

CEP Magazine – September 2018 Meet Ibrahim Yeku, CCEP-I

an interview by Adam Turteltaub

Ibrahim Yeku (yekuduke@yahoo.com) was interviewed in April 2018 by Adam Turteltaub (adam.turteltaub@corporatecompliance.org), Vice President, Strategic Initiatives & International Programs at SCCE & HCCA.

Ibrahim Yeku, Barrister & Solicitor, Solola & Akpana, Old GRA, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

AT: Tell us about your background as an attorney and what led you into compliance.

IY: I started my career in legal practice with the Rivers State Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Port Harcourt Rivers State, Nigeria. This was during the compulsory national youth service as a state draftsman in the Department of Legal Drafting, where I provided assistance to senior state counsel in reviews of public-private partnership contracts, laws, regulations, bills and other instruments referred to the Attorney General of the State by the Rivers State House of Assembly. In the course of my national service, I worked closely with state counsel who were members of the State Contract Management Committee. I was exposed to various types of contracts between the private sector and the state government. The most important lesson I learned was the psychology of government when negotiating contracts and the key considerations for agreeing to certain terms contained in state contracts.

It was really fun preparing draft opinions and reports on why certain proposals would deliver the mandate of the government and why some might not work. Another interesting area of my work experience was legislative drafting and reviews, which entails, among other things, comparing proposed laws (bills) with existing laws. More often than not, I came across situations where certain sections of the proposed laws were in conflict with other existing laws. The diligence required here is to ensure that there are no conflicting provisions within the law, or in any other law and proper cross-referencing is made where necessary.

While at the Nigerian Law School, I registered a business name Legal Phobia which deals with legal audit, legal compliance checks, legal impact assessment reports, due diligence, and debt and assets recovery. When I established Legal Phobia in 2009, compliance was not popular in Nigeria and Africa. Legal Phobia was born out of the motivation to see corporations work within the ambit of the law and enjoy competitive advantages in soliciting for jobs through the demonstration of compliance with laws and regulations. I was unable to do much with Legal Phobia because I needed to acquire the requisite skills. When the opportunity came my way, I joined the law firm of Solola & Akpana in 2011 after one year of national youth service. This was the beginning of a total transformation for me. The work environment at Solola & Akpana is compatible with my vision and aspiration. Having the opportunity to be exposed to various transactions across different sectors and learning under the supervision of renowned legal experts in Nigeria were huge opportunities for me. Mr. Tope Solola and Mr. Iboroma Akpana have both made an immeasurable contribution to the success of my practice as a lawyer. Solola & Akpana shaped my idea of legal practice and helped marry my compliance ambition with legal practice. The firm has been of help in sustaining my ambition through the kind of services it provides to clients. Having started regulatory compliance practice at Solola & Akpana, I gained an appreciation of the obligations imposed on corporations by the law.

AT: Give us an overview of your practice and some of the challenges clients typically face.

IY: The focus of my practice, as it is for my firm, is adding value to the business processes of our clients. In the past nine years, I have primarily focused on commercial litigation, transition advisory, and compliance. In the course of my transaction work, I have advised major transnational companies and foreign enterprises operating and seeking to operate in Nigeria on key provisions of Nigerian laws that may impact their operations. I have represented clients before various courts in Nigeria, defended trademark claims and oppositions, and structured commercial transaction between state governments and private investors in key infrastructural projects, amongst others.

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