

GOMBE STATE JUDICIARY

**HANDBOOK
ON
SMALL CLAIMS COURT**

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The Small Claims Court Handbook is a guide that shows you how to:

- Start your case
- File a Simple Debt Recovery Claim in the Small Claims Court
- Find the right Court for your Claim.
- Obtain and enforce your Judgment
- This handbook is available online at the Gombe State Judiciary website www.judiciary.gm.gov.ng

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What is Small Claim?

A small claim is a claim for money in any simple debt recovery with value not exceeding N3,000,000 (Three Million Naira), excluding interest and costs.

Where can you file a Small Claims Action?

A Small Claims Action can be filed in the Small Claims Court Registry located in the designated Magisterial District.

It can be filed where you or the person(s) or corporation you are claiming from lives, works or carry on business in any part of Gombe State.

What is a Small Claims Court?

It is a Special Court where you can sue for debt or liquidated money demand not exceeding N3,000,000(Three Million Naira). You cannot sue for rent or possession, or for pain or suffering or to enforce a promise in a Small Claims Court.

If your Claim is more than N3,000,000 (Three Million Naira) you cannot split your Claim into smaller Claims to get around the limit of the sum of N3,000,000 (Three Million Naira)

Benefits of a Small Claims Court:

- It is cheap and easy to use
- You do not need to have a lawyer
- The Court will notify the person you are suing for you.

Who can use a Small Claims Court?

- An individual who is eighteen years and above.
- An individual, who is less than eighteen years, or person of unsound mind, can sue through his/her Guardian
- Partnership, Association or Corporation.

What to do before filing a Small Claims action

Write a Letter of Demand as in FORM SCC1

How do I start my Small Claims action?

By filling a Complaint Form and Summons as in Forms SCC 2 and SCC 3.

Where do I get the Court Forms?

You can get the Forms from the Small Claims Registry in every designated Magisterial District or online at the Gombe State Judiciary website.

What information will I need to fill on the form?

Your particulars as the Claimant and the particulars of the person you are suing as well as a description of the claim. It is advisable to follow the instructions on the forms.

What if I do not have the Defendant's correct, legal name?

You can still start your case. You can use any name by which the person you are suing is known or any name that the business or person operating the business uses. But once you get the correct information, you must inform the Court. (If you do not provide the correct information, it will be very hard for you to recover your money judgment if you win).

What do I do with my completed Form?

It should be submitted to the Registrar or any officer of the Court in charge of the Small Claims Registry in the District court where the claim is filed.

Do I have to pay to file my Claim?

Yes. You must pay the Court fees as assessed at the Small Claims Registry.

Can the person I am suing sue me?

Yes, the person you are suing can file Small Claims Counterclaim against you. In the Small Claims Court, a Counter claim can only be for money and the limit is N3,000,000 (Three Million Naira). The person suing you can also admit a part or the whole of the claim and Judgment may be entered on his admission.

How will I know if the Defendant files a Counter-Claim?

If the Defendant files a Counter Claim, he must do so within seven (7) days from the date of service of the Summons on him. You shall

then be served by a Bailiff or any officer of the court.

If the Defendant sues me will my case be adjourned?

If you receive notice of the Counterclaim before the date of your trial, you must be ready to present your claim and defend against the Counter Claim on the date of the trial. The case will not be adjourned because the defendant sues you except if you were not served with the Defendant's Counterclaim before the date of the trial.

Who tells the person I am suing about my claim?

The Small Claims Court's Bailiff or any other officer of the Court will serve the Defendant the Summons personally. If the Defendant cannot be served personally, the Bailiff will file an Affidavit or Certificate of Non-Service and the Court or the Registrar or an Officer of the Small Claims Registry will inform you of the need to file an application for another mode of service.

What information will the Summons give the defendant?

The Summons tells the Defendant:

- What the Claim is about.
- How much money you are claiming from him.
- The date of your Small Claims Court trial. You cannot have a trial if the Defendant is not served.

What do I do on the day of my trial?

- Get to the Court house early
- Find your Small Claims Courtroom.

How will I know when my case starts?

- The Court Registrar will call your case and your name.
- Stand up and answer to your name
- If you are ready, the trial will start.

Can I adjourn my trial?

You can ask the Court to adjourn your trial for a good reason only once during the period of your trial. If you are the defendant, you can ask the Court to adjourn your trial for a good reason only once during the period of your trial.

How do I ask the Court to adjourn my trial?

By sending a letter to the Court and to the other party asking the Court to adjourn the case. This must be done before the date of trial. The Court may grant your application for an adjournment only once and in exceptional circumstances.

If you or someone else on your behalf cannot come to Court on the trial date, the Court will read your letter but may not adjourn the case if the Court is not satisfied with your reason and your case may be dismissed.

If you are the Defendant and you do not appear at the trial, the Court may give Judgment against you.

How do I get ready for my trial?

Before your trial, get all the evidence that supports your claim including:

- Written agreements, letters, photos or other documents
- Bills, receipts, invoices, cheques etc.

Can I have witnesses at my trial?

Yes, you can have witnesses at your trial. A witness can be;

- You
- Someone who knows something about your Claim.
- Someone with a lot of knowledge and experience about your claim (an expert witness).

What if a witness does not want to testify or give me documents that are relevant to my case?

You can ask the Small Claims Court for witness summons that can compel your witness(es) to

- Bring documents or records to the Court or
- To testify at the trial.

Who serves the Order of Court on the Witness?

The Bailiff or other officers of the Small Claims Court will serve the Court Order on the witness.

Do I have to pay the Witness?

If the witness is to testify on your behalf in the case, you will have to pay the cost of bringing him to Court.

Is there a dateline to serve the Subpoena?

The Subpoena must be served before the date the witness is expected to testify or produce a document.

What if I or my witness(es) do not speak English?

You must inform the Court on the first day of your appearance in Court that you do not speak or understand English and inform the Court of the language you or your witness(es) understand. The Court will assign an interpreter to you when you or your witness(es) needs one.

Can the Defendant and I agree to settle our case before the trial?

Yes, the parties are also encouraged to contact one another with a view to settling the matter amicably. However, the Court must be informed on the date of the trial if the case is settled by agreement before that date. The Court may accordingly enter a Consent Judgment.

What happens if one side does not come to Court?

If you are the Claimant and you are not in Court when the Registrar calls the case, the Court will dismiss your case.

If the Defendant is not in Court when the Registrar of the Court calls the case, the Court will hear your case without the Defendant. If you show enough evidence, you may win your case.

What happens during my trial?

As the Claimant, you will first take an Oath to tell the truth and then you will tell your side of the story and show the Court your documents and other evidence. It is up to you to prove your claim. Next the Defendant may ask you questions about the case.

If you have witnesses, they will take an Oath and testify. The Defendant may ask them questions too. After you have concluded your case, the Defendant will testify.

The Defendant takes an Oath and tells his/her side of the story. The Defendant can show documents and other evidence and witnesses can testify on his/her behalf. Before the Defendant's witnesses

testify, they must also take an Oath to tell the truth. You may ask the Defendant and the Defendant's witness(es) questions.

Who will decide my case?

The Court will decide when the trial is over. The Court does not usually make a decision right away. In most cases, the Court needs some time to consider your case and that of the Defendant. The Court will then deliver Judgment.

What if I do not agree with the Court's decision?

If you do not agree with the Court's decision, you can ask the High Court of Gombe State to review your case. This is called an Appeal.

Do I have to pay for an Appeal?

Yes, you would have to pay a fee for a Notice of Appeal. You also have to pay for the compilation of the Records of Appeal to the High Court.

Do I need a Lawyer to ask for an Appeal?

No, but if you hire one, you will have to pay the cost of a Legal Practitioner in addition to the cost of filing an Appeal.

Is there a deadline to ask for an Appeal?

Yes, you must file a Notice of Appeal within 14 days of the Court's Judgment?

If I am the Defendant in the Claim or the Counterclaim and the Court gives judgment against me, do I have to pay the Judgment debt if I ask for an Appeal?

This will be at the discretion of the Trial Court who usually sets the conditions of Appeal.

How do I get the money if I win?

If you win your case and there is no guarantee that the Defendant will pay you willingly and if the Defendant does not pay, there are legal steps that you can take to enforce or get your Judgment sum.

Who will enforce my Judgment?

There are officers of small claims court specifically assigned to enforce Judgment.

How can I find the court officers to enforce my Judgment?

You meet the registrar of the small claims court to direct you on how

to enforce your Judgment.

What do I say to the officers to enforce my Judgment?

Give the registrar your small claims suit number or names of the parties and say that you want to ask the court for an execution/enforcement.

An execution is a court order that allows the Sheriff or officer of the Court to take the property or money of the person you sued to get your judgment paid.

Do I have to pay court officers for Judgment enforcement?

Yes, the small claims registry will determine the amount you will have to pay for the process of enforcement. The payment is to be made to the registry.

How will the court officers know what assets the Judgment debtor has?

You must find out the Judgment Debtor's assets and give the information to the Sheriff or court officer.

ISSUED AT GOMBE THIS 22nd DAY OF December, 2023

**SIGNED
HON. JUSTICE HALIMA S. MOHAMMED
CHIEF JUDGE GOMBE STATE**

