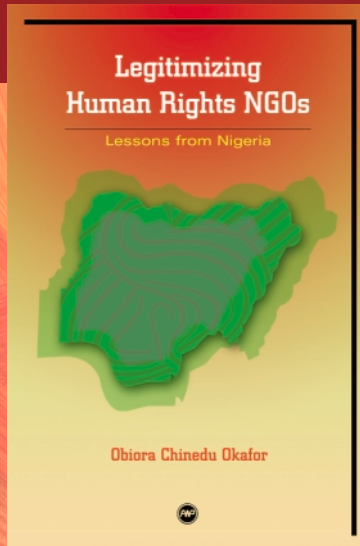


Legitimizing Human Rights NGOs

Lessons from Nigeria



Obiora Chinedu Okafor is an Associate Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School of York University, Toronto, Canada. He previously taught law at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and the University of Nigeria, and served as a Visiting Scholar at Harvard Law School's Human Rights Program. He holds a Ph.D from the University of British Columbia and has been published widely in learned journals.

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The book empirically demonstrates the claim that if human rights NGOs in Nigeria are to popularly legitimate themselves, and therefore achieve much more influence, then almost all of them must undergo a fundamental re-orientation in their institutional forms, conceptual approaches, and activist methods. The book also suggests that given the available evidence, its conclusions are likely to serve as a guide for optimizing the influence of other human rights NGO communities in Africa, and even beyond. In the end, the book argues that nothing less than a transition to a mass movement model will ensure the popular legitimization of most Nigerian and African human rights NGO communities.

More specifically, the book argues that most of these NGOs will need to do almost all of the following if they are to overcome the popular legitimization crisis that they currently face and begin to acquire the desired levels of social influence within the polity:

- Cultivate a broad based and active membership that is sourced from the grassroots, and that exercises far more real power within the relevant organization.
- Democratize much more deeply their internal decision-making structures and operations, in a way that cedes far more real institutional power to the membership.
- Democratize much more deeply the process through which they formulate and prioritize their activist agendas.
- Seek to overcome their generally elitist and urban-centered institutional character by working much more actively with and within the majority rural population of Nigeria.
- Take economic/social rights activism, gender issues, rural issues, and minority/environmental rights activism much more seriously.
- Seek to source much more of its resources locally. The more these NGOs are able to raise funds from their local constituencies, the more they will secure the commitment of the ordinary people.

Africa World Press • P.O. Box 1892, Trenton, NJ 08607

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