**BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN STATE ATTORNEYS-GENERAL AND THE ICPC: A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE CORRUPTION PREVENTION IN NIGERIA’S NORTH-EAST**

**BEING**

**A KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY SENATOR KAKA SHEHU LAWAN, SAN AT THE ICPC ROUNDTABLE ENGAGEMENT WITH STATE ATTORNEYS-GENERAL IN THE NORTH-EAST ON STRENGTHENING ICPC’s CAPACITY FOR CORRUPTION PREVENTION, HELD AT THE AMADA INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, G.R.A., MAIDUGURI ON MONDAY, 18TH AUGUST 2025**

***Protocol***

It is both an honour and a personal privilege to stand before you today, first, as a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and second, as a former Attorney General of Borno State; a role that deepened my understanding of the unique legal, developmental, and security realities of our North-East region. I am deeply grateful to the Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Dr. Musa Adamu Aliyu, SAN, for the kind invitation to deliver this keynote address. This invitation is not only a mark of personal trust, but also a testament to the shared commitment we all have toward promoting accountability, integrity, and good governance in this region and across Nigeria.

Let me begin by commending the Chairman of the ICPC and his entire team for their foresight in convening this timely roundtable. By bringing together the chief law officers of the North-East states, the ICPC has demonstrated its recognition that the fight against corruption, especially in a region grappling with insurgency, humanitarian interventions, and large-scale reconstruction, cannot be won in isolation, but through deliberate and sustained partnerships.

I must also applaud my distinguished colleagues, the Honourable Attorneys-General of the North-East, for their dedication to upholding the rule of law, promoting institutional integrity, and safeguarding public resources in very challenging circumstances. Your work is often carried out under intense pressure, navigating complex legal frameworks, addressing urgent developmental needs, and managing the expectations of both government and the people. This roundtable provides a valuable platform to reinforce our collective resolve, align our strategies, and deepen our shared commitment to building a corruption-free North-East.

**1. Introduction**

As I have already stated, it is both an honour and a responsibility to address this distinguished gathering of State Attorneys-General, senior officials of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and other stakeholders committed to advancing transparency and accountability in Nigeria’s governance. Our topic today, which is *“Building Effective Partnerships between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC: A Strategic Imperative for Sustainable Corruption Prevention in Nigeria’s North-East”,* is not just an academic subject, but a call to action at a time when our region, and indeed our nation, cannot afford the heavy costs of corruption. Corruption is not an abstract governance problem; it is a lived reality that manifests in underfunded schools, dilapidated hospitals, uncompleted roads, delayed salaries, and weakened security infrastructure. Nowhere is this more visible than in the North-East, a region with vast economic potential, yet one that has endured years of insurgency, humanitarian crises, displacement, and slow-paced recovery. [[1]](#footnote-1) In such an environment, every naira lost to corruption is a blow to survival, stability, and the dignity of our people.

The task before us is further complicated by the scale and complexity of resources flowing into the North-East, from federal allocations and state budgets to humanitarian aid, donor funds, and reconstruction projects. These streams, if left without adequate oversight, become channels for mismanagement and diversion. The consequence is twofold: development stalls, and public trust in government institutions erodes.[[2]](#footnote-2) Against this backdrop, the role of the State Attorneys-General, as chief law officers of their respective states, becomes pivotal. You are the constitutional custodians of legal order at the state level, with authority to initiate and oversee prosecutions, advise on governance processes, and ensure that the actions of government comply with both the letter and spirit of the law. The ICPC, on its part, has a federal mandate not only to investigate and prosecute corrupt practices but also to engage in systemic reforms, preventive education, and inter-institutional collaboration.

It is at the intersection of these mandates that the opportunity for effective partnership emerges. By working together, aligning legal authority with investigative reach, and harmonising preventive measures with prosecutorial strategies, State Attorneys-General and the ICPC can form a powerful coalition capable of closing systemic loopholes, deterring corrupt conduct, and building public confidence in governance.

This keynote will therefore explore the following vital components:

1. Why this partnership is a strategic imperative, especially for the North-East.
2. The current gaps that weaken collaboration.
3. Practical pathways for building robust and results-driven partnerships.
4. Special consideration for the North-East and Sustaining the partnership
5. A call to concrete action to ensure that today’s conversations translate into measurable change.

If the North-East is to emerge from the shadows of corruption, insecurity, and underdevelopment, it will not be through isolated institutional efforts, but through integrated, intentional, and sustained collaboration between key actors like the State Attorneys-General and the ICPC.

**2. Understanding the Strategic Imperative**

The fight against corruption in the North-East cannot be viewed as a technical legal task; it is a decisive battle for the survival, credibility, and prosperity of the region. Partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is not simply a matter of institutional convenience, but a necessity dictated by the complex governance realities and developmental challenges that define the region today. A strategic imperative is a course of action so critical to success that failing to pursue it will almost certainly result in unacceptable consequences.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the context of the North-East, where insecurity, poverty, displacement, and reconstruction efforts converge, corruption presents a compound threat capable of undermining peacebuilding, eroding public trust, and squandering resources desperately needed for recovery. Against this backdrop, collaboration between the Attorneys-General and the ICPC moves from being desirable to being indispensable. Without it, enforcement becomes fragmented, investigations drag, prosecutions falter, and preventive mechanisms lack reach and impact.

The two institutions share a common mandate to uphold integrity and the rule of law, but they bring distinct strengths to the table. Attorneys-General, as the chief law officers of their states, possess constitutional authority over prosecutions[[4]](#footnote-4), while the ICPC, empowered by federal statute, has investigative reach, enforcement capacity, and a preventive education mandate.[[5]](#footnote-5) Alone, each operates with jurisdictional and resource limits; together, they form a seamless chain from detection and investigation to prosecution and policy reform.

The North-East’s corruption landscape often spans both state and federal spheres, particularly in the management of reconstruction funds[[6]](#footnote-6), humanitarian aid[[7]](#footnote-7), and donor-supported programmes.[[8]](#footnote-8) A federal agency like the ICPC can follow the trail of misconduct across state boundaries, while Attorneys-General can ensure that prosecutions within their jurisdictions are both swift and watertight. This alignment not only improves operational efficiency but also amplifies deterrence. When state and federal actors present a visible, united front, it sends a clear and unambiguous message that corruption will be detected, prosecuted, and punished, without regard for political connections or influence. Such unity also allows for better use of scarce resources. In a region where both institutions operate within budgetary and manpower constraints, pooling expertise, intelligence, and forensic tools reduces duplication and accelerates case handling. More importantly, this collaboration strengthens the social contract. In fragile environments, public trust is as valuable as physical infrastructure. When citizens see their institutions working together transparently and without political bias, confidence in governance begins to grow.

The developmental stakes could not be higher. Every misappropriated naira in the North-East has a direct human cost, in delayed relief for internally displaced persons, abandoned reconstruction projects, or inflated security contracts that weaken rather than strengthen safety. A deliberate partnership between the Attorneys-General and the ICPC can help protect the integrity of reconstruction funds, introduce corruption risk assessments into major projects, and secure whistleblower channels that are both safe and effective. This is not only a legal or operational necessity; it is also political, societal, and even security-driven. Legally, the Constitution and anti-corruption laws envisage multi-agency cooperation. Operationally, a united approach is essential in a terrain complicated by insecurity and logistical challenges. Politically, joint action insulates both parties from accusations of partisanship by embedding anti-corruption work in a multi-level, bipartisan framework. Socially, the region’s recovery depends on demonstrating that governance can be honest, transparent, and accountable. From a security perspective, every kobo lost to corruption in security or humanitarian procurement risks enabling the very instability that the region is struggling to overcome.

Failure to build and sustain this partnership would come at a high cost, fragmented enforcement, delayed prosecutions, weak deterrence, loss of public confidence, and continued developmental stagnation. However, if pursued with commitment and structure, this alliance could evolve into a national model for federal-state anti-corruption cooperation. The North-East, long associated with hardship and instability, could then become a case study in how coordinated integrity frameworks can transform governance, accelerate recovery, and inspire national reform.

**3. Current Gaps and Challenges**

While there is a shared recognition of the need to combat corruption in the North-East, the reality is that certain persistent gaps continue to hinder the ability of State Attorneys-General and the ICPC to work seamlessly and achieve decisive impact. These gaps are not simply procedural inconveniences; they are structural weaknesses that, if left unaddressed, will continue to create safe spaces for corruption to thrive. The following are the major challenges in this direction:

1. *Fragmentation of Legal Frameworks between the States and the Federal Government*

One of the significant challenges to building an effective partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is the fragmentation of legal frameworks between the federal and state levels. Nigeria’s anti-corruption laws, prosecutorial powers, and investigative procedures are often not fully harmonised, creating overlaps, gaps, and inconsistencies that hinder coordinated action.[[9]](#footnote-9) While the ICPC operates under federal legislation, state Attorneys-General enforce local statutes, sometimes with differing thresholds for investigation, prosecution, and sanction. This legal divergence can lead to jurisdictional conflicts, delays in information sharing, and inconsistent outcomes in corruption cases.[[10]](#footnote-10) In addition, some states may lack comprehensive anti-corruption legislation or dedicated investigative structures, limiting their ability to collaborate effectively with the ICPC. Without harmonised policies and clear protocols, joint initiatives risk inefficiency, duplication of effort, or even legal challenges. Addressing this fragmentation is therefore critical to ensuring a seamless, authoritative, and results-driven partnership.

1. *Weakness of Information-Sharing Mechanisms*

A major challenge to the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is the weakness of existing information-sharing mechanisms.[[11]](#footnote-11) Effective anti-corruption efforts rely heavily on timely, accurate, and secure exchange of intelligence, investigative findings, and case-related data.[[12]](#footnote-12) However, in many instances, communication channels between state-level law enforcement and the federal anti-corruption agency are fragmented, informal, or slow, creating gaps that corrupt actors can exploit. Differences in technology, record-keeping standards, and confidentiality protocols further complicate collaboration, leading to delays in investigations or missed opportunities for intervention.[[13]](#footnote-13) Without robust, standardized, and secure platforms for data exchange, joint operations struggle to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. Strengthening information-sharing mechanisms, including digital platforms, secure databases, and defined protocols for inter-agency communication, is therefore essential to ensure coordinated, timely, and intelligence-driven action against corruption in the North-East

1. *Joint Investigations*

One of the recurring obstacles in fostering strong collaboration between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is the difficulty of conducting effective joint investigations. While joint action offers the advantage of shared expertise, broader intelligence, and stronger prosecutorial strategies, in practice it is often hampered by jurisdictional rivalries and lack of clarity on roles.[[14]](#footnote-14) Overlapping mandates between federal and state authorities can create tension, with cases stalling due to disagreements over who should lead or prosecute.[[15]](#footnote-15) Differences in investigative procedures, inadequate resources at the state level, and the absence of uniform training for investigators further weaken the effectiveness of such efforts. In the North-East, where corruption cases are intertwined with insurgency financing, mismanagement of humanitarian aid, and procurement fraud, these challenges are even more pronounced.[[16]](#footnote-16) Without clear protocols, specialized joint task forces, and standardized case management frameworks, joint investigations risk becoming fragmented, slow, and vulnerable to political interference.

1. *Capacity constraints*

Capacity constraints represent a major challenge to building an effective partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC. Many state ministries of justice and related agencies often lack adequate financial resources, modern investigative tools, and sufficient manpower to handle complex corruption cases. Where staff exist, they may not have the specialized training needed for forensic accounting, cybercrime investigation, procurement fraud detection[[17]](#footnote-17), or managing transnational corruption cases that frequently arise in the North-East. Limited access to technology and weak institutional infrastructure further impede the ability of state authorities to collaborate meaningfully with the ICPC[[18]](#footnote-18). These constraints place additional pressure on the ICPC, which is already stretched thin across the country. As a result, corruption cases are either under-investigated, delayed, or abandoned, allowing impunity to thrive. Addressing these capacity gaps through sustained training, technical assistance, and provision of resources is critical to making the partnership both effective and sustainable.

1. *Political Interference*

Political interference remains one of the most formidable challenges to forging a credible partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC. Corruption cases often involve politically exposed persons, influential contractors, or powerful local actors whose interests are deeply entrenched in state and regional governance structures.[[19]](#footnote-19) Attorneys-General, being political appointees in many states, sometimes face immense pressure to shield certain individuals from investigation or prosecution, thereby undermining the independence of the justice system. Such interference can manifest as directives to drop cases, deliberate delays in granting approvals for prosecution, or manipulation of investigative priorities to target opponents while protecting allies.[[20]](#footnote-20) In the North-East, where governance is further complicated by insurgency-related security expenditures and humanitarian aid, the risk of politicisation of corruption cases is even higher. Unless mechanisms are established to insulate investigations and prosecutions from undue influence, the partnership will struggle to achieve credibility, public trust, and sustainable results.

1. *Lack of Systematic Preventive Monitoring*

A critical weakness undermining the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is the absence of systematic preventive monitoring mechanisms. Too often, anti-corruption responses are reactive, focusing on investigations and prosecutions after funds have been diverted or projects have failed, rather than preventing the misuse of resources in the first place.[[21]](#footnote-21) In the North-East, where billions of naira are channelled into reconstruction, humanitarian relief, and security operations, the lack of consistent oversight and early warning systems creates fertile ground for leakages, procurement fraud, and mismanagement.[[22]](#footnote-22) Without routine audits, compliance checks, and integrity safeguards built into project cycles, corrupt practices are detected only after significant damage has been done. Moreover, state institutions frequently lack structured monitoring frameworks, trained personnel, or technology-enabled tools to track expenditures in real time. Building a proactive culture of preventive monitoring is essential to protect scarce resources, reassure donors, and ensure that interventions genuinely reach affected communities.

These gaps collectively demand urgent and deliberate action. The stakes in the North-East are exceptionally high: the region is in the midst of rebuilding not just its physical infrastructure but also its governance credibility. Every delayed prosecution, every uncoordinated investigation, and every unaddressed legal loophole feeds into a cycle that prolongs recovery, weakens public trust, and emboldens corrupt actors. Closing these gaps will require not only legislative harmonisation and institutional restructuring but also the cultivation of a collaborative culture grounded in mutual trust, operational transparency, and political will. Without such decisive measures, the anti-corruption agenda risks remaining aspirational rather than transformational.

**4. Pathways to Building Effective Partnerships**

For the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC to move beyond good intentions and translate into measurable outcomes, it must be built on deliberate, structured, and sustained pathways. These pathways, which should not only address existing gaps but also create a proactive, resilient framework for preventing, detecting, and prosecuting corruption in the North-East, are discussed as follows:

1. *Legal and Policy Harmonisation*

A strong partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC must be grounded in a legal and policy framework that is clear, consistent, and mutually reinforcing. At present, disparities between federal anti-corruption laws and those at the state level create gaps that sophisticated offenders can exploit. Some state statutes are outdated, incomplete, or silent on emerging forms of corruption, while others are misaligned with federal provisions such as the ICPC Act.[[23]](#footnote-23) This patchwork of laws not only complicates investigations and prosecutions but also weakens the deterrent effect of anti-corruption measures. Harmonisation begins with a comprehensive audit of each state’s legal instruments relating to corruption, procurement, public finance, and criminal procedure.[[24]](#footnote-24) This review should align state provisions with national standards while adapting them to local realities, ensuring relevance without sacrificing consistency. Beyond legislation, harmonisation must also address policy frameworks, particularly those governing budgeting, procurement, and public project monitoring, so that preventive standards are uniform across jurisdictions.

An essential tool in this process is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). By clearly defining the roles, responsibilities, and timelines for cooperation, MoUs provide a structured operational guide for joint investigations, intelligence sharing, and coordinated prosecutions. They also help to resolve potential jurisdictional disputes before they arise, reducing delays that could compromise cases. Importantly, harmonisation should anticipate future challenges. As corruption evolves, particularly through cyber-enabled crimes, illicit financial flows, and the diversion of humanitarian aid, laws and policies must remain adaptive. Regular joint reviews by the ICPC and state justice ministries can ensure that the legal framework keeps pace with emerging threats.

Ultimately, legal and policy harmonisation is not just about closing loopholes; it is about creating a shared operational language that allows state and federal actors to act as a single, coherent force against corruption, with no room for ambiguity or procedural obstruction.

1. *Joint Intelligence Gathering and Case Management*

One of the most critical pillars of an effective partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is the establishment of a robust framework for joint intelligence gathering and coordinated case management. Corruption in the North-East often involves complex networks that operate across state lines, exploit weaknesses in both local and federal oversight, and use sophisticated methods to conceal illicit activity.[[25]](#footnote-25) In such an environment, intelligence is the lifeblood of enforcement, and the speed, accuracy, and accessibility of that intelligence can determine whether a case succeeds or fails. Currently, investigative intelligence, whether relating to procurement fraud, diversion of humanitarian aid, or illicit financial flows, is often trapped within institutional silos. This lack of systematic sharing leads to duplication of effort, delays in intervention, and the loss of critical evidence.[[26]](#footnote-26) A formalised mechanism for intelligence collaboration would change this dynamic, enabling both the ICPC and state ministries of justice to act on information in real time.

Such a mechanism could take the form of a *North-East Regional Anti-Corruption Intelligence Network*, staffed by designated liaison officers from each State Attorney-General’s office, ICPC zonal operations, and other relevant agencies. The network would maintain a secure, encrypted digital platform for the rapid exchange of investigative data, including financial transaction records, procurement documentation, and witness statements. Beyond intelligence gathering, joint case management is essential to ensure that investigations and prosecutions follow a unified strategy from inception to conclusion. *Joint Case Review Panels*, bringing together investigators, prosecutors, and forensic experts, would allow for collective assessment of evidence, strategic decisions on charges, and coordinated trial preparation. This integrated approach minimises evidentiary gaps, reduces procedural errors, and strengthens the chances of successful prosecution. By embedding intelligence sharing and case coordination into the partnership, both institutions can move from reactive responses to proactive, targeted interventions that disrupt corruption networks before they can cause irreversible damage.

1. *Preventive Monitoring and Integrity Safeguards*

While investigation and prosecution remain indispensable tools in the fight against corruption, sustainable prevention depends on building systems that make corrupt practices difficult to initiate and easy to detect.[[27]](#footnote-27) Preventive monitoring and integrity safeguards form the proactive arm of the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC, ensuring that corruption risks are identified and addressed before they crystallise into criminal acts.[[28]](#footnote-28) In the North-East, where public resources are often directed toward infrastructure reconstruction, humanitarian relief, and social intervention programmes, large-scale projects present high-value targets for corrupt actors. Weak project oversight, opaque procurement processes, and insufficient compliance checks create opportunities for fraud, cost inflation, and substandard delivery.

A strategic partnership could establish *Joint Integrity Monitoring Teams* tasked with auditing procurement processes, monitoring contract execution, and inspecting project sites in real time. These teams, comprising representatives from State Ministries of Justice, the ICPC, and relevant sectoral agencies, would serve as an early-warning mechanism, flagging irregularities before payments are disbursed or contracts are concluded. Integrity safeguards should also extend to public sector human resource systems. Transparent recruitment, merit-based promotions, and regular asset declarations for public officials are crucial in limiting discretionary abuse.[[29]](#footnote-29) Here, the Attorneys-General can lead the process of institutionalising ethical codes, conflict-of-interest rules, and disciplinary frameworks, while the ICPC provides the technical expertise to embed these standards in day-to-day operations.

In addition, digital transparency tools, such as e-procurement platforms, public project dashboards, and whistleblower portals, can significantly reduce opportunities for manipulation. The partnership can drive the adoption of these tools across North-East states, ensuring public access to key information and empowering citizens to serve as watchdogs. By embedding preventive monitoring and integrity safeguards into governance structures, the partnership moves beyond punishment into systemic protection, building resilient institutions that deny corruption the oxygen it needs to thrive.

1. *Capacity Building and Technical Skill Transfer*

The long-term success of a partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC will depend heavily on the strength, competence, and adaptability of the human resources driving anti-corruption efforts.[[30]](#footnote-30) Capacity building and technical skill transfer are therefore not optional add-ons, they are foundational investments that equip both institutions to meet the evolving sophistication of corrupt practices in the North-East. Corruption is no longer confined to simple bribery or document falsification. It increasingly involves digital manipulation of financial systems, cross-border fund transfers, shell company networks, and the use of emerging technologies to conceal evidence. Confronting these challenges requires a workforce with specialised skills in areas such as forensic accounting, cybercrime investigation, digital evidence preservation, procurement fraud detection, and data-driven risk analysis.

Through a structured capacity-building programme, the ICPC can provide targeted training for prosecutors, legal officers, and investigators in state justice ministries. These sessions could include simulated case exercises, exposure to advanced investigative tools, and in-depth workshops on building evidence chains that can withstand judicial scrutiny.[[31]](#footnote-31) The Attorneys-General, in turn, can facilitate joint training for ICPC personnel on state-specific legal frameworks, procedural rules, and local enforcement dynamics, ensuring that federal interventions are contextually grounded. Technical skill transfer should go beyond one-off trainings to institutionalised mentorship arrangements. Embedding ICPC experts within state ministries for fixed periods, and reciprocally assigning state prosecutors to ICPC zonal offices, would foster on-the-job learning and cross-pollination of expertise. Over time, this model creates a pool of professionals who can work interchangeably within state and federal systems, reducing dependency on external consultants and enhancing operational continuity.

Ultimately, sustained skill development ensures that the partnership remains not only reactive to existing corruption patterns but also anticipatory, capable of innovating strategies ahead of emerging threats. It builds an enduring human infrastructure for justice that outlives political cycles and adapts to future governance demands.

1. *Public Engagement and Social Accountability Mechanisms*

Corruption thrives in secrecy, but wilts under the glare of public scrutiny. For the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC to achieve lasting impact in the North-East, it must actively involve citizens, civil society, and the media as co-owners of the anti-corruption agenda. Public engagement is not merely about awareness campaigns, but about building a participatory framework where citizens can track, question, and influence the integrity of governance processes.[[32]](#footnote-32) In the North-East, where reconstruction projects, humanitarian aid, and special intervention funds are widespread, communities are often the first to detect irregularities, whether in abandoned projects, inflated contract sums, or diversion of relief materials.[[33]](#footnote-33) By creating structured channels for citizens to report such concerns, the partnership can turn public vigilance into actionable intelligence. These could include confidential whistleblowing platforms, toll-free hotlines, and mobile apps tailored to local languages and literacy levels.

Social accountability mechanisms should also leverage civil society organisations (CSOs) as intermediaries. CSOs can help track public projects, convene town hall meetings, and prepare independent “scorecards” on government performance. Attorneys-General can use these reports to guide legal interventions, while the ICPC can investigate systemic vulnerabilities revealed by the findings. The media, both traditional and digital, remains a powerful partner in this process. Proactive engagement with journalists through briefings, press kits, and investigative collaborations can ensure that corruption-related stories are accurate, responsible, and solution-focused rather than sensationalist.

Finally, public engagement must be continuous, not episodic. Embedding feedback loops, where citizens see tangible results from their reports, builds trust in the partnership and motivates sustained participation. When communities are empowered to act as custodians of public integrity, the anti-corruption fight gains a multiplier effect, extending oversight far beyond the walls of government offices and into the very spaces where public resources are applied.

1. *Institutionalising the Partnership for Sustainability*

The most significant challenge facing many well-intentioned anti-corruption initiatives is their short lifespan. Political transitions, leadership changes, and shifting priorities often cause promising collaborations to fade before they can yield lasting impact. To avoid this fate, the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC must be institutionalised, embedded in policy, procedure, and culture, so it becomes a permanent feature of governance in the North-East, rather than a temporary project.[[34]](#footnote-34) Institutionalisation begins with a formal framework that clearly defines the scope, objectives, and operational mechanisms of the partnership. This could take the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or inter-agency cooperation agreement, backed by state and federal policy endorsements. Such documents should outline joint decision-making structures, protocols for information sharing, and mechanisms for resolving jurisdictional overlaps, ensuring the partnership operates smoothly regardless of changes in leadership.

Equally important is the establishment of dedicated liaison units or focal desks within both the ICPC and state Ministries of Justice. These units would serve as permanent contact points, ensuring continuity of communication, tracking joint initiatives, and monitoring agreed deliverables. Embedding partnership responsibilities into official job descriptions also ensures that collaboration is not dependent on the goodwill of individual officers, but is part of institutional duty. Regular performance reviews, joint strategic planning sessions, and annual public reports on partnership outcomes can further entrench the initiative in the governance landscape. These measures enhance accountability, keep the collaboration visible, and make it politically costly for any administration to dismantle it. Ultimately, institutionalisation transforms a strategic partnership from a fragile handshake into a durable governance architecture. It ensures that the fight against corruption in the North-East is shielded from political disruptions, sustained by systems rather than personalities, and positioned to deliver impact for decades to come.

1. *Leveraging Technology for Coordination and Transparency*

In today’s governance environment, technology is both a tool and an essential enabler of coordination, efficiency, and accountability. For the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC to operate effectively in the North-East, technology must be at the core of its strategy.

First, technology can serve as the central nervous system of the partnership, facilitating real-time communication, secure document sharing, and case coordination.[[35]](#footnote-35) A dedicated digital platform, accessible to both ICPC and State Attorneys-General, can host shared case files, investigative timelines, legal briefs, and evidence repositories. This not only improves efficiency but also reduces duplication of effort and ensures that no matter where an officer is located in the region, they have access to the same up-to-date information. Second, technology enhances transparency, which is critical for building public trust. Open data dashboards can be developed to publish key anti-corruption indicators, progress on ongoing investigations, and the status of recovered assets, while respecting confidentiality in sensitive matters. Such tools enable citizens, civil society, and the media to see tangible outcomes, reinforcing confidence in the partnership’s effectiveness. Third, artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics can be deployed to detect anomalies in procurement processes, budget expenditures, and project execution. By flagging suspicious transactions early, these tools allow proactive intervention before corruption fully manifests. In the North-East, where development funds flow through multiple layers of contractors and agencies, predictive analytics can be particularly valuable.

Finally, technology can facilitate citizen participation. Mobile apps, SMS platforms, and social media channels in local languages can be used for whistleblowing, feedback, and monitoring of public projects.

By embedding technology into both operational coordination and public-facing transparency measures, the partnership gains speed, precision, and credibility, transforming anti-corruption efforts from reactive enforcement into proactive, intelligence-driven governance.

1. **Special Considerations for the North-East**

Any anti-corruption partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC in Nigeria’s North-East must be tailored to the unique political, socio-economic, and security realities of the region. The North-East is not just geopolitical zone, but a post-conflict region still grappling with the consequences of over a decade of insurgency, mass displacement, infrastructure destruction, and socio-economic dislocation. These realities shape the corruption risks, enforcement challenges, and the modalities for sustaining an effective anti-corruption strategy. One defining consideration is the post-conflict governance environment.[[36]](#footnote-36) The large inflow of humanitarian aid, reconstruction funds, and donor-supported projects, while critical for recovery, also creates significant vulnerability to mismanagement, diversion, and procurement fraud. In some cases, weak oversight mechanisms and opaque contracting processes have turned recovery programmes into lucrative opportunities for corrupt actors. Partnerships in the North-East must therefore prioritise preventive monitoring and targeted audits of reconstruction and humanitarian spending.

Another factor is the security challenge. The presence of insurgent groups, banditry, and criminal networks limits access to certain areas, making investigation and prosecution more difficult. Corruption in security sector procurement or diversion of resources meant for internally displaced persons (IDPs) directly undermines stability.[[37]](#footnote-37) This calls for tailored joint strategies between the ICPC, State Attorneys-General, and security agencies to ensure evidence gathering is not disrupted by insecurity. The humanitarian context also presents unique ethical and operational dilemmas. In displacement camps and host communities, service delivery is often mediated by local power brokers or aid intermediaries.[[38]](#footnote-38) This increases the risk of petty corruption, extortion, and exploitation of vulnerable populations. Building community-based anti-corruption watchdogs and embedding accountability clauses in humanitarian contracts is essential.

Additionally, the low literacy levels, poverty rates, and cultural dynamics in parts of the region require that public engagement be conducted in local languages, using trusted community influencers, religious leaders, and traditional institutions to mobilise citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts. Finally, the partnership must recognise the interstate and cross-border dimensions of corruption in the North-East. Given its proximity to Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, illicit trade, smuggling, and cross-border financial flows are prevalent. This necessitates regional cooperation beyond Nigerian borders, involving intelligence-sharing agreements with relevant authorities in neighbouring countries. The North-East demands not a one-size-fits-all model but a context-specific, security-sensitive, and culturally attuned partnership, one that safeguards recovery funds, empowers citizens, and builds trust in state institutions while navigating the unique governance terrain of the region.

From the above, it becomes obvious that the North-East’s unique context, marked by ongoing insurgency, extensive humanitarian interventions, and massive reconstruction projects, demands that any partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC be tailored to address specific governance vulnerabilities. In this setting, the stakes are high: resources are stretched, public trust is fragile, and the urgency of rebuilding creates both opportunities for progress and risks of exploitation.

A critical priority is the monitoring of donor and humanitarian aid funds to ensure they reach intended beneficiaries. Over the years, vast sums, both domestic and international, have been committed to providing food, shelter, education, healthcare, and livelihoods for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Yet without rigorous oversight, these funds risk being diverted, inflated, or misallocated. The partnership should establish a joint monitoring framework anchored on transparency, including real-time tracking of disbursements, open publication of aid data, and regular public reporting. Community-based verification mechanisms, allowing IDPs and host communities to confirm aid delivery, would further strengthen integrity and trust.

Equally important is auditing procurement for reconstruction projects in housing, infrastructure, schools, and health facilities. The urgency of rebuilding often tempts shortcuts in procurement processes, enabling inflated contracts, unqualified contractors, and substandard work. A collaborative ICPC-Attorney-General oversight approach can mitigate these risks through pre-award due diligence, active project monitoring by independent technical experts, and rigorous post-completion audits. Public disclosure of procurement plans, contract awards, and progress reports would enhance accountability and deter malpractice.

In addition, oversight of security sector expenditures is crucial. In conflict environments, emergency security spending often escapes robust scrutiny due to operational sensitivities, creating loopholes for corruption. Partnerships should design confidential yet robust audit systems that respect security imperatives while tracking funds. This could include verifying troop allowances, monitoring procurement of fuel, equipment, and supplies, and ensuring allocations for community policing are used as intended. A 2021 audit in a conflict-affected area revealed inflated contracts for food supply to displaced persons. A joint AG–ICPC monitoring team could have detected such anomalies earlier.

By giving deliberate and sustained attention to these priorities provides a fertile ground for the partnership to directly address some of the region’s most critical vulnerabilities. It will safeguard scarce resources, improve the delivery of essential services, and strengthen the credibility of both state and federal anti-corruption efforts in the eyes of citizens and international partners.

1. **Sustaining the Partnership**

Building a partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is only the first step; sustaining it over the long term is the real test of commitment, vision, and institutional maturity. In the anti-corruption space, particularly in a region as complex as the North-East, partnerships must be resilient to political transitions, leadership changes, and shifting priorities. Sustainability requires embedding the collaboration into formal structures, operational cultures, and legislative frameworks so that it is not dependent on personalities or ad hoc goodwill. Therefore, the following sustainability strategies are vital:

a. *Institutionalisation*

A key strategy is institutionalisation, ensuring the partnership is backed by formal agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), jointly developed operational protocols, and possibly state-level policy directives or executive orders. Institutionalising the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is essential to ensure it outlives political cycles, administrative changes, and shifting priorities. In the North-East, where corruption threatens humanitarian relief, reconstruction, and security, this means embedding the collaboration in formal, enduring structures. The process should begin with a formally documented framework, such as a Memorandum of Understanding or Joint Action Protocol, clearly defining roles, responsibilities, communication channels, and performance indicators. Beyond agreements, the partnership must be anchored in state-level legal and policy instruments, such as executive orders or legislation, that mandate structured cooperation with the ICPC.

Dedicated liaison units within both the ICPC and the Ministries of Justice should serve as permanent operational bridges, ensuring agreements are implemented in daily operations. Joint capacity-building programmes, staff secondments, and shared resources will further embed the collaboration into institutional practice rather than individual discretion. Integration into broader frameworks like the National Anti-Corruption Strategy and regional development plans for the North-East will ensure alignment with national priorities. By institutionalising the partnership, cooperation becomes a permanent, predictable mechanism for preventing and combating corruption, capable of sustaining momentum and delivering results despite leadership changes or evolving challenges. These instruments can clearly outline the objectives, scope, reporting structures, and dispute resolution mechanisms, thereby reducing the risk of the partnership fading with leadership changes.

1. *Regular Joint Strategic Reviews*

Regular joint strategic reviews are a cornerstone of sustaining and institutionalising the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC. These reviews provide a structured platform for both parties to periodically assess the effectiveness of their collaboration, evaluate progress against agreed performance indicators, and identify emerging corruption risks that require attention. In the North-East, where corruption threats are often fluid due to ongoing insurgency, humanitarian operations, and large-scale reconstruction projects, such reviews ensure the partnership remains adaptive and relevant. They allow for real-time adjustments to strategies, reallocation of resources where necessary, and the incorporation of lessons learned from ongoing cases or preventive initiatives. Strategic reviews also strengthen mutual accountability, as each side must present updates, report on commitments, and justify decisions. They offer opportunities for joint problem-solving, ensuring challenges are addressed before they escalate into systemic failures. Moreover, these reviews can be used to align anti-corruption priorities with broader regional and national development goals, enhancing the legitimacy and impact of the partnership. By embedding regular strategic reviews into the operational calendar, the collaboration shifts from being reactive to proactive, building trust, fostering transparency, and ensuring that anti-corruption measures are continuously refined for maximum impact.

1. *Dedicated funding streams*

Dedicated funding streams are vital to ensuring the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC is not undermined by financial constraints or inconsistent resource allocation. Effective anti-corruption collaboration, especially in a complex environment like Nigeria’s North-East, requires predictable, sustained financing to support joint investigations, intelligence sharing, training programmes, public outreach, and technological infrastructure. Without ring-fenced resources, well-intentioned initiatives risk stalling due to competing budgetary priorities or political changes. By establishing dedicated funding lines within both state and federal budgets, the partnership can operate with greater independence, continuity, and confidence. These funds should be legally protected from arbitrary diversion and released in a timely manner to avoid operational delays.

Additionally, the partnership can explore supplementary funding through donor grants, development partners, and corporate social responsibility programmes, particularly for capacity building, technology acquisition, and public education campaigns. However, such external support must be transparently managed to maintain credibility and avoid conflicts of interest. No doubt, dedicated funding streams signal political will, institutional seriousness, and long-term commitment to corruption prevention. They ensure that the partnership’s goals are not merely aspirational but are backed by the tangible resources required to deliver measurable and lasting results in the region.

1. *Relationship-Building at Multiple Levels*

This is essential for ensuring that the partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC moves beyond formal agreements into a living, functional collaboration. While institutional memoranda and protocols provide the framework, it is the strength of interpersonal and inter-agency relationships that determines the quality of cooperation in practice. At the leadership level, regular engagement between Attorneys-General and senior ICPC officials fosters strategic alignment, trust, and mutual respect. These high-level relationships set the tone for collaboration, ensuring that political and operational priorities are harmonised.

At the operational level, close working relationships between investigators, prosecutors, intelligence officers, and administrative staff enable day-to-day coordination. When these professionals know and trust each other, they are more likely to share sensitive information, provide timely updates, and respond quickly to emerging corruption threats. At the community interface, building relationships with local stakeholders, traditional leaders, civil society, journalists, and community-based organisations, helps anchor the partnership in public trust. This grassroots engagement strengthens legitimacy, enhances public reporting of corruption, and ensures that anti-corruption interventions reflect local realities. By cultivating relationships at all these levels simultaneously, the partnership develops resilience, adaptability, and the goodwill necessary to sustain joint action even in the face of political changes or external pressures.

1. *Public Engagement*

Public engagement is a cornerstone of any credible and sustainable anti-corruption partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC. Corruption thrives in environments where the public is uninformed, disengaged, or distrustful of government institutions. In contrast, when citizens are aware of their rights, understand how public resources are meant to be used, and feel empowered to report wrongdoing, corruption becomes far more difficult to conceal. In the context of the North-East, public engagement should be proactive, inclusive, and context-sensitive. Proactive engagement means not waiting for public outcry before acting, but instead consistently communicating the partnership’s objectives, activities, and results. This builds public confidence and signals that anti-corruption efforts are not symbolic but action-driven.

Inclusivity requires reaching out to all segments of society; youth, women, displaced persons, traders, professionals, and traditional authorities, using language, channels, and formats they can easily understand. Town hall meetings, radio programmes in local dialects, and community drama can be powerful tools for connecting with diverse audiences. Transparency in public engagement is equally critical. Sharing audit results, investigation outcomes, and recovered assets reinforces trust and shows tangible progress. Moreover, accessible whistleblower channels, both digital and community-based, encourage citizen participation in identifying and reporting corruption. When public engagement is systematic, credible, and continuous, it transforms citizens from passive observers into active partners, creating a societal environment where corruption is collectively resisted rather than silently endured.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing, it is clear that a sustained partnership is not an event but a living, evolving framework. In the North-East, where corruption can undermine both peacebuilding and development, ensuring the longevity of this collaboration is not just strategic, it is essential for the region’s stability and prosperity.

1. **Conclusion and Call to Action**

While the fight against corruption in Nigeria’s North-East is a legal or institutional challenge, it is equally a moral, developmental, and security imperative. The region’s ongoing insurgency, humanitarian crises, and massive reconstruction efforts have created both urgent needs and significant resource flows. In such a context, corruption is not just an economic drain; it is a direct threat to peacebuilding, human dignity, and the prospects for long-term stability. The partnership between State Attorneys-General and the ICPC offers a unique opportunity to align legal authority with investigative capacity, policy influence with operational reach, and state-level insight with federal oversight. But for this partnership to achieve its full potential, it must be deliberate, coordinated, and sustained. It must be anchored in trust, guided by shared priorities, and reinforced by institutional mechanisms that survive political transitions. We must commit to joint intelligence-sharing, coordinated investigations, harmonised policies, and targeted public engagement. We must also prioritise the specific vulnerabilities of the North-East, monitoring humanitarian funds, scrutinising reconstruction projects, and ensuring transparent security sector expenditures.

The call to action is clear: let this roundtable be the starting point for an enduring alliance, one that speaks with one voice against corruption, acts with unity of purpose, and delivers justice that is both seen and felt. Together, let us build the foundations of integrity on which the North-East’s recovery and Nigeria’s future can securely rest.

I urge this roundtable to move beyond discussions into formal commitments, concrete timelines, and measurable outcomes. Let us agree today on a framework that unites our mandates, aligns our strategies, and delivers sustainable corruption prevention for the people we serve. As the saying goes, *“When spiders unite, they can tie down a lion.”* By uniting the legal force of the State Attorneys-General with the investigative and preventive power of the ICPC, we can tie down the lion of corruption in Nigeria’s North-East.

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