



CURRICULUM VALIDATION AND CROSS-SECTORAL MEETING REPORT

Bridge to Justice Project | Lagos, Nigeria | 20th-21st April 2026

INTRODUCTION

Justice Bridge Foundation convened a two-day Curriculum Validation and Cross-Sectoral Meeting under the Bridge to Justice Project in Lagos, Nigeria. The meeting brought together lawyers, community representatives, project partners and regional actors from Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Sierra Leone to review the Movement Lawyering Curriculum and assess it against the lived realities of affected communities across the four countries.

The meeting was designed as a working session. It created space for participants to examine the legal, institutional and community realities affecting key populations, people living with HIV and other criminalised or marginalised groups, while also reviewing whether the curriculum provides a useful basis for training lawyers who will support rights-affirming legal work. By bringing lawyers and community actors into the same room, the process ensured that the curriculum was reviewed from both technical legal and lived-experience perspectives.

A central premise of the meeting was that access to justice is shaped by more than formal law. Across the four countries, participants highlighted how enforcement patterns, institutional behaviour, stigma, fear of exposure and delays in justice delivery influence help-seeking, the ability of lawyers to intervene, and the effectiveness of legal remedies. The discussion emphasised that the curriculum must reflect these operational realities.

The meeting integrated two linked processes: legal and institutional landscape mapping, and structured curriculum validation. Day One focused on mapping how law operates in practice. Day Two focused on reviewing the curriculum, applying it to case scenarios and identifying areas for refinement before the training phase. This report provides participants with a concise but substantive record of the main discussions, insights, outcomes and next steps.



OBJECTIVES

- Present and review the Movement Lawyering Curriculum developed under the Bridge to Justice Project.
- Examine the curriculum in relation to country-specific legal and institutional realities.
- Conduct legal and institutional landscape mapping across Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Sierra Leone.
- Strengthen cross-country exchange among lawyers and community representatives.
- Generate practical insights to inform training design and implementation.



EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- A Movement Lawyering Curriculum that reflects the legal and institutional realities across the four countries.
- Clearer documentation of legal and institutional realities across the four countries.
- Consolidated participant insights on the structure, content and sequencing of the curriculum.
- A shared understanding of movement lawyering, strategic litigation and community-linked legal support
- Practical direction for the next phase of the project, including lawyer training, country-level adaptation, community embedding and future collaboration.

OVERVIEW OF THE TWO-DAY PROCESS

The meeting followed a two-day structure that moved from context to application. Day One was dedicated to legal and institutional landscape mapping. Through country panel sessions and facilitated discussions, participants examined the legal and social conditions in Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Sierra Leone. The discussions went beyond what the law says on paper and focused on enforcement patterns, institutional responses, community realities, access to justice barriers and the risks faced by affected people and legal practitioners.

Day Two focused on the Movement Lawyering Curriculum. The curriculum was formally presented as a twelve-module framework for lawyers working on contested rights in hostile environments. Participants then reviewed the curriculum through structured questions, group discussions and case analysis. This allowed participants to assess not only whether the curriculum is relevant, but whether it can help lawyers make practical decisions about risk, timing, evidence, client protection and legal strategy.

This sequencing was important. The landscape mapping on Day One provided the factual and contextual foundation for the curriculum review on Day Two. Participants first identified how law operates in practice, then tested whether the curriculum responds to those realities. This made the validation process more grounded and helped ensure that the next phase of the Bridge to Justice Project is designed around actual country conditions.

DAY ONE: LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE MAPPING

Day One opened with participant introductions, ground rules, expectations and concerns. Participants expressed interest in practical tools for movement lawyering, stronger legal

strategies, cross-country learning and deeper understanding of how lawyers across West and Central Africa can work together. Concerns focused on the density of the agenda, the need for deeper engagement and the importance of keeping the discussions centred on the experiences of affected people.



The opening remarks placed the meeting within a wider regional context. Dr. Seun Bakare, Executive Director of Justice Bridge Foundation, situated the work within the need to develop African jurisprudence on contested rights. He emphasised that strategic litigation is not only a courtroom exercise, but a way of challenging harmful laws, building legal interpretation and shifting public and institutional understanding.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Columbus Ndeloa, representing the Elton John AIDS Foundation, affirmed the importance of access to justice for key populations and communities affected by criminalisation, and noted the value of building a cohort of lawyers able to support this work across the region.

Following plenary discussions, participants engaged in a series of country panel sessions. These sessions provided space for detailed reflection on how law operates in practice within each context, drawing on lived experiences, institutional interactions and community realities.

NIGERIA

The panel session on Nigeria examined a layered enforcement environment in which formal law intersects with religious, cultural and institutional pressures. Panelists discussed the everyday

realities faced by key populations and people living with HIV, including homelessness, workplace discrimination, denial of services, family rejection, police harassment and privacy violations. In parts of Northern Nigeria, the presence of Hisbah Police was identified as an additional form of moral policing, creating further risk for affected people.



A major point from the Nigerian discussion was the weakness of evidence systems. Panelists noted that police may search phones, review private chats, invade privacy and compel deletion of videos or recordings. In many cases, there is no preserved evidence, no clear crime scene, no reliable record and no effective documentation trail. This makes legal action difficult and often leaves victims with limited proof. At the same time, Nigeria was identified as a context where movement lawyering has advanced beyond theory through litigation, institutional engagement and collaboration with bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission.

GHANA

The panel session on Ghana focused on the political and legislative context, particularly the pressure surrounding the Family Values Bill. Panelists described how public discourse and legislative developments have deepened fear and uncertainty for communities and organisations providing legal or social support. The panel also showed that legal barriers do not always appear through criminal prosecution alone. They may arise through administrative processes, bureaucratic delay, lack of recognition and barriers to identity documentation.

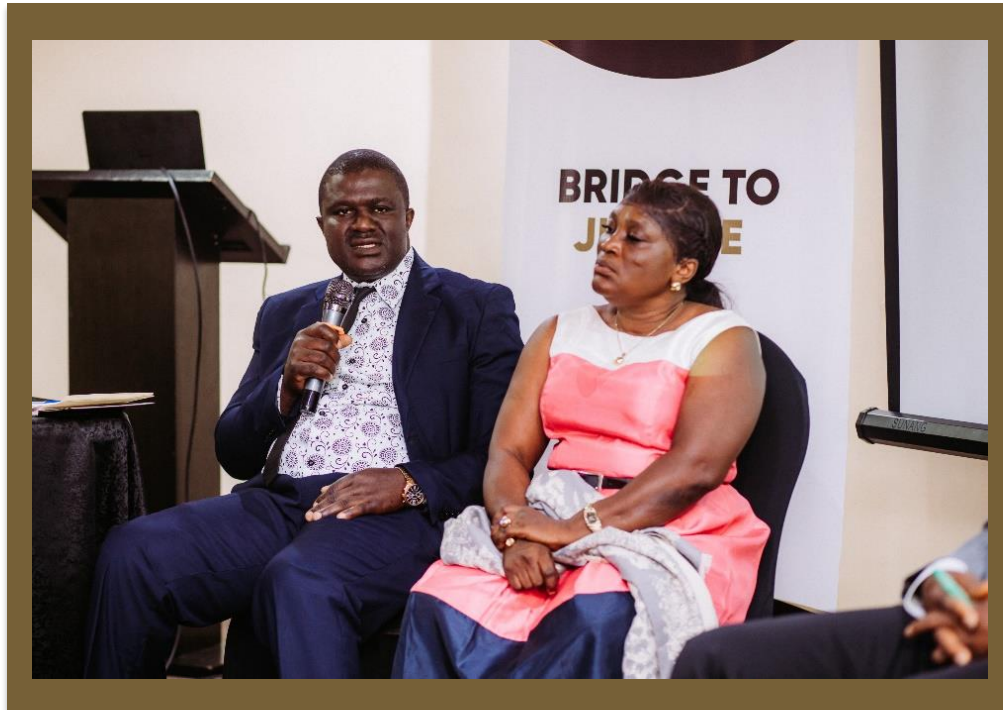


The discussion highlighted the importance of early legislative engagement. Participants noted that advocacy cannot begin only after harmful laws have been passed. It also requires monitoring legislative processes, identifying potential allies and engaging actors who may be neutral, undecided or able to influence outcomes from within institutions. The Nigerian experience with the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act was referenced as a cautionary example, with participants noting that Ghana has an opportunity to draw lessons from Nigerian advocacy, legal strategy and public engagement efforts.

Another important contribution from the Ghana session concerned how legal success is assessed. The panel reflected that a legal or policy outcome may appear positive on the surface while still carrying complex implications for movement goals. This reinforced the need to examine not only whether a legal development looks progressive, but also whether it protects affected communities in practice and avoids creating new forms of exclusion or control.

CAMEROON

The panel session on Cameroon presented a context shaped by centralised political power and limited judicial independence. Participants described a system in which executive influence affects appointments, promotions and disciplinary processes within the justice system. Lawyers, human rights defenders and activists were described as operating in an environment where rights-based work may attract arrest, detention or institutional pressure. The criminalisation of same-sex relations remains a central legal barrier, and affected people often rely on non-governmental organisations for support.



The discussion also highlighted the Anglophone-Francophone divide as an important structural issue. Panelists described Anglophone Cameroon's exclusion from some political, legal, donor and regional spaces, and noted that Francophone actors often dominate national and international platforms. This has direct implications for future programming because movement lawyering cannot be built credibly without attention to internal representation, language and regional inclusion.

SIERRA LEONE

The Sierra Leone panel presented a context marked by strong social conservatism, stigma and policing risks. Participants described how existing legal provisions and moral narratives are used to justify harassment, arrest and disruption of legal or community support. One account involved the unlawful arrest of a lawyer who was providing support to key populations, showing that legal practitioners themselves may face direct risk when working in this space.



Despite these constraints, the Sierra Leone discussion also identified practical adaptation. A panelist described a digital tool that allows people living with HIV to request and access medication without physically exposing themselves to environments where they may face harassment or stigma. This example showed how local actors are developing harm-reduction strategies where direct access to services is difficult or unsafe.

CROSS-COUNTRY INSIGHTS FROM DAY ONE

Across the four country panels, participants identified common challenges in access to justice. These included criminalisation, stigma, slow justice delivery, congested court systems, weak evidence gathering, institutional hostility and fear of exposure. Participants also agreed that many people do not pursue formal remedies because legal action may increase visibility, trigger retaliation or fail to produce timely results.

The discussions also revealed significant differences in movement lawyering readiness. Nigeria and Ghana showed more developed engagement through litigation, institutional advocacy, training and community-linked legal support. Cameroon and Sierra Leone reflected a more foundational stage of development, with greater need for values clarification, rights-based framing, language refinement, risk-sensitive practice and early-stage movement lawyering training. This distinction became one of the most important findings of the meeting.

DAY TWO: CURRICULUM VALIDATION AND REVIEW

Day Two began with reflections from participants on what stood out from the landscape mapping. Many participants highlighted the similarities across jurisdictions, the value of hearing country experiences and the importance of understanding each legal environment before designing legal strategies. These reflections connected Day One directly to the curriculum review, making clear that any training model must respond to different levels of country readiness.

Dr. Seun Bakare formally unveiled the Movement Lawyering Curriculum as a twelve-module framework designed to support lawyers working in contested rights environments. The modules covered movement lawyering, strategic litigation, equality and non-discrimination, rights retreat, sexual rights, health and HIV justice, freedom of association, privacy and bodily integrity, constitutional litigation under conservative interpretation, forum strategy, responses to anti-rights actors and long-term movement lawyering practice.

During the presentation, strategic litigation was framed as more than winning a case. It was discussed as a tool for impact, evidence generation, public conversation, jurisprudence building and visibility of violations. Participants were also reminded that timing matters. Poorly prepared litigation can harm clients, expose communities, weaken future cases and create backlash. This reinforced the importance of preparation, risk assessment and client-centred decision-making.

The curriculum review exercise was organised around three guiding questions: what works, what does not work and what is missing. Participants affirmed that the curriculum is timely, relevant and necessary. They appreciated its movement lawyering focus, strategic litigation content and attempt to connect legal practice with community realities. The curriculum was also seen as a basis for regional solidarity among lawyers working in difficult environments.



Participants also identified areas for refinement. These included clearer sequencing of foundational concepts, more consistent terminology, stronger values clarification, deeper grounding in SOGIESC concepts and stronger practical content on evidence gathering, police engagement, risk and crisis response, post-litigation backlash, ADR, law reform and engagement with government institutions. A recurring point was that lawyers must be trained not only in legal doctrine, but also in language, confidentiality, client dignity, mental health awareness and survivor-sensitive practice.

The group case analysis exercises allowed participants to apply the curriculum to practical legal scenarios. One group examined organisational restriction or shutdown and considered freedom of association, advocacy and protection of community actors. Another focused on litigation strategy, complainant identification, evidence gathering and advocacy support. A third analysed a privacy-related scenario involving disclosure of sensitive information by law enforcement, raising issues of dignity, bodily integrity, police accountability and public pressure. These exercises showed that movement lawyering requires judgment, timing, forum choice, client protection and attention to impact beyond judgment.

Finally, the field visit to TIERS offices provided a practical extension of the curriculum discussion. A case example presented by TIERS highlighted an HIV discrimination matter arising from the employer's discovery of the client's HIV status and subsequent termination of employment.

The discussion underscored the importance of confidentiality, timely legal response and the role of strategic litigation in addressing stigma and securing remedies. It also reflected the need for client-centred approaches and the integration of psychosocial considerations in legal practice.



KEY OUTCOMES

The meeting confirmed the relevance of the Movement Lawyering Curriculum and generated practical feedback for its refinement. Participants agreed that the curriculum responds to real legal and community needs, while also identifying areas where it can be strengthened before training begins. The meeting also produced a comparative understanding of country realities, showing both shared regional challenges and country-specific differences.

The landscape mapping provided a clear basis for differentiated training. Nigeria and Ghana require training that strengthens existing practice, deepens strategic litigation skills and supports institutional engagement. Cameroon and Sierra Leone require foundational engagement that builds values clarification, SOGIESC grounding, language sensitivity, risk awareness and early-stage movement lawyering capacity. This finding will shape the next phase of project implementation.

The meeting also strengthened cross-country learning among lawyers and community actors. Participants left with a clearer understanding that movement lawyering is not limited to courtroom representation. It includes documentation, strategic timing, advocacy, institutional engagement, community support, client protection and long-term legal change.



NEXT STEPS

The next phase of the Bridge to Justice Project will focus on the recruitment and training of lawyers, drawing on key insights from the validation and review process to ensure that the training responds to the practical realities identified.

The project will also support continued cross-country learning, strengthen referral pathways, and deepen community-linked legal support. This includes building a network of trained lawyers, strengthening collaboration between legal practitioners and community organisations, and publishing a Regional Legal Support Directory as a regional resource to improve access to rights-affirming legal support for LGBTQ+ persons and people living with HIV, and to facilitate referrals between community organisations and trained lawyers.

The aim is to move from curriculum validation to practical implementation in a way that is grounded in context and responsive to the needs of affected communities.

CONCLUSION

The Curriculum Validation and Cross-Sectoral Meeting provided an important foundation for the next phase of the Bridge to Justice Project. By combining legal and institutional landscape mapping with structured curriculum validation, the meeting ensured that the curriculum is grounded in how law operates in practice across Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Sierra Leone.

The process confirmed that the four countries share important challenges, including stigma, criminalisation, weak evidence systems, institutional barriers and delayed justice. It also confirmed that the countries are not at the same stage of movement lawyering development. This finding is central to future training design and programme implementation.

The meeting affirmed the importance of lawyers who can work with communities, understand risk, protect clients, engage institutions and use the law as one tool within a wider movement strategy. The outcomes provide a clear basis for refining the curriculum, training lawyers and strengthening access to justice for key populations across the region.