

Organizing and Mobilizing Techniques and Strategies for Human Rights Defenders in Nigeria

Eze Chris Akani

The 21st century has become the age of rights. This was made possible because of the improvement and scientific revolution in the areas of communication, movement of persons, goods and services. This phenomenal development has broken all artificial, national and geographical boundaries. Indeed, we are all journalists living in compressed world often referred to as the global village. Unfortunately, these developments have heralded a trail of human rights, disrespect and suppression. This has necessitated the need for the training and retraining of Human Rights Defenders. They would ensure that human rights as an inalienable concept are not treated according to the whims of rulers and persons. This study seeks to examine how the human rights defenders can within the epoch of globalization ensure that people are not unnecessarily denied of their rights. The method of data collection is primarily from secondary sources. These include a review of existing literature, United Nations human rights instruments, official bulletin, newspapers and magazines. We also visited some research institutes such as the National Institute for International Affairs (NIIA) and the Claude Ake School of Government in the University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State. It was discovered that human rights in the 21st century, particularly in Nigeria has been needlessly violated. This is because of lingering human insecurity, popular ignorance, rising frustration due to rising unemployment and lack of Government political will to ensure good governance. We therefore, recommend that there should be a vigorous political education class to make people aware of their rights. Government should ensure that the protection of the rights of the people is mainstreamed in all their policies and programmes.

Keywords: Mainstreamed, Human rights defenders, Globalization, Human rights, Politics.

Author's Affiliation

Political Science Department, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuorlumeni, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Email: cherukei.akani@yahoo.com

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INTRODUCTION

It is great to be with Human Rights Defenders (HDRs) sharing pleasantries and reminiscences. Such an epoch-making opportunity only rekindles our hope for the future and determination for self- realization. More gratifying is the fact that this gathering is coming at a time in 2020, when we have been completely swept away by the rugged whirlpool of pirate politics, thus leaving the political landscape to be dictated by the jungle justice of survival of the fittest.

It is against this backdrop that the organizers of this workshop must be profusely commended for reigniting that spark of consciousness and awakening that propelled Nigerians to send the military junta (1985-1998) and their cronies out of the political arena. The consummation of that popular act reaffirms the determination and ruggedness of a people to free themselves from years of thralldom. This cannot be forgotten in the annals of Nigerian political history. We shall also not forget Nigerians who paid the supreme sacrifice in the defense of democracy, and for the untrammelled triumph of individual liberties.

Regrettably, since the so-called civil rule took off on May 29, 1999, nothing fundamental has changed from the anti-democratic past. In fact, many analysts are almost constrained to assert that the civilian regime with its populist claim is as decadent, corrupt and disrespectful of human rights as the discredited military era. It is important to state that after more than six decades of political independence, the Nigerian post-colonial state cannot provide the basic needs of the people. Poverty and leadership deficit continue to loom large, with democratic space shrinking. The reason for this woeful failure is not far-fetched. It can only be located in the disjointed, disarticulated incoherent, incapable of auto-centric growth and dependent political economy which was inherited from the colonial State (Ake, 1981). This colonial albatross was enlarged and overblown by the coterie of bourgeois class that took over political power from the colonialists. They were not focused, and united on the question of building a strong Nigerian state. Rather, they were more preoccupied with capturing power not only for political vendetta, but as an instrument for grand corruption legitimized with parochial sensibilities.

This explains the incessant hostility and Hobbesian character of political contest as demonstrated in the general elections from 1959 to 2019. Therefore, it is not strange that protection of human rights is a mirage, a dream in the imagination of the custodians of State power. Twenty-two years into the twenty-first century, despite its resource abundance, Nigeria is tightly trapped within the circuit of excruciating insecurity and violence. How can HRDs perform their functions within this environment? This is the focus of this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study relied solely on secondary sources because of its qualitative nature. These include a review of existing literature as they bear relevance to the study, newspapers, magazines, official bulletins and a visit to prominent research institutes in Nigeria such as the Centre for Black Arts and African Culture (CBAAC), Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), all in Lagos, and the Claude Ake School of Government, in the University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Organization, Mobilization and Human Rights

It would be apposite at this juncture to define some of the concepts we shall be dealing with in this paper, without which we shall be involved in aimless academic voyage. Apart from making it less stressful in comprehending the task before us, it will aid HRDs in the appreciation of their historical responsibilities.

To organize is the verb of the noun organization. It connotes a conscious activity to set things right preparatory for goal accomplishment. It is an integral part of administration. Thomas (2012) highlighted that it entails the development of the formal structure of authority through which the labour is subdivided, organised, and coordinated to achieve the specified purpose. The efficacy of any organization, in part, is determined by the level of organization. An essential part of administration is that it lays down the requisite structure and framework for a smooth implementation of programmes and policies. In fact, it can be seen as a pace-setter in the mobilization of human and material resources. But, it is important to state that for organization to achieve a reasonable level of success, it must have a leadership that is goal-oriented and committed to fertilizing capacity-enhance stand.

It is to give an 'orderly or organic structure, to arrange parts... so that it will work as a whole' (Cayne, 1992). Making all necessary arrangement is to preclude derailment and failure, because people do not organize in a vacuum or for fun, but to achieve a premeditated goal. Goal attainment becomes a cardinal principle of every organizational process. Hence, it involves working with people, planning and implementing strategies and popular empowerment. In this scenario, mobilization becomes a desideratum. Simply put, it is a means of preparing and encouraging people to take collective action on matters that concern them.

Organization is essentially a means of empowering the people to enable them to deal with the problems and issues of their environment. It can serve as an instrument to mobilize peoples' own resources for projects which can satisfy a wide variety of their needs. An essential attribute of these concepts is that they embody the process of popular empowerment, strengthens human capacity, provide opportunity for collective engagement and awareness creation. This is why a properly organized and mobilized mass is not only an enlightened people, but a thinking group whose consciousness is awake at all times. Mobilizing people is the process of assisting a community or groups of people to identify shared challenges or objectives, to mobilize resources, and to design and execute strategies for achieving their goals.

Organizing and mobilizing people may seem to be an

all-comer's affair, but it must be noted that considering the fickle-mindedness of human nature, and the nature of politics, it is always an uphill task to mobilize for socio-political enlightenment. This is why special skill, systematic strategies and techniques have become a necessity. In this situation, the purpose of organizing and mobilizing people is for the defense, protection, promotion and enjoyment of human rights. Since human rights protection is the purpose of social mobilization, it will be better to comprehend the concept.

What Are Human Rights?

In social discourse of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, human rights have become a recurrent topic. According to Henkin (1990), this significance is because "Ours is the era of rights". Human right is the only political and moral concept that has achieved global recognition (Mutua, 1996). There is now an uncontested agreement that every man and woman from birth to death counts and is entitled to an irreducible core of dignity and integrity. In reality, the concept of human rights is the central concept in the world we have created and continue to shape (Henkin, 1990).

Therefore, a thorough knowledge of the notion is no longer negotiable. In fact, it is the right to the satisfaction of such basic requirements as food, housing, healthcare, and education... as well as the right to all civic and political liberty that constitute human rights (Cayne, 1992). Human rights are sturdy foundations necessary for societal survival and procreation. They are fundamental characteristics given to humanity by nature and cannot be rejected unless via fair legal procedure and outside of cultural relativism. They precede contemporary government and other human rules. This is due to the fact that the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the basis of liberty, justice, and peace in the world (Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, 2007). They are fundamental rights, which, as noted by Kapoor (2016), cannot be taken away by any legislative or government act and which are often outlined in a constitution. As a critical component of democracy, it is rooted on the enhancement and expansion of human dignity and happiness. As Pope John Paul stated "all these human rights taken together are in keeping with the substance of the dignity of the human being understood in its entirety not as reduced to one dimension only" (Gasiokwu, 2003). Ancient societies such as the Greek city-states and the Roman Empire inhibited individual liberties and freedoms because of the slave mode of production.

The Hammurabi code of 1772 BC, The Mosaic Ten commandments and other ancient instruments could be seen as an attempt to protect individual freedoms from tyranny. It was from the thirteenth century that concerted efforts were made to institutionalize the promotion and protection of individual rights. This was how the historic Magna Carta of

1215 came into existence. This was followed by the Kurukan Fuga Charter of 1236 in the Mali Empire. From the fifteenth century onwards, capitalist development needed a group of free individuals to sell their labour power for production in return for wages. This resulted to a stern struggle against feudal orthodoxy and Divine Rights of kings. The struggle was epitomized in the philosophical writings of John Locke, J.J (1632-1704), Rousseau (1712-1778), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Charles Montesquieu (1689-1755), and even J.S. Mill (1804-1873). These philosophers created a socio-political milieu for the acceptance of capitalism. This milieu was anchored on the rights of man, and consequently snowballed into two major revolutions, the 1776 American Declaration of Independence and the 1789 French Revolution. The 1776 Declaration strongly noted that;

"We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights Governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute Government laying its foundation on such principles and 'organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem likely to affect their safety, and happiness..."

In the same vein, the French Revolution led to the Declaration of the Right Man and Citizens on August 26, 1789. Articles 1 to 2 of the Declaration noted that men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions maybe founded on the general good. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression'

Locke (2004) noted that the "liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man...". He went on to say that human being '...by nature are all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of his estate, and subjected to the political power of another without his consent' (Locke, 2004). This is the basis of the social contract between the rulers and the ruled.

Rousseau (1968), stated that "man was born free and he is everywhere in chains. Those who think themselves the masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they" (Rousseau, 1968). This innate freedom of man prompted

Obaseki (1992) to assert that human rights are rights inherent in humans as rational, free-willing beings that are neither granted nor susceptible of being limited by positive legislation. In fact, life becomes detestable, unproductive, slavish, and insecure when these rights are not enjoyed to the fullest. As a vital tool to check the emergence of tyranny and totalitarian rule, Immanuel Kant stated in 1951 that "there can be no stability in any system which is based on the evil and weakness in man's nature", the idea of human rights will eventually come to win the day" (Kant, 1991). It must win the day in this epoch of globalization because it is 'universal, nonpartisan, 'accultural', a historical, and non-ideological' (Mutua, 1996).

The significance of these rights is reflected in the collection of United Nations Covenants on Human Rights dating back to 10th December 1948, therefore enlarging the International Bill of Rights (IBRs). Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights declares, "All people are born free and equal in rights". They are gifted with reason and conscience and should behave towards one another in a brotherly manner. The possession of reason and conscience cannot be infringed upon or denied since they are holy qualities (Gasiokwu, 2003). More intriguing is the Preamble of the Declaration, which states that the peoples of the United Nations have reaffirmed their belief in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women, and have resolved to advance social progress and higher standards for large freedoms. In the same vein, article 5 of the Vienna Declaration of 1993 also states that "all human rights are universal, indivisible interdependent and interrelated". Therefore, no aspect of the rights can be preserved or honoured more than the others. From the above, it is clear that human rights are rights possessed only by human beings which cannot be alienated from them unless through a due process of law. But people must be made to be aware of these rights, especially in a polity where governance is the exclusive preserve of a few, and where popular participation in social matters is constrained by institutional bottle-necks as in Nigeria.

As we noted, Nigeria is a post-colonial state that is presided over by a bourgeois class. This class is 'unhegemonic' and believes in the occupation of state power for economic consolidation. This has been the trend since October 1, 1960 and it largely accounts for the high incidence of prebendalism, grand corruption, and combative electoral struggle. The absence of a hegemonic bourgeoisie, grounded in a solid and independent economic base and successfully engaged in private accumulation of capital, has transformed politics into material struggle (Taylor, 2008). It is, therefore, not strange that fissiparous tendencies and centripetal forces have come to typify the country's social realities. All these border on inequitable distribution of

Table 1. South-Eastern Nigeria Death from 2012 to 2021.

S/No	Year	No. of Death
1.	2012	92
2.	2013	68
3.	2014	22
4.	2015	50
5.	2016	225
6.	2017	222
7.	2018	160
8.	2019	114
9.	2020	110
10.	2021	647
Total		1,660

Source: Elebeke (2022)

resources accruing to the country and near extinction of the basic needs of the populace.

The Stark Reality

The Niger Delta generates 90 percent of Nigeria's oil and more than 75 percent of the country's export revenues, yet relatively little of the region's riches has been employed to benefit its inhabitants. Nigeria has the second-lowest per-capita oil-export revenues in the world, estimated at US\$ 212 per person in 2004 - a statistics that compares poorly to the 1980 figure of US\$589 per person, a decrease of more than 50 percent. Taylor (2008) noted that at 48: In actuality, Nigeria has become a debtor and beggar state, as well as a death zone governed by shallow and opportunistic politicians.

Unemployment which has risen to 33% and inflation 18% in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022) have combined to pile up excruciating pressure on the polity. The after math is that there is a rising frustration of the youth and the growing 'confusion of agendas' of the Nigerian state. Most surprising is that the apostles of bloodletting boldly walk away without facing the law. By 2022 Nigeria has more than 2.9 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (UNHCR, 2020). In the first quarter of 2022, 3,119 were killed, out of this 1,743 were from Niger, Zamfara and Kaduna (Premium Times, 2022; The Cable, 2022). According to report from Center for Democracy and Development (CDD), in the South East Nigeria, more than 1,660 people were killed from 2012 to 2021 (Table 1). It is within this corrupt-ridden, neo-patrimonial, disrespect of rule of law and unstable political terrain that the HRDs will perform their duty.

Who are the Human Rights Defenders?

Human Rights Defenders are persons and organizations

devoted to the preservation and promotion of the rights of others. They believe in the universality of human rights and seek the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. They exclusively do nonviolent acts. In other words, HRDs might be seen as peacemakers and mediators of conflict. Section 5 of the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, which came into effect in June 2004, defines Human Rights Defenders as people, organizations, and societal institutions that promote and preserve generally acknowledged human rights and basic freedoms. Additionally, they advocate and preserve the rights of groups such as indigenous populations.

Typically, they are referred to as human rights advocates. They have devoted themselves to safeguarding our mutually guaranteed dignity and often make the ultimate sacrifice in carrying out their duties. The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Resolution 53/144 on March 8, 1999, "reaffirming the significance of observing the purpose and principles of the United Nations Charter for the promotion and preservation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people throughout the globe!" This Resolution was the impetus for the "Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms." Article 1 of the Declaration, stated that "everyone has the right to advocate and fight for the preservation and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels, both individually and in conjunction with others".

The UNDHRs is seen as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote, respect for these rights and freedoms and progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of member states themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction (Olanmi, 2010).

These efforts not only demonstrate the prominence and relevance attached to United Nations Bill of Rights, but enjoy every human being to show commitment in the defense and promotion of these rights within his/her capacity. In actuality, we are all human rights defenders, as mandated by the United Nations, since article 5 of the March 8, 1999 Declaration said that everyone has the right, individually and collectively, at the national and international levels to:

- a) To gather or congregate in a peaceful manner;
- b) To organize, join, and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations, or groupings.
- c) To interact with non-governmental and inter-governmental groups.

This has given a stamp of global validity to the work of HRDs. They are not limited by territorial distinctions, ethnic boundaries, racial group or religious affiliation. Violation of human rights of any kind irrespective of the persons and institutions involved is within their jurisdiction. Their selfless endeavours to the rights of the defenseless have made them to be called Citizen's Defenders. According to article 4 of the European Union Guidelines, their primary tasks include documenting human rights breaches and providing legal, psychological, medical, or other help to victims of such violations. In addition, they oppose cultures of impurity that help to conceal systematic and recurring violations of human rights and basic freedoms, and they mainstream human rights culture and knowledge among human rights defenders at the national, regional, and international levels. While these functions may look simple on appearance, in reality they are laden with risk; involving, assaults, abduction, arrest, unlawful detention, intimidation and even death. Many HRDs in Nigeria have tales of woes and painful ordeals to tell. Some have been forgotten and remain unsung. Considering the prevailing anti-democratic character of the Nigerian State, and the attendant risk involved, HRDs at all levels must be systematic, diplomatic, and thorough and have a full knowledge of their political terrain in the performance of their social responsibilities. Therefore, they must first of all be genuine defenders. In other words, whoever wants to be in the fold of HRDs must first and foremost be genuinely and personally committed on the work. The interest and desire must be born out of a conviction to engage in a selfless work for humanity. Such person must be ready to happily encounter painful ordeals, and it is expected that they must be accepted and endured with enviable equanimity. It must not be an avenue for primitive accumulation of wealth or flamboyance for selfish ego. Indeed, they must represent the quintessence of the society and epitomize what they abhor in words and deeds. Having been convinced to take part in this onerous task, an aspiring HRDs must begin to acquaint himself/herself with almost all the United Nations International Bill of Rights including the UNDHRs, the International Humanitarian Law and the Covenant and Protocol on Terrorism.

The importance of this exercise is to be able to educate other people who may not be aware of their rights. After all you cannot give what you do not have. HRDs as trainers must devise a means of simplifying the hard facts and truths of human rights to the grassroots. In most cases manuals and booklets can be produced for easy comprehension,

especially in the language of the community.

In addition, HRDs must discover their constituency, size and constraints. This will assist them in designing their political education classes at agreed intervals. It should be done in such a manner that it becomes part and parcel of the daily routine of the grassroots. This will circumvent a situation where an initial spark of interest is allowed to fade away. It is important to emphasize that internal cohesion and a sense of unity must be a recurring slogan, for sustenance. Considering the global wane on human rights agenda, HRDs must develop a sharper critical self-evaluation and objectivity. Efforts must be made for the provision of a library at the grassroots where people can freely visit to read and enlighten themselves on human rights matters. This is extremely important because almost all the 774 Local Government Areas in the country do not have a library facility that can ignite a sense of scholarship. Without the provision of this amenity, the business of mobilization will become a fleeting illusion. As the conscience of the society, HRDs must not falter to express their feelings and voices on any abuse of rights in any part of the world. In any State where there is an absence of the critical spirit in the attitude of the citizens to their rulers, the promotion of rights is a difficult matter (Laski, 2004). They must allow the efflorescence of their critical spirit by criticizing obnoxious policies of government. The development of a critical spirit makes training and re-training a necessity. It drives away ignorance because education equips the holder with some inestimable skills and 'makes a people easy to govern but difficult to enslave' (Adewumi, 1988).

CONCLUSION

HRDs are indispensable in the promotion and protection of human rights. It is therefore, important that they should devise appropriate measures and techniques to organize and mobilize people for the knowledge of human rights to blossom. However, in carrying out their functions, they are faced with many difficulties and constraints. Realizing the degree of challenges HRDs face, the EU Guidelines in article 11 mandated EU Missions to unreservedly support and encourage the work of HRDs. 'They are enjoined to visit Human Rights Defenders in custody, under house arrest and attending their trials as observers.

They are also to "provide, where appropriate, conspicuous acknowledgement to human rights defenders and their efforts, including... visits or invitations for such reasons as the presentation of awards they have won". All of these provide HRDs with support and motivation. The United Nations Declaration of March 8, 1999 also requires nations to preserve, promote, and implement all human rights, and to guarantee that all individuals under their control may enjoy all social, economic, political, and other rights and freedoms. In

light of this, article 14 (1 to 2) stipulates that the Nigerian Federal Government must be built on the values of democracy and social justice. The Nigerian people own sovereignty, from which the government derives all of its power and authority. In conclusion, therefore, it must be stated that the task before HRDs is potentially risky. Networking with other organizations whose views and actions are not repugnant to human rights becomes a desideratum. Perhaps this informed the establishment of the office of the Special Representative later Rapporteur through resolution 2000/61 of the United Nations, on Human Rights. HRDs are assured that they are not alone in the performance of their duties. Therefore, they must be consistent, committed and conscious in the defence of human rights.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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