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Amnesty International and the Challenges of Promoting Human Rights in Nigeria, 2015–2025

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Abstract

This study examined Amnesty International and the challenges associated with promoting human rights in Nigeria from 2015 to 2025. The study was anchored on Constructivism Theory and employed both primary and secondary sources of data, with primary information obtained through interviews. The findings revealed that Amnesty International adopts various strategies, including research, advocacy, and public mobilization, to address human rights violations and injustices. The organization conducts comprehensive and carefully verified investigations into alleged human rights abuses committed by governments, corporations, and other actors worldwide. These investigations involve multiple sources and techniques, including reports, surveys, interviews, and digital technologies. Furthermore, Amnesty International seeks to influence policymakers and relevant authorities to uphold and protect human rights through lobbying, public campaigns, awareness programmes, and legal interventions. Despite these efforts, the study found that Amnesty International encounters considerable challenges in Nigeria, including measures allegedly adopted by government authorities to restrict its advocacy activities. Such measures reportedly include legislative initiatives aimed at limiting organizational operations and the alleged sponsorship of local non-governmental organizations to organize protests against international civil society groups and identify operational vulnerabilities. Based on these findings, the study recommended that Amnesty International should strengthen its public image management strategies and establish constructive relationships with the Nigerian government and other relevant stakeholders, particularly in contexts where the organization is perceived as promoting Western ideological interests. The study further recommended expanding grassroots awareness and public education initiatives across developing countries, particularly Nigeria, to improve local understanding of Amnesty International's objectives and activities. This approach is essential because relying exclusively on top-down human rights advocacy may limit meaningful community participation. Therefore, local populations should be adequately informed about the organization's principles and provided with accessible opportunities for engagement in human rights promotion and protection.

Keywords: *Amnesty International, Challenges, Human, Protection, Rights and Nigeria.*

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) has a prominent role in the promotion and protection of human rights, having enacted a range of declarations, conventions and international treaties to respond to each of the various types of human rights abuses and violations. One of the most basic instruments is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948. This historic proclamation is a declaration of basic rights and freedoms that every person has a right to, regardless of country of origin, ethnicity, religion or other personal characteristics. The second key international tool is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966. The Covenant gives greater detail and safeguards the fundamental rights such as the right to due process, freedom from torture and slavery,

freedom of privacy, and freedom of movement. It also highlights the obligation of the state parties to respect, protect and realize these rights for everyone under their sovereignty and jurisdiction. Likewise, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) of 1984, expressly bans torture and requires the participating states to put in place effective measures for its prevention, investigation and punishment in their jurisdiction (Muslim, 2024).

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (now the African Union (AU)) in 1981 is a fundamental legal framework in Africa for the protection and promotion of human rights in the continent. The Banjul Charter, as it is known, outlines a detailed plan of action for civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and takes into account the differing historical and social situations in African societies. The Charter contains a number of fundamental rights, such as the right to life, freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence. The commitments in these provisions underscore the Charter's focus on safeguarding human dignity and ensuring that people are protected from human rights violations by non-state actors and state institutions (Slye, 2022).

The international human rights law, the regional human rights instruments, and the Nigerian Constitution place a duty on the Nigerian authorities to ensure the fundamental rights of all without distinction, including the right to life. However, Nigeria's human rights have continued to be marred by various serious violations and abuses. These include extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, violence against women and girls, restrictions on the freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, forced evictions, environmental pollution and lack of accountability for human rights violations. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is an important institutional mechanism to address and prevent violations of human rights in Nigeria. The Commission has been established under the National Human Rights Commission Act of 1995 and its functions are those relating to the promotion and protection of human rights through the monitoring, advocacy, investigation, advisory and consultative services and other activities.

Amnesty International is an international human rights organization that works for a world in which everyone has the rights and freedoms laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights conventions. It is a worldwide campaigning movement of individuals who campaign against human rights violations and promote the protection of basic freedoms. It was founded in 1961 in London by British lawyer Peter Benenson, who was inspired by the imprisonment of two Portuguese students for raising a toast to freedom. Amnesty International's primary goals are to stop and bring to light human rights abuses like torture, arbitrary arrest and execution, and to advocate for human rights as defined by the UDHR. Amnesty International is one of the leading international human rights organizations, and it works around the world through advocacy campaigns to promote and support the protection and recognition of these basic human rights. All of its activities are based on the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other recognised international human rights documents. Amnesty International mobilizes people and communities around the world to speak out against abuses, call for accountability and raise awareness and protection for human rights through a global network of supporters and activists (Amnesty International, 2023).

Amnesty International is present in more than 150 countries and territories around the world, and has over 2.2 million members, supporters and signatories in every country in which it operates. It is an independent, international non-governmental organization (NGO) with a non-partisan stance that is not subject to government control, political influence, economic interests and religious affiliation. Amnesty International is an autonomous democratic group which receives the bulk of its funds from membership subscriptions, voluntary donations and support from individual members around the world. It is implemented on a national level via national sections, local groups, individual members and human rights activists who conduct letter-writing campaigns, public demonstrations, government lobbying, and educational activities about human rights issues. In addition, the organization works with intergovernmental organisations like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court for the promotion of development, implementation and enforcement of international human rights standards and legal frameworks. It is guided by the principles of international solidarity, effective action for individual victims, global coverage, universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality, independence, democracy and mutual respect (Amnesty International, 2023).

The protection of fundamental human rights is provided for in the Federal Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, but the way it is implemented and protected is still very much a challenge. Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Philippines 1999 (as amended) provides for the various fundamental rights, among which are the right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, privacy and freedom from discrimination. Though the constitution protects certain human rights, Nigeria still suffers from

different forms of violation of human rights, such as rape, unlawful detention, extrajudicial killing, environmental degradation and other abuses. Political motives, terrorism and the operations of multinational companies, including in the Niger Delta area, have been linked to such offences. Other cases include religious extremism, ethnic intolerance and excessive force use by police and military, many of which have been inadequately investigated and met with impunity (Onwuazombe, 2025). The developments have raised concerns about Nigeria's adherence to the principles and obligations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which it has endorsed as a member of the United Nations. In light of the prevalence of human rights violations around the world and the ongoing struggles for human rights in Nigeria, it is crucial to investigate the work and efforts of human rights organisations, especially Amnesty International, in holding states to account and safeguarding fundamental rights.

Research Questions

In effort towards addressing the research problem of this study, the following questions are considered fundamental:

i. How effective have different strategies employed by Amnesty International been in combating human right violations in Nigeria?

ii. What are the challenges facing Amnesty International in their effort toward promoting human rights in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess Amnesty International and the challenges of promoting human rights in Nigeria (2015 – 2025). The specific objectives are as follows:

i. To ascertain how effective the different strategies employed by Amnesty International been in combating human right violations in Nigeria.

ii. To examine the challenges facing Amnesty International in their effort toward promoting human rights in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

The paradox of democratic governance and the problems engendered by human rights violations during Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and its implications for the principles of international human rights law, were investigated by Maza (2022), Babajide (2022), Yorgancıoğlu (2022) and Bakyil (2022). The study approach was qualitative with an in-depth desk review of the available literature and relevant documents. The result showed that, even with the continuous existence of democratic and civilian rule in Nigeria, consolidation of real democratic values and principles is not an easy task. This was traced to the continued incidence of human rights abuses in various shades in Nigerian society. The study also found that, international actors such as the United Nations, have failed to effectively prevent, address and sanction the violation of the human rights of Nigerians allegedly committed by Nigerian security forces, which has had a negative impact on the consolidation of democratic governance and the promotion of democratic values in Nigeria.

Today, while the Nigerian constitution and other government initiatives are geared towards ensuring respect for fundamental human rights, there are several different types of violations and abuses that are still taking place. The violations are committed at times by the public officials and institutions that have been vested with the power of governing the country and protecting the citizens. The study noted that public statements and official promises to safeguard human rights have not always led to effective action to prevent such violations. The researchers, therefore, noted the need to tackle the challenges if Nigeria's democratic governance is to be strengthened and consolidated. They called on the relevant institutions and stakeholders at the international, regional and national levels to put in place effective mechanisms to guarantee and ensure the fundamental rights and freedoms of everyone in Nigeria are always respected, protected and enforced in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

Likewise, Abubakar (2023) studied the problems faced by human rights protection and the incidence of human rights violations in Nigeria. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used and the primary data was collected by the researcher by administering questionnaires and interviews. The investigation investigated alleged human rights abuses by the Nigeria Police Force personnel, especially with regards to unlawful arrest and detention of persons. It also gave conceptual explanations on human rights and looked at the different threats faced by the protection of human rights in Nigeria, especially the persons in conflict with the law in the custody of security agencies. The results showed serious shortcomings in institutional facilities and pervasive failure to meet the minimum standards for the treatment and protection of detainees. The study also found a number of cases of human rights abuses in custodial institutions, with ongoing gaps in the administration of justice and the protection of fundamental rights.

Abubakar (2023) based on the findings, made the following recommendations to mitigate the problem of human rights violation and good governance in Nigeria. These included strengthening judicial independence, safeguarding press freedom, advancing democratic principles, increasing human rights education, and public awareness of human rights abuses. The existing studies, however, largely

focused on human rights abuses, institutional flaws and the problems of democracy in Nigeria, and only briefly considered the particular obstacles which Amnesty International faced in its work to advance and defend human rights. This shortcoming exposes a research gap in the area of the operational, political and institutional obstacles faced by Amnesty International in Nigeria. The current study thus endeavors to fill this void by exploring the difficulties that have been encountered by Amnesty in the pursuit of human rights protection in Nigeria, especially between 2015 and 2025.

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism Theory

Constructivism was propounded by Wedth (1992). Constructivism offers an alternative perspective on international organizations' strategies. It emphasizes the significance of social identities, norms, and institutions in shaping state behavior. According to constructivists, international organizations' responsibilities in socialization, norm establishment, and identity formation influence states' perceptions and actions regarding human rights. Constructivists maintain that international institutions are essential for the dissemination of human rights standards across nations and cultures. The objective of these organizations is to establish human rights as a universal principle. Notable constructivists such as Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) delineate the three phases of norm evolution emergence, cascade, and internalization. International organizations play a critical role in the emergence and cascade phases of norm development by advocating for new human rights standards and exerting pressure on states to adopt them to establish their legitimacy. States internalize norms, thereby integrating human rights into their identity and policymaking.

In their work on transnational networks, Keck and Sikkink (1998) emphasize that international organizations do not work alone but as part of transnational advocacy networks (TAN) that involve NGOs, activists, and international organizations working together to promote human rights values. These networks use strategies such as "naming and shaming" and direct involvement with global media to influence public opinion and pressure governments. TANs work by presenting human rights concerns in ways that appeal to both local and international audiences, then using these networks to influence state conduct and enforce human rights norms through social and moral pressure.

Constructivists maintain that human rights are not absolute but rather concepts that have developed over time. Social learning and peer pressure influence the adoption of human rights norms, according to Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999). International organizations are essential in the definition of human rights and the discourse surrounding them, as they are responsible for legitimizing them on a global scale. International organizations encourage states to adopt human rights standards for practical and symbolic reasons, as their international standing hinges on their adherence to these socially established principles.

Constructivists, who maintain that we generate our social reality, resolve this issue (Onuf 1989). Throughout their interactions and actions, actors (often influential figures, such as leaders and prominent individuals) continuously influence and, at times, entirely alter the fundamental nature of international relations. Constructivists maintain that what actors do in international relations, their interests, and the structures they operate in are defined by social norms and ideas rather than by objective or material conditions (Barkin, 2023). Constructivist reasoning asserts that certain social constructs, such as ideas, beliefs, norms, identities, or other interpretive filters, shape people's actions and perceptions of the world (Wagner, 2024). These social constructs have been the main theme of constructivist schools of thought for a long time (Wagner, 2024). These social constructs further help us as humans act to make the world what it is.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design. The study population comprised officials from seven selected organizations, namely Amnesty International Office, Abuja; Public Complaints Commission; Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Nigerian Military; Nigeria Police Force; Centre for Democracy and Development in Nigeria; and Berekete Family Human Rights Radio. The total target population consisted of 133 officials drawn from these institutions. A sample size of thirteen (13) respondents was selected using the sampling procedure attributed to Black and Champion (1976). Given the total population of 133, the researcher applied the recommended sampling proportion of 10%, resulting in approximately 13 respondents. Accordingly, in-depth interviews were conducted with thirteen participants. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents considered knowledgeable and capable of providing relevant information about the research objectives. Participants were deliberately selected from the identified institutions based on their experience and involvement in issues relating to human rights protection and advocacy.

Data for the study were obtained from two principal sources: primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected respondents. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol consisting of open-ended questions designed to obtain detailed information relevant to the objectives of the study. The interviews were conducted individually to allow participants to express their opinions, experiences, and perspectives on the subject

under investigation. Secondary data were obtained through the examination of existing records, reports, and relevant documents from different sources, including government institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and media publications. These materials included relevant legal instruments, court records, police reports, and publications issued by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Additional secondary information was sourced from local and international academic journals, newspapers, magazines, media organizations, government publications, reports from non-governmental organizations, and other relevant scholarly materials. Content analysis was adopted as the principal technique for examining and interpreting information obtained from both primary and secondary sources. This method enabled the researcher to identify, classify, and interpret recurring themes, patterns, and relevant issues emerging from the collected materials. Furthermore, significant features of the messages contained in the reviewed documents were identified, categorized, and examined, including the frequency with which particular themes and issues appeared. This approach provided a systematic basis for interpreting the evidence and drawing conclusions in relation to the objectives of the study.

Data Presentation

The qualitative primary data gathered from interviews is described in this section. Further, secondary data from secondary sources like related literature, papers, press releases, media reports, and the research records of AI supplement the data. This analysis was informed by two research questions. Given the sensitivities of the issue and the need to protect the participants from reprisal, the study coded and then pseudonymized the participants as, for example P1 for Participant 1 (the 13th Participant). Participants were asked questions to address the research topics of Amnesty and the difficulties of human rights promotion in Nigeria for the year 2015 - 2025. This aimed to provide transparency in data and analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Objective One: To ascertain how effective the different strategies employed by Amnesty International been in combating human right violations in Nigeria

Amnesty International is a prominent international organization focused on human rights, each with a distinct approach to advocating for individuals' rights and addressing violations worldwide. In instances of unjust arrests where individuals are detained without formal charges, organizations such as Amnesty International consistently hold authorities accountable for their actions. Amnesty International takes additional steps by collaborating with victims to initiate legal action against organizations and governments that have been investigated and found complicit in human rights abuses, a practice not undertaken by Human Rights Watch. There is an array of techniques which Amnesty International used in its campaign to promote and protect human rights. As stated by Bardarova Jakovley, Serafimova & Loteski (2023), these include the following:

Letter campaigns: One way that Amnesty International uses in promoting the human right is through letter campaigns. Here, personalised letters are signed and addressed to the government officials and policy makers in an attempt to coerce them to re-shape the laws for the sake of persons whose rights are violated as was the case with the letter submitted by Amnesty International in Nigeria to the Presidential Investigation Panel on the compliance of armed forces in observance of human right obligation and its rules of engagement. The letter also added that Amnesty International Nigeria had sent 66 letters to the Nigerian government from 2012-2017 and almost only received 15 responses (Amnesty International, 2023). Letter campaigns are very malleable and are based on the technological updates of information technologies such as new social media like the Facebook and Twitter sites: the already citizens and registered members of Amnesty International could access the platforms where they easily sign for letters and join the campaigns they wish. Support of Mass Public Demonstrations In fact, Amnesty International does not participate in a public demonstration as such but supports groups who demonstrate peacefully in search of human rights causes. In this regard, Amnesty International supports the activities of groups fighting for human rights goals such as freedom from any form of government abuse, the right to labour, etc. For instance, Amnesty Nigeria denounced the persecution of the protesting journalists in Nigeria and stated further that this undermines freedom of expression that is a prerequisite right of a democratic society such as Nigeria. Another was in the September 2019 protest calling for the release of the leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Zakzaky, arrested in December 2015 to stand trial. It was supported by Amnesty International (Sahara Reporters, 2023).

Targeted campaigns: It was applied with different means of communication (elements of mass media, news media when these organisations issue press releases, face-to-face communication, letters, communiqués, opinion leaders, etc.) to present authorities with the results of their investigations and also recommendations on the phenomenon or issue of the human right. Therefore, unlike letter campaigns, target campaigns are not intended to prevail pressure on the government or the decision makers

but to avail important information for good judgement and decision-making process. Over the years, Amnesty International has earned a unique reputation as one of the most reliable sources of useful information for leaders on human right issues around the world in reports written for every country where Amnesty International operates annually. In Nigeria, these yearly reports have been of service to the government and citizens to identify areas of human right violations and bring the attention of international bodies which goes a long way in upholding the human right and strong institution.

A number of studies have been identified to have examined the role and strategies of NGOs in promoting human rights. Marcinkutė (2021) identified a number of strategies to include that NGOs constantly assess human rights conditions in certain nations globally, particularly transnational NGOs like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The study argued that NGOs also oversee state compliance with their commitments under human rights law. They function as "watchdogs," offering an independent evaluation and analysis of the extent to which human rights are upheld. This monitoring facilitates the collection of data regarding human rights conditions both nationally and internationally, hence illuminating any issues.

Marcinkutė (2021) argued that NGOs collect information from multiple sources, including individuals who are victims, witnesses, and other human rights NGOs; newspapers; as well as through the examination of injuries and physical evidence and by observing trials and demonstrations. NGOs collect and distribute information regarding human rights issues to highlight existing problems to the public, authorities, and other stakeholders, thereby amplifying the concerns of often marginalized voices. The investigation, documentation, and dissemination of data by human rights NGOs are essential for highlighting rights violations to the public and the international community.

Marcinkutė (2021) further opined that NGOs utilize the information they collect, validate, and disseminate as a primary tool in lobbying governments for changes in human rights policy. NGOs, in their role as advocates, seek to influence government officials to make decisions that enhance the protection of human rights. The lobbying primarily occurs through NGO engagement with the negotiation or consultation processes regarding new human rights rules. NGOs lobby regional and international governmental bodies to act regarding states that violate human rights, which may be sanctions be it economic and or political.

NGOs, due to their understanding of human rights issues and their reputation for impartiality, are sometimes engaged in reconciliation and mediation processes (Marcinkutė 2021). They typically function as nonpartisan intermediaries, collaborating with opponents, facilitating negotiations, and assisting in identifying an acceptable solution for both sides. This is particularly relevant in conflict resolution involving ethnic minorities. Education on rights for people issues enhances the actual conditions of human rights by informing individuals of their rights, thereby increasing the likelihood of their assertion. NGOs disseminate information regarding human rights broadly and on specific topics. They conduct courses, publish materials, and organise events such as seminars and round tables.

The study concluded by arguing that the primary strategy employed by human rights NGOs to safeguard human rights remains the "mobilisation of shame," commonly referred to as the "naming and shaming" approach. This strategy posits that the collection and dissemination of information regarding a country's human rights records and abuses will compel the government to alter its conduct, thereby enhancing its adherence to international standards pertaining to human rights.

Training of Local Groups: Amnesty International has contributed to capacity-building initiatives by training local groups to promote peace, maintain stability, and strengthen the protection of human rights within society. During the Niger Delta crisis, the organization's programmes reportedly included transformational training initiatives involving education and vocational skills development to support the reintegration of former militants into society (Uddin, 2023). These training programmes aim to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and institutional capacity of local organizations to promote and protect human rights more effectively. Furthermore, such training sessions provide opportunities for Amnesty International and local human rights activists to establish collaborative relationships, enhance coordination, and facilitate the effective exchange of information and data.

Provision of Human Rights Education to Citizens: Amnesty International recognises that for the human rights to be defended successfully, the citizens need be well aware of their basic rights. An informed citizen is better placed to identify infractions and act accordingly to safeguard and defend their rights. To this end, Amnesty International develops different forums where citizens are educated about the human rights that apply under their national constitutions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also educates people on reporting human rights abuses and seeking remedies. These programs are disseminated via the organization's website and networks of volunteers in many countries. These materials and platforms could also be accessed by people and

communities in Nigeria.

In his recent study, Ivanytskyi (2024) highlighted various roles and strategies employed by NGOs to advocate for human rights. The study contended that NGOs directly offer support to those who have experienced human rights violations through many means, including humanitarian relief, protection, vocational training, legal assistance, or discussions regarding litigation. Ivanytskyi (2024) opined that NGOs gather credible data regarding instances of human rights violations and governments frequently circumvent commitments under ratified international accords due to the public's lack of awareness regarding the outcomes of their policies. The accumulation of such data as well as its application to enhance the transparency of governmental human rights records is essential for holding perpetrators accountable, frequently employed by non-governmental organisations to exert pressure on governments and the general public by highlighting cases that resonate with a fundamental sense of justice (Ivanytskyi, 2024).

NGOs also execute campaigns and lobbying through the following strategies: a) Initiatives to dispatch thousands of letters globally to government officials b) public demonstrations or actions engaging mass media; c) distribution of information through mass media and online platforms; d) submission of shadow reports to UN human rights monitoring entities to inform them about the actual human rights situation in a specific country. Ivanytskyi (2024) noted that some prominent NGOs facilitate informal discussions or briefings for officials from the government and also conduct educational initiatives on human rights through public awareness and instructional activities.

Lobbying: It is an organised and conscious attempt to apply pressure on legislators and other public as well as private leaders in support of a course (human right). One of the main tactics of Amnesty International is lobbying. The first lobbying action in Nigeria was the opening of an office in Abuja. A previous director of Amnesty International Nigeria said the office would allow them to lobby more strongly, to scream louder for human rights abuses, and to bring research and analyses of such crimes to bear faster than before.

Naming and Shaming: The "naming and shaming" method is also a common tactic used by Amnesty International in its advocacy for and protection of human rights worldwide. This is a strategy that seeks to publicize and denounce their human rights abuses to hurt their reputation and put pressure on the institutions concerned to correct their abuses. Amnesty International Nigeria has adopted this by making public the names of alleged human rights violators, including the security institutions and government agencies. The organization had made public allegations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment by the Nigeria military to the public in June 2019, which it said violated the fundamental human rights of the victims. The organisation also cited a lack of justice for torture victims and that the judiciary has not taken action against the culture of impunity. Amnesty also urged the Nigerian authorities to investigate the death of three members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) in police custody in the country on 5 August 2019. The organization aims to highlight abuses, hold perpetrators accountable and deter further human rights violations through these naming and shaming exercises.

In response to separatist-related violence, the Nigerian Government implemented measures to boost security such as curfews, intelligence operations, community policing and others in the South-East region. Curfews were enforced in states including Imo, Anambra, and Ebonyi, with security officials saying it is due to the security threats posed by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). Such bans were common after violent incidents or a “Sit-In” order was issued by separatist organizations. Besides, it was said that there were some surveillance measures in place to keep an eye on separatist activities across the region, including the use of digital monitoring systems. Linkage of National Identification Numbers (NIN) to Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) cards by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) in 2020 was one national policy that facilitated the collection and integration of telecoms-related identity information. But it drew criticism because it would allow for greater monitoring and was seen as unfairly targeting South-East communities, on the pretense of blocking terrorist communication (Citizen's Gavel, 2022).

According to Amnesty International (2023), the Nigerian Army used drones in Enugu and Imo States during 2022 and the Federal Government has deployed closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in cities including Aba and Owerri, as part of the Safe City Project. These surveillance technologies have attracted criticism over concerns that they could be used for unlawful profiling and monitoring of activists and journalists. There have also been allegations of abuse of intelligence services by the Department of State Services (DSS) in relation to allegedly intercepting communications of pro-Biafra activists. Moreover, according to Committee to Protect Journalists (2023), journalist Nonso Nkwa has been detained for 3 months in 2023 in connection with his criticism of government surveillance practices. These events have raised questions on the potential misuse of surveillance and implications for freedom of expression, privacy, and other human rights.

In the area of community policing, the Nigerian

government has been promoting the deployment of state-sponsored vigilante groups such as Ebube Agu (established in 2021) and the Anambra Vigilante Group (AVG) that would complement the activities of the federal security agencies. However, these organizations have been criticized for allegations of "militarization", misuse and violation of human rights. While there have been concerns about their formal training and their ability to operate, it has been reported that some Ebube Agu operatives have been involved in joint security operations with military personnel, which reportedly led to extrajudicial killings. The group has been involved in the alleged killing of 15 villagers who were alleged to be supporting IPOB (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2022) in Ebonyi State. Some Ebube Agu operatives have also been accused of colluding with criminals. In some communities like Orsu in Orlu, Imo State, the vigilante operatives have been seen to work together with security operatives in the extortion of their population. Likewise, residents of the Anambra State were kidnapped for ransom by members of the Anambra Vigilante Group in 2023 (Sahara Reporters, 2023). These supposed activities have undermined public trust and confidence in community-based security arrangements. Some communities therefore view these groups as illegitimate sources of local security and a continuation of government repression. According to Nextier SPD, a survey in 2023 revealed that 68% of the people in the South-East were distrustful of Ebube Agu due to alleged abuses and misconduct.

> There are several international human rights report that focus on measuring a country's particular human rights index based on a certain factor, there are so many reports that say our human rights record are on the decline so you can check the democracy index and the freedom house index so I think those will give you a better markers because they have a whole approach that they use. It involves analysing issues around freedom of expression, political participation, things like that, media freedom, they have several markers that they use to measure these things and they give a more accurate impression of whether or not it is improving. But on our part I say that there are a number of incidents that we've recorded in the last couple of years that raise concerns for the state of human rights in Nigeria, same thing issues around freedom of expression but we've done this in a more detailed approach. Sometimes it is one or two incidences that really disturbs us for example the shooting of protesters at the Lekki toll gate, now that was one brazen show of arbitrary use of force against citizens, extrajudicial killings and it was not just what was done but the way in which it was done and that was one major factor that we would consider in saying that they are major concerns for democracy in Nigeria (Interviewed April, 2026).

And we've seen this happen a couple of times in this administration, the Lekki one was more glaring because it was already in focus internationally and nationally, but we've seen security forces open fire on groups of people including the Shitte Movement of Nigeria who were in a procession, a religious procession who were completely shut down by the military officers. It happened all around the nations capital, in Karu a border town between Abuja and Nassarawa State, so you see this sort of gross human rights abuses not just here, not just in the main cities but outside of the cities sometimes in the Northeast. And it is not only the fact that these things happen, but the fact that the authorities are sometimes completely unwilling to address them when it happens, so those also raise concerns for rights abuses. And even in terms of basic freedoms, Nigeria has a very active and vibrant civil society but one thing that has been interesting to note in recent times has been how concerned people are in the shrinking civic space in Nigeria, that is also a major issue that indicates that there are concerns or that we should be concerned for the country's human rights record. So whether or not I can say that, it's a difficult analysis because at different times there have been different concerns so in the Jonathan Administration there were a lot of concerns around insecurity which is also a human rights issue, those concerns haven't gone away and there are added concerns around freedom of expression. Maybe that is an indication that things are worse, but who knows whether the next administration what other concerns would come up but by all means we are not where we want to be yet as a country looking back at some of the aspirations of Nigerians and the authorities in 1999 when we entered into the dispensation of constitutional government (Interviewed April, 2026).

There are many issues with our constitution that citizens have raised that have not yet been addressed so I think that the willingness of the authorities to address this issues, to address human rights abuses shows that we are itching closer to a democratic consolidation but for now we are not seeing that willingness, we are not seeing the strides that we hope to see in a government that is actually serious about human rights concerns. So, it's definitely not where we want to be I can say that for a fact, but whether is worse or not, I think different eras comes with different challenges and sometimes it's definitely more concerning than in other era but we are focused on these issues, we continue to document them and yeah maybe to be fair I can say that there are increased concerns for human rights at this point but noting that there've always been concerns and then again you can refer to some of the indexes that can give you

a more scientific timeline of human rights issues in Nigeria whether or not they are getting worse or getting better but definitely there are increased concerns for human right issues in Nigeria (Interviewed April, 2026).

Security agencies in Nigeria have been accused of serious human rights abuse. The military, police, DSS and other paramilitary apparatus have been witnessed to molest, intimidate, torture and harass ordinary civilians with no hiding place or respite. The Nigeria Police Force is chillingly the agency among the security forces with mouth-watering histories of human right abuse. Particularly when the Police force has failed to abrogate a Force Order 237 in Crime Control which usually serve as a basis for shooting the citizens by the police.

Objective Two: To examine the challenges facing Amnesty International in their effort toward promoting human rights in Nigeria

However, Amnesty International is not free from a number of critiques and obstacles that affect its capacity to confront human rights violations in Nigeria, despite its major commitment to the defence and promotion of human rights since 1967. One of the main complaints against Amnesty International is that its efforts are very much Western-oriented. It is believed that the group is exporting the Western ideology of its understanding of human rights. Note that Western cultural beliefs and ideologies have not always been appreciated by the rest of the world, particularly in the Middle East and Asia. Therefore, the presence and involvement of Amnesty International in such new communities may sometimes be viewed with distrust and scepticism. Such perceptions could be detrimental to public trust and acceptance of the organization, membership, and local support of the organization in particular nations.

> It can be safely concluded that judicial independence is not yet a reality but a mere aspiration in Nigeria today. The appointment and removal of judges are not insulated or isolated from politics, ethnicity favoritism, and other primordial considerations (Interviewed April, 2026).

In another case, Amnesty Nigeria has been put under tremendous pressure by the public and the government officials and authorities to leave Nigeria. In August 2019, the group was accused by opposition parties of sponsoring them to join hands with the enemies of the country. The protest followed reports they were planning a nationwide protest by a coalition of civil organisations. The massive nationwide protest was set to come on August 5, with the hashtag "Revolution Now". However, Amnesty International claimed they were not ready to be threatened but will rather continue to fight for human rights and hold government accountable (Adepegba and Akinkuotu, 2019).

> Another challenge facing Amnesty International and indeed other international human right groups is their lack of authoritative capacities. The Universal Declaration on Human Right is not binding on the Nigerian laws. Amnesty International can only draw the attention of the Nigerian government and international communities to issues of human rights abuses. Sometimes, the Nigerian government and regimes are very slow in taking actions, hence, requires more time and resources on the side of the organizations. The plethora of such cases might significantly slow down the progress of Amnesty International (Interviewed April, 2026).

Outside of Nigeria, Amnesty Nigeria is often not greeted by the people and the government. The group was accused of fraternising with enemies of the country in behalf of the opposition members of the political party in August 2019 (Slye, 2022). The rally was spurred by rumours that a group of civil organisations called for a national protest. Amnesty International and other international human rights groups are doing their best, but they lack the clout. In the example of Nigeria, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not binding. Amnesty International can only prosecute human rights violations against the Nigerian government and international communities. Some cases need organisations to spare extra time and resources, and the Nigerian government and regimes may be unresponsive. Many such cases that highly derail the growth of Amnesty International.

> The economic challenges faced by Nigeria, exacerbated by high inflation rates following the removal of subsidies on essential commodities, represent significant socioeconomic factors that intertwine with human rights abuses in profound ways. Nigeria's decision to remove subsidies on fuel and other essential goods aimed to reduce fiscal burdens but has had severe repercussions on its population. The removal of subsidies on essential commodities has directly impacted the cost of living for ordinary Nigerians. This has led to increased prices of food, fuel, transportation, and other basic necessities, disproportionately affecting low-income households. As prices escalate, families are forced to allocate a larger portion of their income to meet basic needs, pushing many deeper into poverty. The inability to afford essentials such as food and healthcare further exposes vulnerable populations to hunger, malnutrition, and preventable diseases,

> constituting violations of their economic and social rights. As a matter of fact, the economic strain heightens inequality within Nigerian society (Interviewed April, 2026).

Economic inequality continues to widen as inflation reduces the purchasing power of low-income households, while wealthier individuals are generally better positioned to withstand rising living costs. Furthermore, economic decline has significant implications for access to essential services such as education and healthcare, which are fundamental to human development and overall well-being. When families are unable to afford school fees or necessary medical treatment, vulnerable populations become increasingly marginalized and deprived of services essential to the realization of their basic human rights. Children from economically disadvantaged households may also be compelled to engage in child labour or enter into early marriages as a means of supporting family income, thereby undermining their right to education and protection against exploitation. These socio-economic difficulties further increase individuals' exposure to other forms of human rights violations, including gender-based violence and human trafficking (Interview, April 2026).

Furthermore, the global political climate poses additional challenges. The rise of nationalism, authoritarianism, and populist ideologies in recent years has undermined international human rights norms and institutions. Governments in some regions have restricted the activities of NGOs, labeling them as foreign agents or threats to national security, thereby hindering their operations and impact (OHCHR, 2021). Amidst these challenges, Amnesty International continues to play a pivotal role in the global human rights movement. Its ability to adapt to evolving contexts, leverage digital tools for advocacy, and engage with diverse stakeholders underscores its resilience and commitment to justice. However, as the nature of human rights violations becomes increasingly complex, it is imperative to critically examine the organization's role, strategies, and limitations to identify areas for improvement and ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

> Without doubt, accessibility to court by litigants is one thing, while the impartiality of the judge is another. Respect and obedience to the judgment and orders of the court is yet another important consideration. It is a notorious fact that judgments and orders of courts are not self executing and the judiciary does not have its own body or institution charged with the responsibility of enforcing its judgments. The implication of this fact is that the judiciary inevitably depends on the executive for the enforcement of its judgments. The executive branch, without doubt, is the greatest violator of human rights. It is the major "predator" from which judicial protection is often sought. This being the case, there is little guarantee that when an order is made against the executive branch, the same will be treated as sacrosanct. On the contrary, the unfortunate and regrettable experience has been regular disobedience of the executive to lawful and subsisting court orders. Often, government chooses the orders to obey. It obeys those it is comfortable with and disobeys those which are in conflict with its interest, ignoring the consequences to the individuals whose rights have been violated (Interviewed April, 2026).

While international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) provide guidelines for safeguarding human rights, the implementation and enforcement of these standards remain inconsistent. Amnesty International has been instrumental in bridging this gap by advocating for victims, exposing human rights abuses, and pressuring governments and institutions to act. However, the organization operates in an increasingly complex global landscape marked by geopolitical tensions, restricted civic spaces, and challenges in resource allocation. Moreover, Amnesty International faces scrutiny regarding its objectivity and effectiveness in addressing human rights violations. Critics argue that its focus may sometimes be skewed by political or ideological factors, potentially undermining its credibility. As such, a comprehensive assessment of Amnesty International's role, strategies, and impact is essential to understand its contributions to global human rights advocacy and to identify opportunities for enhancing its effectiveness.

Amnesty International is a global network of human rights activists that campaigns against various forms of human rights violations around the world. However, the organization also faces many challenges and criticisms from different actors and perspectives, such as:

i. Some governments accuse Amnesty International of being biased, politicized or interfering in their internal affairs. For example, the US government rejected Amnesty International's allegations of human rights abuses in 2005, stating that they were unsupported by facts. Similarly, Israel, China, Russia and other countries have also criticized Amnesty International for what they assert constituted one-sided reporting or a failure to treat threats to security as a mitigating factor.

ii. Some religious groups oppose Amnesty International's stance on issues such as abortion, LGBT rights or freedom of expression. For example, some Catholic organizations withdrew their support from Amnesty International after it

adopted a policy of advocating for access to legal and safe abortion. Amnesty International has also been accused of violating the universality of human rights by imposing Western values on non Western cultures.

iii. Some scholars and activists question Amnesty International's methodology, effectiveness or accountability. For example, some critics argue that Amnesty International relies too much on Western media sources, fails to address structural causes of human rights violations or lacks transparency and democracy in its decision-making processes. Amnesty International has also been criticized for paying some of its staff high salaries and for having a toxic work environment.

iv. Some other groups accuse Amnesty International of engaging in "lawfare" or using legal means to achieve political goals. For example, some pro-Israel organizations claim that Amnesty International supports boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) against Israel and files lawsuits against Israeli officials. However, Amnesty International's work in Nigeria has not been without challenges and criticisms from various actors and perspectives. Some of the main issues that the organization faces are:

a. Accusations of Bias and Interference: Amnesty International has been accused by the Nigerian government and some security agencies of being biased against them and interfering in the country's internal affairs. For example, in 2020, the Nigerian military rejected Amnesty International's report on the killing of peaceful protesters by security forces during the #EndSARS protests, calling it "a deliberate attempt to blackmail the Nigerian military.

b. The government also accused the organization of supporting terrorism and undermining national security.

c. Threats and Harassment: Amnesty International's staff and partners in Nigeria have faced threats and harassment from state and non-state actors for their human rights work. In 2017, a group of protesters stormed Amnesty International's office in Abuja, demanding that the organization leave the country. In 2019, Amnesty International's staff received death threats from an unknown source after publishing a report on the atrocities committed by Boko Haram and the Nigerian military in the northeast.

d. Lack of Access and Cooperation: Amnesty International has faced difficulties in accessing some areas and obtaining information from some authorities in Nigeria. For instance, the organization has not been able to visit detention facilities run by the military or interview detainees held there. The organization has also faced challenges in getting cooperation from some state governments and agencies in addressing human rights issues.

e. Cultural and Religious Sensitivities: Amnesty International has faced criticism from some cultural and religious groups in Nigeria for its stance on some human rights issues that are considered controversial or taboo. For example, the organization has been criticized for its campaign for access to legal and safe abortion for women and girls who are victims of rape or incest. The organization has also been opposed by some conservative groups for its support for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people.

Despite these challenges and criticisms, Amnesty International remains committed to its mission of promoting and protecting human rights in Nigeria. The organization continues to document and expose human rights violations, engage with relevant authorities and stakeholders, mobilize public opinion and action, and provide support to human rights defenders and victims. Amnesty International also strives to uphold its principles of impartiality, independence, accuracy, and accountability in its work. Amnesty International has faced several controversies and criticisms, especially from some governments and groups that accuse it of bias, interference, and misinformation. One of the countries where Amnesty International has been involved in several controversies is Nigeria, a West African nation with a history of political instability, ethnic conflicts, and human rights violations.

Lack of Engagement and Dialogue with Stakeholders: Some critics have argued that AI does not engage or dialogue with the relevant stakeholders in Nigeria, such as the government, the security agencies, the civil society, the media, and the victims of human rights violations. They have claimed that AI only issues reports and statements without consulting or collaborating with those who are directly involved or affected by the human rights issues. They have also suggested that AI should adopt a more constructive and positive approach to human rights advocacy and protection in Nigeria, rather than being confrontational and negative. These controversies have implications for the future of human rights advocacy and protection in Nigeria. Some of the possible implications according to Ezeani (2018) are:

Reduced Impact and Influence of AI's Work: The controversies surrounding AI may reduce its impact and influence on the human rights situation in Nigeria. The government and its security agencies may ignore or dismiss AI's reports and recommendations as biased or false. The public may lose trust or confidence in AI's work as credible or reliable. The victims of human rights violations may feel abandoned or betrayed by AI as their ally or defender.

Increased Risks and Challenges for AI's Staff and Operations: The controversies surrounding AI may increase the risks and challenges for its staff and operations in Nigeria. AI's staff may face harassment, intimidation, or violence from some groups or individuals who are hostile to its work. AI's offices may face vandalism, arson, or closure from some authorities or protesters who want to silence or expel it from the country. AI's operations may face restrictions, interference, or sabotage from some actors who want to hinder or hamper its work.

Decreased Space and Opportunities for Human Rights Advocacy and Protection: The controversies surrounding AI may decrease the space and opportunities for human rights advocacy and protection in Nigeria. The government may enact laws or policies that curtail or violate human rights in the name of national security or public order. The security agencies may commit more human rights violations or abuses with impunity or cover-up. The civil society may face more repression or co-optation from the state or nonstate actors. The media may face more censorship or self-censorship on human rights issues. The victims of human rights violations may face more fear or silence on their plight. The controversies surrounding AI have serious implications for the future of human rights advocacy and protection in Nigeria. AI needs to address these controversies effectively and strategically to maintain its credibility, legitimacy, and relevance in the country (Amnesty International, 2021).

Discussion of Findings

i. Amnesty International uses various methods of research, advocacy and mobilization to fight against abuses and injustices. Amnesty International conducts accurate and cross-checked research into human rights violations by governments, companies and other actors worldwide, using different sources and tools, such as reports, surveys, interviews and digital technologies. Amnesty International influences and pressures decision makers to respect and protect human rights, through lobbying, campaigning, public awareness and legal action. This is in line with the theory of liberalism where Moravcsik (1995) identified three strategies used by international organizations for advancing democratization and safeguarding human rights domestically: sanctioning, shaming, and cooperation. Amnesty International also mobilizes millions of supporters and activists around the world, who join its global movement and take part in its actions, such as petitions, demonstrations, donations and online engagement (Amnesty International Report, 2019 & 2021). Amnesty International's methods of research, advocacy and mobilization are guided by its strategic plan, which defines its vision, mission, values and goals for the future (Amnesty International Report, 2022).

ii. The above findings agree with the majority of the liberalists (Keck and Sikkink 2024; Moravcsik, 1995) and, to a lesser extent, constructivists (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Wendt 1999) theories on strategies used by international organizations in promoting human rights. However, AI does not adopt dialogue as a strategy for promoting human rights in Nigeria. Dialogue and mediation between conflicting parties is one of the strategies identified by liberalism (Nye, 1977). Thus AI does not mediate among parties but only support victims of rights violations.

Civil societies, both international and local in Nigeria, are facing significant challenges as authorities are implementing measures to suppress their advocacy efforts. The authorities are employing both traditional methods, such as sponsoring legislation to limit activities, and innovative strategies by funding local NGOs to organize protests against international civil society organizations and identify weaknesses in their operations.

Conclusion

Upon examining the strategies employed by AI and evaluating their advocacy efforts regarding human rights, it is evident that they have effectively contributed to the reduction of human rights violations in the country. The roles assumed by international civil society have been identified, along with the steps and actions undertaken by organizations to promote human rights attributes. Addressing human rights issues and rectifying the discrepancies arising from violations requires engaging in dialogue with authorities and relevant stakeholders, conducting thorough research, and publishing reports that expose the atrocities committed by those in power. This process aims to unveil the true situation on the ground, contrasting it with the narrative presented by the authorities.

"The failure of guaranteeing respect for international human rights obligations cannot be said to be only the responsibility of the executive arm of government," said

Director of Amnesty International Nigeria Osai Ojigho at the launch of the report. "The ratification of numerous human rights treaties and commitments at international and regional levels along with obligations to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil human rights have had no meaningful impact on Nigeria in improving the vicious cycle of human rights crises in the country." The government of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu must act without delay to come to an end the rampant systematic human rights violations and abuses across Nigeria. Amnesty International calls on the government of Nigeria to grasp this chance to break free from decades of human rights violations and rampant impunity, inter alia, through prioritising human rights and not crushing them. Other recommendations are that Amnesty International should engage in a more complex, inclusive, and constructive approach to the Nigerian authorities and other stakeholders while maintaining its independence and impartiality. The survey highlighted that Amnesty International has an essential role to play in Nigeria but should be more responsive, accountable, and transparent in its activities to earn the greater trust and support from the Nigerian people.

Recommendations

Based on the observed challenges and criticism facing Amnesty International, this study puts forward the following recommendations:

i. Civil society involvement and community engagement are also critical in addressing these abuses. Empowering local human rights organizations, journalists, and activists through funding, legal protections, and capacity-building initiatives can promote transparency and awareness. International cooperation with organizations like the United Nations and the African Union can provide Nigeria with the support and guidance needed to enhance human rights protection. Also, addressing the underlying socio-economic issues, such as poverty, unemployment, and ethnic tensions, can also help mitigate the root causes of human rights abuses.

ii. Amnesty International should do more around image management and establish a firm relationship with the Nigerian government and other places where the organization is seen as a tool for promotion of western ideologies. There is also a need for Amnesty International to create more awareness and knowledge of its activities in grassroots areas of developing countries like Nigeria. This is because the top-down approach to fight for human rights is not a viable strategy. Locals need to understand the ideals of Amnesty as well as have easy access to engagement.

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