
**NALS
DICTIONARY
OF
AFRICAN CUSTOMARY LAWS**

**NIALS DICTIONARY OF AFRICAN
CUSTOMARY LAWS**

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PREFACE

This work began against the backdrop of the ever increasing need to illuminate the track route of customary law in Africa. It is set to create some sort of cultural sensitivity amongst scholars, researchers and general readers to enable them demonstrate an understanding of the historical development of African Customary Law. Many books and texts have been written over the years on customary law but there has been no source to consult to answer the basic questions that were presented by novices in the field. This dictionary proposes to shed light on most terms commonly used in customary law and to provide the most in-depth understanding of words that cut across cultures in Africa.

The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies being the hub of research and advanced legal studies in Nigeria has taken up the responsibility for the furtherance of sound, impeccable growth in all aspects of our law and has by so doing, decided to leave no stone unturned for the achievement of this purpose. This dictionary will therefore serve as a veritable instrument for proper understanding of the contextual usage of words in customary law and will help students of African customary Law navigate effortlessly through the hitherto uncharted waters of customary law.

Professor Epiphany Azinge, SAN, Ph.D, LL.D
Director-General

INTRODUCTION

As a traditional common rule and practice that has become an intrinsic part of the accepted and expected conduct in a community, customary law has formed an important aspect of our law. This dictionary provides the most appropriate definitions for a thousand customary law terms. Different African languages have been employed to portray the rich cultural, historical development of the various customary law systems seen across Africa. Terms have been selected for inclusion in this work from a number of sources. Indices of several hundreds of customary and family law texts were consulted. Journals and law reports were perused. Many terms were brought to the author's attention by reference questions. Common variations have been included as cross references. Due to the fluid nature of language however, some of the responsibility must lie with the user to play with possible variations.

Entries include a description of countries, tribes, languages; dialects if the term is not in English e.g. [Zulu], [Shona], [Ibibio], [Yoruba], [Ashanti], [Xosa] to indicate the exact custom or law defined. A translation or brief explanation then follows. There are citations of decided cases attached to certain terms to further buttress their meanings and the cases were indicated by italics. This dictionary is indeed one of a kind and is highly recommended to students of history, sociology and anthropology; legal practitioners and jurists, legal scholars and students of Law and all those genuinely interested in understanding the meaning of words within the context of African Customary Law.

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