantee their effective implementation.

Across Nigeria, empirical studies have identified persistent systemic deficiencies in juvenile justice: overcrowded and shared juvenile/adult detention facilities, lack of diversion options, minimal legal representation for minors, and absence of rehabilitative opportunities (Atílọ́lá, *et al.,* 2017; Umar, 2024). These conditions illustrate that despite a credible statutory architecture, the juvenile justice system often operates as a punitive and dehumanizing institution rather than a rehabilitative one (Atílọ́lá *et al.,* 2017 as cited in Umar, 2024; Adetona, 2024; AWJAI, 2024).

Within this national backdrop, Nasarawa State represents a particularly instructive case. Although the state domesticated the CRA in 2005, it did not operationalize the necessary institutional mechanisms such as family courts or juvenile sentencing protocols until March 2023 (Ajobe, 2023; All Africa, 2023). This 17-year implementation gap left

innumerable child defendants prosecuted in conventional adult courts without CRA-mandated safeguards.

The formal establishment of a functioning Family Court in Lafia in March 2023, pursuant to the Rule and Practice Direction 2023, marked a pivotal policy shift (Ajobe, 2023; Leadership/All Africa, 2023). Nasarawa thereby became the first state to fully operationalize CRA-compliant court processes. That court is designed to hear matters involving children, women, and family welfare, theoretically enabling adherence to CRA principles of best interests, confidentiality, and diversion (Ajobe, 2023).

Yet even with legislative compliance, practical application remains an unfinished agenda. Reports suggest that Nasarawa still confronts serious challenges: limited budgetary support; insufficient judicial and prosecutorial training; lack of juvenile remand homes; and slow rollout of diversion mechanisms and community reintegration programs (AWJAI, 2024; Umar, 2024). In essence, while the legal framework now exists in form, the substance of child-centered justice remains elusive.

Given these dynamics, this research addresses several interrelated questions;

1. To what extent do statutory instruments such as the CRA and ACJA provide an adequate and coherent framework for child justice administration in Nasarawa?
2. How effective has the March 2023 Family Court been in implementing juvenile-friendly procedures and protections?
3. What institutional, logistical, and capacity factors inhibit the translation of CRA principles into practice in Nasarawa?
4. What reforms are necessary to ensure that the prosecution of child offenders reflects rehabilitative, non-punitive values consistent with international standards?

Methodologically, the study adopts a doctrinal approach that analyses statute, case law, and policy documents, supplemented by secondary data from legal reports and NGO advocacy findings. Drawing upon Nigeria-wide analyses such as Umar (2024) and Adetona (2024) it situates Nasarawa's developments within broader national and comparative frameworks.

This introduction establishes that while Nigeria possesses a robust normative child-justice architecture, the lived reality for child offenders in many states including Nasarawa is characterized by delay, under-resourcing, and reactive reform. With Nasarawa's 2023 operationalization of family courts, the state now enters a critical transitional phase. It holds the promise of aligning prosecutorial practices with rehabilitative ideals but only if systemic gaps such as funding shortages, infrastructural deficits, and capacity constraints are addressed (AWJAI, 2024; Umar, 2024).

Legal Framework Governing Child Justice in Nigeria

Nigeria's child justice framework is primarily composed of federal statutes most notably the Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003 and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015 supplemented by institutional structures and implementation mechanisms required by those laws. However, between 2020 and 2025, multiple expert assessments emphasize that significant gaps persist between legislative intent and practical enforcement.

The Child Rights Act 2003: Foundations & Obligations

The CRA, enacted at the federal level in 2003, seeks to domesticate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), establishing a comprehensive rights-based framework for children in Nigeria. It defines a child as any person under 18 years and guarantees rights to survival, development, education, protection, and participation (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025).

The Act establishes provisions central to juvenile justice;

1. Prohibition of the death penalty or sentence of life imprisonment for juvenile offenders;
2. Requirement for separate facilities and courts for minors;
3. Confidentiality of records and child-friendly procedural protections;
4. Preference for non-custodial and diversionary measures, including counseling, probation, community service, restorative justice, and rehabilitation over imprisonment.

Critically, the CRA mandates the establishment of National, State, and Local Government Child Rights Implementation Committees, to monitor and coordinate child rights implementation across jurisdictions. Section 204 of the CRA specifically mandates the establishment of child-friendly courts or family courts to handle juvenile cases, ensuring transparency, sensitivity, and expedited processes.

However, statutory effective operation hinges on state domestication. As of 2023, only Bauchi State remained among 36 states yet to adopt the CRA (though some reports vary on which state). Despite near-universal domestication by 2022 (with most states having passed their CRA equivalent), implementation has been broadly assessed as poor, with experts noting inadequate structures, under-resourced agencies, and weak enforcement mechanisms across states.

Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015: Reinforcing Protections

The ACJA 2015, enacted to reform Nigeria's criminal justice procedures, explicitly reinforces CRA principles in criminal adjudication involving minors. It requires that

children under 18 be tried in separate courts, be given priority in hearing schedules, and be afforded legal representation, privacy, and protection from torture or coercive media exposure.

Notable provisions of the ACJA include;

i. Sections 8 & 15: Require humane treatment, prohibition of torture, timely record-keeping, informed arrest procedures, and the suspect's rights to communication and bail;
ii. Section 18: Police may arrest without warrant under reasonable suspicion, but must comply with child-friendly rules of the ACJA when minors are involved.

ACJA reinforces diversion and non-custodial sentencing for juveniles and extends CRA's principles into procedural law, but again effectiveness is tied to operational capacity and institutional will.

Implementation Structures & Obstacles (2020–2025)
Implementation Committees and Oversight Bodies

The statutory implementation architecture under the CRA calls for multi-tiered oversight. The National Child Rights Implementation Committee (NCRIC) coordinates federal directives and supports states in launching enforcement mechanisms (Chaman Law Firm, 2024). However, many state and local committees remain ineffective underfunded, understaffed, or inactive leading to uneven realisation of CRA's mandates.

In 2023–2025, NCRIC itself recommended a review of the CRA, noting that some provisions passed two decades ago now require updating to align with modern societal realities. This reinforcement highlights recognition at the federal level that while statutes remain strong on paper, they must evolve to be functional.

Family Courts: Institutional Bottlenecks

Although Section 204 mandates family or children's courts, very few states have established fully functional ones as of mid-2025. In places like Calabar (Cross River State), family courts sit only once weekly, lack basic child-friendly facilities, and cases drag on sometimes for three to five years undermining CRA goals of timely and humane justice.

UNICEF's advocacy from 2023 urges state governments to establish courts that are not merely nominal but equipped with trained staff, colorful and welcoming environments, and procedural guidance for juvenile cases. Yet advocacy frequently outpaces actual rollout.

Funding, Awareness, and Cultural Constraints

Multiple assessments between 2020 and 2025 emphasize weak political will and funding shortfalls. UNICEF and civil society experts have repeatedly urged states (e.g., Kano, Cross

River) to commit budgetary resources and staffing to child justice initiatives, including raising awareness among stakeholders, building infrastructure, and sensitizing law enforcement.

Cultural and religious norms remain further obstacles. Some communities still favor traditional resolutions and may resist CRA provisions particularly around age of consent, property rights, or family authority undermining legal consistency and enforcement.

Persisting Systemic Failures

By 2023, child-rights experts still rated Nigeria's overall CRA implementation as "near zero" demonstrating the depth of systemic inaction despite high rates of domestication.

Key failures include;

1. Juvenile facilities largely non-existent or improvised, with minors held alongside adults;
2. Almost no diversion programs, probation facilities, or counselling services;
3. Very few minors receive legal representation, and judicial officers lack CRA-specific training;
4. Cases involving juveniles are processed slowly in adult courts, contrary to CRA mandates.

International and Comparative Dimensions

Nigeria's frameworks are aligned in theory with international standards UNCRC General Comment 10 (2007) stresses rehabilitation, minimum age of criminal responsibility, and the necessity for procedural protections (even though Nigeria still allows 12 years as threshold). The CRA echoes these values, but implementation lags lead experts to call for reassessment and potential alignment with more progressive policies or regional best practices.

With the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child providing oversight on compliance with the ACRWC, Nigeria must improve domestic enforcement to avoid international criticism and ensure that child offenders are treated within rehabilitative and human-rights grounded systems.

Institutional Practices in Nasarawa State in the Prosecution of Child Offenders

The institutional response to juvenile justice in Nasarawa State has undergone notable development in recent years, especially following the operationalization of the Child Rights Act (CRA) through the establishment of the Family Court in 2023. Prior to this advancement, child offenders in the state were routinely subjected to adult judicial processes, which ran contrary to the rehabilitative intentions of the CRA and the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which Nigeria is a signatory (AWJAI, 2024).

For over a decade following the domestication of the CRA in Nasarawa State in 2005, there was minimal enforcement of its provisions. Institutions such as the judiciary, police, correctional services, and child welfare agencies lacked dedicated frameworks to accommodate the specific needs and protections of child offenders (Ajobe, 2023). Consequently, many children accused of crimes were arraigned in regular magistrate or high courts, often without legal representation or parental guidance, in direct contravention of Sections 204 and 221 of the CRA, which mandate the establishment of Family Courts and child-friendly procedures (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025).

A major institutional milestone was achieved in March 2023, when Nasarawa State formally established a Family Court in Lafia, the state capital. This court was created in line with the provisions of the CRA and the Rule and Practice Direction for the Nasarawa State Family Court (2023), becoming the first of its kind in the state and representing a pivotal institutional response to juvenile justice (Ajobe, 2023). The Family Court is intended to ensure privacy during trials, allow diversionary procedures, prioritize non-custodial sentencing, and ensure access to legal counsel for the child, among other procedural safeguards (Umar, 2024).

Despite this progress, the effective functioning of the Family Court and other juvenile justice institutions in Nasarawa is hampered by several structural challenges. According to Umar (2024), many judicial officers and legal practitioners still lack training in child-sensitive procedures. This gap often results in procedural errors or inappropriate sentencing practices, particularly when judges revert to adult criminal procedures due to lack of institutional clarity or urgency of caseloads.

Furthermore, infrastructure remains a critical obstacle. Nasarawa State currently lacks purpose-built juvenile remand homes and correctional facilities. Consequently, many child offenders are held in adult custodial environments, raising concerns about exposure to violence, abuse, and further criminalization (AWJAI, 2024). The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has consistently highlighted the dangers of detaining children with adults, emphasizing the need for investment in age-appropriate correctional services (NHRC, 2023).

In terms of law enforcement, the police in Nasarawa often struggle to identify and appropriately handle child offenders due to limited training on juvenile rights and procedures. Although Section 207 of the CRA calls for the establishment of specialized child protection units within police departments, these are not yet fully functional in Nasarawa (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025). Arrests are often made without consideration of the child's age, and detention beyond the constitutional time frame is common (Umar, 2024).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an essential complementary role in bridging these institutional gaps. The Asabe Waziri Justice Advocacy Initiative (AWJAI) has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of juvenile offenders, providing legal aid, and pushing for reforms in Nasarawa's family justice system (AWJAI, 2024). These efforts have led to increased awareness among legal practitioners and policymakers, although widespread institutional reform is still pending.

Furthermore, prosecutorial discretion in Nasarawa remains inconsistent. While the CRA encourages diversion of child offenders to welfare programs rather than court processes, this principle is often underutilized. Diversion programs such as community service, counseling, and vocational training are rare due to inadequate funding and lack of inter-agency coordination (Adetona, 2024). The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which should spearhead rehabilitation and reintegration services, is underfunded and institutionally weak, making it difficult to support the judiciary in implementing non-custodial alternatives.

Institutional collaboration is also suboptimal. While the CRA envisions a multi-sectoral approach involving the judiciary, police, correctional officers, social workers, and educators, inter-agency cooperation in Nasarawa is limited. Data sharing, case tracking, and holistic child assessments are rarely conducted in a coordinated manner (Umar, 2024). This disjointedness undermines the state's ability to ensure continuity of care and follow-up in the management of child offenders.

Critique of the System

While Nasarawa State achieved a crucial legal milestone by establishing a Family Court in March 2023, systemic shortcomings persist that significantly undermine the effectiveness of child-justice administration. An overarching concern is the long implementation delay: despite CRA domestication in 2005, the lack of institutional infrastructure for almost 18 years undermined statutory intent, exposing child offenders to adult procedures devoid of child-centred protections (Abogonye, 2022; Ajobe, 2023).

Delay and Legal Vacuum

This protracted delay created a de facto vacuum in enforcement. For nearly two decades, children were routinely brought before magistrates or high courts in non-child-friendly settings, often without counsel, parental presence, or adherence to CRA-obligated confidentiality or diversion principles (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025). By the time Nasarawa activated the Family Court in 2023, countless child defendants had experienced system flaws that perpetuated punitive over rehabilitative outcomes.

Detention and Facility Deficits

Even post-2023, juvenile detention infrastructure remains critically absent. Nasarawa lacks purpose-built juvenile remand homes, meaning child offenders often remain in adult custody pending trial, facing overcrowded, unsanitary conditions contradicting CRA

mandates for child-specific holding facilities (AWJAI, 2024; United Nations International Children Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2025). National data reveal that over 90 percent of detained children were held in adult centres, often for minor offences, with only 26 percent convicted systemic injustice shaped by procedural delays and insufficient rehabilitation options (UNICEF, 2025).

Underutilization of Diversion and Rehabilitation

CRA emphasises non-custodial alternatives such as counseling, probation, community service, and restorative justice (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025). Yet, in Nasarawa as in most Nigerian States diversion remains rare. There is little coordinated inter-agency effort to operationalize these alternatives. NGOs like AWJAI highlight that, absent structured programs and funding, most child offenders are funneled through formal prosecution rather than community-based rehabilitation (AWJAI, 2024; Umar, 2024).

Training and Capacity Shortfalls

Judicial officers, police, prosecutors, and social welfare staff in Nasarawa frequently lack targeted training on CRA provisions or child-friendly jurisprudential procedures. Umar (2024) indicates procedural missteps continue when judges default to adult-criminal models amid caseload pressure or ignorance of child safeguards (Umar, 2024). Police units are ill-prepared Section 207 requires child protection units, but these remain dormant in practice (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025). Consequently, the age of offenders is often misread or ignored at arrest, prolonging detention and compounding adversity (Umar, 2024).

Oversight and Accountability Gaps

The CRA's oversight architecture including State-level Implementation Committees and national bodies like NCRIC has failed to enforce meaningful compliance in Nasarawa. Governance observers note committees are frequently understaffed and underfunded, without real enforcement power to monitor court procedures, remand practices, or diversion case outcomes (Abogonye, 2022; National Agency for the Control of Women, Youths and Children Affairs [NACWYCA], 2025). In February 2025, NACWYCA convened stakeholders to urge collaborative action, noting that family courts remain under-resourced and juvenile homes unrealized (NACWYCA, 2025).

Harsh Conditions and Mental Health Risks

Though not unique to Nasarawa, the broader Nigerian juvenile detention context underscores abuse likely mirrored within the state. United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (2025) found that many children suffered physical and psychological abuse in facilities: beatings (83%), torture complaints (over 50%), neglected health care,

and severe overcrowding (UNICEF, 2025). Atilola *et al.,* (2022) documented high rates of mental and behavioral disorders among incarcerated youth stemming from trauma and absence of counselling or rehabilitation (Atilola *et al.,* 2017 as reported in Umar, 2024). Given Nasarawa's lack of child-specific facilities, it is plausible that similar conditions afflict detained children there.

Marginalised Services and Poor Public Awareness

Public awareness remains low. Sensitisation campaigns about juvenile rights and procedural norms are limited; many families and communities are unaware of CRA provisions. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development has not effectively performed its mandate of providing reintegration services, partly because of funding constraints and weak institutional frameworks (Umar, 2024; NACWYCA, 2025). As a result, most children processed through criminal procedures are not redirected towards social support interventions or reintegration into education or vocational training.

Overall Institutional Dysfunction

Taken together, Nasarawa's child-justice institutions display a pattern of dysfunction: statutes exist, but enforcement falters; courts are established, but facilities and procedures lag; and oversight is mandated, but committees are weak. The result is a justice system that nominally aligns with CRA ideals, yet structurally perpetuates punitive, inefficient, and rights-violative processes.

Recommendations

In light of Nasarawa State's recent institutional reforms particularly the establishment of the Family Court in March 2023 but persistent operational challenges, substantive interventions are needed to align prosecution of child offenders with both statutory obligations and rehabilitative ideals.

Expand and Strengthen Diversion Programs

The Child Rights Act (CRA) mandates non-custodial alternatives such as community service, probation, restorative justice, and counselling (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025). However, in Nasarawa such programs remain rare due to limited resources and agency coordination. Non-governmental organizations (e.g., Asabe Waziri Justice Advocacy Initiative [AWJAI], Hope Behind Bars Africa) have highlighted the urgent need to develop and finance diversion initiatives for minors (AWJAI, 2024; Hope Behind Bars Africa, 2023). Establishing structured diversion protocols ideally administered by the Ministry of Women Affairs, Social Welfare, and NGOs could reduce reliance on formal prosecution and prevent criminalization of youth for minor offenses.

Infrastructure Development: Juvenile Facilities and Safe Spaces

Despite the Family Court operational since 2023, Nasarawa lacks dedicated juvenile remand homes or youth rehabilitation centres. Without such infrastructure, child offenders are intermittently held in adult facilities, heightening risk of abuse and stigmatization (AWJAI, 2024; Wilson Diriwari, 2023). The state should prioritize construction, or repurposing, of age-appropriate detention facilities that integrate education, psychological care, and vocational training. These facilities must be integrated with the diversion system to support reintegration and reduce recidivism.

Capacity-Building and Training for Stakeholders

Judicial officers, police, prosecutorial staff, and social workers in Nasarawa frequently lack training in child-appropriate legal procedures and CRA mandates. Umar (2024) notes frequent procedural departures when judges revert to adult-style processing under pressure. Training workshops, continuing professional education, and curriculum inclusion of juvenile justice principles should be mandated. Partnerships with legal aid organizations and institutions like Hope Behind Bars Africa and AWJAI can support these initiatives with practical guidelines and mentorship programs.

Institutional Coordination and Oversight Mechanisms

CRA provisions require establishment of State and Local Implementation Committees to oversee enforcement (Child Rights Act in Nigeria, 2025). Yet these bodies in Nasarawa remain underfunded and inactive. Strengthening these committees by ensuring regular meetings, adequate budgets, and clear mandates is critical. They should monitor key metrics: court backlog, detention periods, diversion uptake, and recidivism. Civil society input, via NACWYCA or AWJAI representatives, would bolster accountability (Ajobe, 2023; Law & Society Magazine, 2025).

Public Awareness and Stakeholder Sensitization

Low community awareness about children's legal rights and juvenile justice procedures persists in Nasarawa (AWJAI, 2024). Effective implementation demands sensitization campaigns targeting parents, community leaders, schools, and police officers. Messaging should emphasize the CRA's best-interest-of-the-child principle, the benefits of rehabilitation over incarceration, and available diversion options. State Ministries should collaborate with media houses and NGOs to launch public education drives.

Budgetary Commitment and Financial Sustainability

Institutional reforms must be matched by fiscal commitment. Family Court operations, juvenile facilities, training programs, and diversion services require dedicated line items in

the Nasarawa state budget. Experience from Lagos and other states shows that courts often fail to function consistently without committed funding for assessors, social welfare officers, and private support services (Punch NG, 2025; Law & Society Magazine, 2025). Nasarawa should model its budget allocations accordingly and explore public-private partnerships for resource mobilization.

Engagement with Civil Society & International Partners

Successful juvenile justice reforms in Nigeria have often involved collaboration between overnment, civil society, and international agencies. Organizations like Hope Behind Bars Africa and AWJAI have provided pro bono legal aid and policy advocacy (Hope Behind Bars Africa, 2023; AWJAI, 2024). Engaging these actors can help pilot juvenile programmes, monitor court practices, and assist in training. Partnerships with UNICEF or international funders may provide technical and infrastructural support.

Conclusion

Nasarawa State's creation of a functioning Family Court in March 2023 marked a landmark shift in Nigerian juvenile justice, making it the first state to operationalize CRA-compliant court proceedings since domestication in 2005 (Ajobe, 2023; Law & Society Magazine, 2025). However, legal reform remains only a first step systemic transformation requires strong institutions, sustained funding, and a child-focused ethos in practice.

Our analysis reveals that, despite statutory alignment with the CRA and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015, Nasarawa's prosecutorial system continues to exhibit critical gaps: detention in adult facilities, lack of trained personnel, minimal diversion programming, and weak oversight mechanisms. These issues undermine the rehabilitative mandate of Nigeria's child justice framework (AWJAI, 2024; Wilson Diriwari, 2023).

Children in Nasarawa risk prolonged remand, exposure to adult detention, and criminal records that hinder their social reintegration a clear departure from both CRA ideals and international norms. Reports of juvenile abuse, overcrowding, and mental health risks provide cautionary evidence that legislative existence cannot substitute for effective implementation (AWJAI, 2024; Wilson Diriwari, 2023).

Notwithstanding these challenges, the recent institutional activation suggests Nasarawa is at a critical juncture. If the state commits to expanding diversion services, constructing juvenile-appropriate facilities, training justice sector stakeholders, and implementing robust oversight, it can pivot from symbolic compliance to substantive justice for child offenders.

Ultimately, the success of child-justice reform in Nasarawa depends on sustained political will, inter-agency collaboration, and community engagement. The state has the potential

to embody Nigeria's statutory aspirations in practice but only by bridging the gap between legislative promise and lived experience. With the right infrastructure, funding, and focus on rehabilitation, Nasarawa could serve as a national model for transforming the prosecution of child offenders in accordance with human rights norms and restorative justice principles.

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