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2021

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Nkechinyere Omumu Anyadike

*Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*

Stephen Tochukwu Nwachukwu

*Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*

Joseph O. Wogu

*Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, drjoseph.wogu@gmail.com*

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Anyadike, Nkechinyere Omumu; Nwachukwu, Stephen Tochukwu; and Wogu, Joseph O., "Human Rights in Nigeria and the Implications of Human Rights Education for Resource Collection by Libraries" (2021).

*Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 5391.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/5391>

## **Human Rights in Nigeria and the Implications of Human Rights Education for Resource Collection by Libraries**

<sup>1</sup>Nkechinyere Omumu Anyadike, <sup>1</sup>Stephen Tochukwu Nwachukwu, <sup>2</sup>Joseph O. Wogu

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

<sup>2</sup>Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Correspondence: Nwachukwu Tochukwu Stephen, Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. E-mail: [tochukwu.nwachukwu@unn.edu.ng](mailto:tochukwu.nwachukwu@unn.edu.ng)

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper theorizes the concept of human rights as contextually determinable and posits that the potency of the empirical trajectories of such rights is setting-dependent. The methodology of the presentation is logical argumentation and the theoretical framework is the interest theory of rights. The West African state of Nigeria has been chosen for the discussion. The paper's thesis is that human rights milieus are expandable. The normative designs of the work necessitate framing the illustrations on a nation state. This paper also underscores the roles of libraries as institutions for expanding access to human rights education and resource collection on human rights. The authors pointed out libraries can integrate the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights with their library policy guidelines to promote effectual access to quality education and information rights for all.

**Keywords:** Human rights, Human rights education and training, libraries, resource collection

## **INTRODUCTION**

Human rights are in general terms, “rights” which all human beings, by virtue of their humanity possess, and include the right to life, personal liberty, fair hearing, and dignity of human person, freedom of thought, conscience and religion. These “rights” provide common standards of behavior among humanity and are natural, inviolable, rational and unalterable, as their deprivations would constitute grave offenses to the citizens’ sense of justice (Onwuazombe, 2017). They are the rules, norms and standard expectations seeking to protect all peoples and every person from cruel and relentless political, legal, and social abuses. They include: the right to freedom of religion, freedom from being tortured, the right to a fair hearing/fair trial when charged with a crime, and the right to education (Nickel, 2019). These rights/freedoms are however, historically embedded with deformities in Nigeria.

According to Onwuazombe (2017, p.116), “dating back to the colonial era, the human rights records of the Nigerian state has been consistently poor and unimpressive and at present, the situation has not significantly improved”. In other words, the human rights records of the Nigerian state has remained consistently mediocre and unimposing even in the 21st century. The current paper is a contribution to what needs to be done in expanding the contexts of human rights in the country. The theoretical framework of the study is the interest theory of rights. The methodology of the presentation is logical argumentation.

Under the Civil and Political Rights trajectory of the generic human rights classification, Nickel (2019) highlights that these rights are familiar from historic bills of rights such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789) and the U.S. Bill of Rights (1791, with subsequent amendments). Contemporary sources include the first 21 Articles of the Universal Declaration, and treaties such as the European Convention, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.

Ekpo and Agorye (2018) researched what they conceived as the docility of Nigerian youths in the face of human rights violations by the then military administrations in Nigeria. According to these authors, the history of military regimes in Nigeria is interwoven with the history of impunity, repression, suppression, use of violence, and brazen flattening of fundamental human rights in the country. Their paper focused on military clampdown on youth demonstrations during the authoritarian era. Ekpo and Agorye argued that the different repressive military regimes engendered a docile and sycophantic breed of youths who displayed lackadaisical attitude over issues bordering on social contract. They contended that these youths were conditioned to become ignorant of crucial governance issues and nonchalant about human rights infractions in governance procedures.

The work of Eba (2017) partly concentrated on why discriminatory practices prevailed in acquiring the citizenship of Nigeria, and the consequences of citizenship discriminatory practices in the country. Then, after the data gathered by Eba via interviews and the analysis of secondary-sources-documents were organized, structurally coded and interpreted in themes, it was found contrary to international conventions, that migrants, minority ethnic groups, refugees, women, and children, were deprived of the right to acquire the country's citizenship. Consequently, these social groups were subjected to marginalization, unfair competition, statelessness, unemployment and violation of their human rights.

Taking a historical route to the surrounding issues, Jauhari (2011) compared the colonial and post-colonial human rights situations in Nigeria and found a scenario of worsening human rights violations after independence as compared to the colonial era. Jauhari highlighted a position of long history of violation of human rights in Nigeria, traceable to the colonial periods. In efforts to consolidate and expand their power, the

researcher argued, the British colonial masters utterly violated the rights of the Nigerian people. But even several years after independence, the Nigerian citizens have continued to face incessant violations of their basic rights, during the mixed periods of military and civilian rule, as military rule in the country became a symbol of unhindered authoritarianism. After every military coup, the country's constitution became suspended, as the government remained unaccountable to the people and the civilian regimes also became characterized by unaccountability. In order to hold on to power, Jauhari (2011) surmizes, the civilian leaders denied freedom of expression to the citizens, blatantly rigged elections and engaged in unlawful and extra-judicial killings.

Relating the embedded human rights issues in the country, more specifically within the contexts of the poor, and dispensation of justice, Okafor and Ugochukwu (2015) studied the extent to which the jurisprudence of the Nigerian appellate courts had expanded, maintained or contracted the opportunities of the poor. This was with a view to ascertaining the level to which the poor were able to exercise as vigorously as possible; their own 'agency' to act, to redress human rights abuses committed against them during the period between 1990 and 2011 in Nigeria. Okafor and Ugochukwu utilised a critical socio-legal framework which situated Nigeria's human rights law relating to the agency of the poor, within its historical, social, economic and political contexts. The study particularly utilised inter alia, the core ideas of Upendra Baxi's influential trade-related market-friendly human rights theory. Hence, while it is usually concluded that the weak, deprived, and excluded, are passive victims of their condition, the starting point of the article is that, where adequate openings and prospects exist in law and policy, or are permitted by the adequacy of resources, or provided through pro-poor judicial action, the poor are invariably able to resist this attribution and struggle to alter their life circumstances.

The major issues addressed by Okafor and Ugochukwu (2015) bordered on the extent to which the Nigerian appellate courts had (in the course of developing their human rights praxis) engendered or impeded the opportunities for the poor in Nigeria to exercise their agency, within the legal system, in order to struggle more effectively to alter their circumstances in life. Their study was further interested in the type of conceptual mechanisms used by these courts in examining and deciding the germane cases, in ways that expanded or contracted the agency of the poor in seeking legal redress and social justice. The researchers argued that many factors interacted in this regard to produce certain outcomes, some within and others outside the control of the courts. They concluded that where necessary, the courts should always enrich the factors within their control, in such manner that the poor can more stoutly exercise their agency in these regards, promote the course of social justice and minimize the instances of the abuse and denial of human rights.

Dada (2013) asserts that although human rights matters have globally become a subject of immense relevance, in international law, states are fundamentally responsible for their promotion and protection. The Nigerian state has accordingly built some commendable institutional infrastructure and created a variety of remedies, judicial and even extra-judicial – to remedy human rights violations in the country. Dada however posits that the provision of remedies and their adequacies and efficacies are entirely separate issues, as he examined the extant judicial remedies in Nigeria for redressing human rights violations and stressed the imperative of judicial remedies in general terms. Dada (2013) further examined the processes of activating judicial remedies in Nigeria and drew attention to the legion of impediments which have immensely frustrated, compromised and undermined the efficacies of the remedies. The paper concluded that the judiciary has to be ever alert to deter every attack, subtle or gross, against human rights in the country

Durojaye (2013) examined the implications of widowhood practices for the enjoyment of women's fundamental rights and freedoms in the Nigerian nation. This paper discussed the effects of legal and socio-cultural structures of Nigeria for gender equality. It argued that the country's plural legal system, which encouraged the application of statutory law, side by side with customary law, potentially undermined women's fundamental rights. Durojaye then discussed some specific human rights of women, specifically the rights to non-discrimination and dignity, which are threatened by widowhood practices. This paper posited in conclusion, that since Nigeria had ratified international human rights instruments such as the Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women (African Women's Protocol), the country was obligated to taking appropriate measures and steps, to eradicate damaging cultural practices to women's rights.

In his study titled "Policing and Human Rights in Nigeria: Marxism and Symbolic Interactionism", Richard (2017) set out to establish both micro and macro sociological factors responsible for human rights abuses by the police in Nigeria. The work was also aimed at evolving theoretically grounded solutions to the problem of human rights breaches in the country. Richard suggested that "overreliance on structural dimension to police abuse of human rights in Nigeria was undoubtedly oversimplifying the micro-level decision-making processes of the parties involved". The paper underscored that men and officers of the Nigerian Police were frequently involved in cases of human rights abuses in performing their civic duties. The most common of these abuses bordered on intimidation, brutality, extortion and torture, which existed in spite of the continuous denial by the police authorities. Richard identified the key factors that make human right abuses common in the policing of democratic Nigeria to include poor education and training, poor remuneration, corruption and poor infrastructure. As established by Marxists' perspective of policing and human rights, the



study submits, the structure of policing in Nigeria was such that the upper class were favoured and have their rights protected while the rights of the lower class were frequently trampled upon. The symbolic interactionism variable of the work was denoted as the influence of peer orientation and peer influence in transmitting the values, definitions, beliefs, and “manners of expression” which depart from the acceptable behaviour of respecting human rights. The paper recommends careful recruitment and selection processes, effective monitoring and effective penal system, and massive reorientation of the police to make it fit into policing a democratic society like Nigeria.

Johnson and Salau (2019) who studied human rights and governance in Nigeria between 2011 and 2015 averred that in reality, the human rights situation in the country remained irreconcilable with constitutionalism as there were always cases of trampling upon citizens’ fundamental rights. This paper specifically considered the human rights state of affairs under President Jonathan’s administration (2011-2015). The work appraised how human rights issues were handled under this administration. The researchers contended that politically and socio-economically, Nigeria continued to confront serious human rights challenges including a culture of impunity where perpetrators of human rights abuses were often not held accountable for their infringements and illegalities. There were various forms of corrupt practices, extra-judicial killings by the police and there was the Boko Haram insurgency in the country which precipitated its own brands of human rights violations.

Johnson and Salau posited that moreover, there was in this era the absence of serious improvements in the socio-economic status of Nigerian citizens as the advertised increasing GDP growth was merely on paper and hardly real in the economy. The paper concluded that in protecting the rights and liberties of all Nigerians, the Nigerian Government must be resolute in its commitment to ensuring security, without compromising on human rights. The authors argued for strong and transparent institutions that would deliver essential services to

the Nigerian citizenry. According to Johnson and Salau (2019), to build and sustain such institutions require looking internally, with readiness to use political will in the right direction; and take significant actions to address critical human rights issues in the Nigerian nation.

Akanni (2019) posits that usually in the process of conducting counterinsurgency campaigns by government forces, human rights of citizens of the states where insurgents operate are abused. For instance he argues, in prosecuting the Boko Haram counterinsurgency in the North-eastern parts of Nigeria, Nigerian military men, the Civilian Joint Task Force and the Multinational Joint Task Forces have been accused of flagrant human rights violations and gross disregard of international humanitarian laws, resulting in serious casualties and additional destruction of property. The paper essentially examines the abuses of human rights occasioned by counter-insurgency operations in all states, inclusive of Nigeria. Akanni argues that despite the high level of domestic and international laws regulating the conduct of warfare, especially the rules of International Human Rights (IHR) law and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Nigerian security personnel and their international partners participating in counterinsurgency operations in the country still engaged in gross violation of human rights in North-eastern parts of Nigeria. This paper further deposes that it is possible to launch successful counter-insurgency campaigns without impinging on citizens' fundamental human rights such as right to life, liberty, dignity of the human person, right to private and family life, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of movement. These would be possible where international best practices are adhered to and the rules of engagement by the military religiously observed. The paper consequently recommends that government forces involved in counterinsurgency operations should strictly observe the IHL rules and the rules of engagement for the military, and that current culprits be investigated and prosecuted to serve as deterrent to future violators

But despite the great number of studies on human rights issues in Nigeria and the appreciable evidence of other actions in improving upon the country's national human rights records, the truth is that the gaps in human rights notions and policy understandings in the West African state remain deep. It appears as if in attempting to cover the identified human rights craters in the country, the nation's stakeholders have all continued to move forward in a circle. To successfully block the seemingly yawning breaches therefore probably requires opening out scholarly the perimeters of the human rights cavity in the country. It possibly entails expanding the contexts of human rights in the nation.

## **THE INTEREST THEORY OF RIGHTS**

It was probably Jeremy Bentham who originally proposed the interest theory of rights (Essays, 2018). What is however more scholarly plausible is the supposition that important interest theorists include the following eminent thinkers: Jeremy Bentham, Rudolf von Ihering, John Langshaw Austin, David Lyons, Neil MacCormick, Joseph Raz and Matthew Henry Kramer (Wenar, 2020). Citing, Bentham therefore, Essays (2018) posits that "a person has a distinctive human right when others have duties which protect one of that person's interests." Hence, considered from the trajectories of the interest theory of rights, Pogge (2007) in Essays (2018) deposes that "human rights take their role to be to protect a person's basic interests." Interest theorists, highlights Wenar, "maintain that the function of a right is to further the right-holder's interests." Consequently, "an owner has a right, according to the interest theorists, not because owners have choices, but because the ownership makes owners better off." Human rights are accordingly purposed for the wellbeing of the right-holders. In applying the interest theory of rights to this study therefore it is held that citizens' wellbeing is a totality of nondiscriminatory formation in which the basics must be availed to everyone. The principal function of human rights thus becomes the protection and promotion of certain essential human interests (Fagan, 2020).

## **EXPANDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN NIGERIA**

Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, copiously provides for the human rights of Nigerian citizens. Chapter II (16) of the same Constitution under the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, had earlier also provided as follows: (1) the state shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution (a) harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy; (b) control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity. This paper is particularly concerned with subsection 1(b) on “securing the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen, on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity”. Article 13(3) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights also stipulates that every individual shall have the right of access to public property and services, in strict equality of all persons before the law. Article 19 of the Charter provides for “the right of all peoples to equality and rights” while Article 24 offers the people the right to a general satisfactory environment and clearly spells out that “all peoples shall have the right to a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development”. The Nigerian state was among the first set of nations which signed and ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

However, the abridged literature review of this study does not suggest determined adherence to either the letter or the spirit of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in Nigeria. Empirical evidence further proves that in Nigeria the contents and intents of the country's constitution are not always weighty matters. Chapter II, Subsection 14: 2(b) of this document provides that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. But only a stranger to Nigeria would think that this provision is ever

taken seriously enough in the country. Security of the people has remained largely a private affair in Nigeria. Security as provided by the state is fundamentally for the ruling elite and their associates, and for all others privileged to possess the fiscal resources and the other requirements for security protection in the nation. Security of the people is only a postscript in the national governance template of the country. Welfare of the people on the other hand has increasingly become an ordinary political elite stunt in the national system, as the more several budgetary provisions are made for such purposes, and ostensible public policies inaugurated in such putative dimensions, the more the welfare of the people remains an optical illusion in Nigeria. Chapter II, Subsection 15(2) of the constitution further prohibits discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties. Again, only people who do not know anything about Nigeria would think that this area of the constitution is taken seriously by anyone in the country.

The practical breaches of Chapter II of the subsisting 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) entitled, “Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy”, can precipitate hypertension in a perceptually pallid analyst. Some randomly made selection from this chapter of the Constitution still follows: Subsection 15(5) provides that the state shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power. Then subsection 16 (2) declares that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring:

(b) that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good;(c) that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and (d) that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.

What Subsection 15(5) above implies by the state abolishing all corrupt practices and abuse of power remains bewildering. The interpretation given to this provision by the operators of the Nigerian Constitution is possibly also known to them and their co-traitors

alone. Corrupt practices are in historical trajectories nearly synonymous with public office in Nigeria. However, the advent of the extant 1999 Constitution of the country and the post-military (civil) rule it ushered in promoted public sector corrupt practices to an all-time morbid and ignoble level in the country. It became impracticable to keep records of such titanic cases of public sector thievery in the country (Agbibo, 2012, Agbibo, 2014; Oluwagbenga & Abimbola, 2016; Ocheje, 2018; Abada & Ngwu, 2019). The abuse of power accompaniment to the cases of public sector sleaze in the nation has also become benumbing. Public office is sought in the country for personal gains, and the selected or elected occupants of the public offices quickly forget that the country is not some personal property belonging to their corrupt and loathsome class. In their continuing shenanigans accountability and human rights issues have remained secondary matters (Fagbadebo, 2007; Oni, 2016; Richard, 2017; Okunola, Umaru & Hassan, 2019; Azubuike, & Songi, 2020).

But Rawls (1999) in Nickel (2019) posits that human rights are a special class of urgent rights. Their urgency emanates from the social injustice and relative deprivation frequently associated with the instances of human rights violations and denials. Most often, human rights questions are presented as possessing universalistic underpinnings and global colours. But the core empirical trajectories of human rights are setting-dependent. In one jurisdiction therefore it may be same sex marriage rights that propel human rights campaigns, while in another, majority of the citizens are compelled to travel on craters-filled roads. They travel under such conditions because of the unavailability of other travel possibilities, while the ruling class flies in the air with Private Jets. In the Nigerian state for instance, despite all pretenses to the contrary, all denials and every political elite subterfuge to obscure the awful reality, the country has historically remained a theater of dilapidated roads (Da Costa, 2009; Enwerem & Ali, 2016; Olubomehin, 2016; My Engineers, 2018; Chinwo, 2019; Nwafor & Onya, 2019; Okechukwu, 2020; Olawoyin, 2020). While the roads

in the country have traditionally remained in such decrepit conditions, anonymous Nigerians own and operate some 200 private jets in the country (Oyebade, 2017). The owners of the jets go incognito because their sources of wealth are dubious and are easily traceable to stolen public funds and public sector related questionable transactions. And so in this country, citizens may be assumed to have been granted freedom of movement by their governors but are often compelled to go to bed on the roads because their rickety automobiles have become stuck there.

“By contemporary consensus human rights are generally understood as the moral-political claims which all human beings are deemed to have upon their societies or governments, claims recognized “as of right” and “not by love, grace or charity” (Onwuazombe, 2017). But this is hardly the case in this study’s case study country where human rights are perceived as inelastic largesse, the size of which has already been settled by the political elite. Therefore in this 21st century in Nigeria, all households which cannot afford the cost of the ubiquitous personal generating sets for electricity power supply are usually in darkness, metaphorically and in actuality. Because they are poor, the human rights allotted to them have precluded the charity of electricity. Pogge (2007) sees severe poverty as a human rights violation. Osae-Brown and Olurounbi (2019), highlight that the Nigeria “runs on generators and only nine hours of power a day”. Under such scenarios, it would remain preposterous to consider access to electricity as a right accessible to all citizens. It apparently appears silly to make such proposals at the United Nations’ level and will also seem degrading for leaders in this paper’s study area to broach public policies in the same regards. But the truth is that human rights are contextually determinable, when others have duties to protect and guarantee the other persons’ interests and wellbeing. The apogee of human rights is reached in this scenario of everyone’s wellbeing. It is possible to expand the contexts of human rights in Nigeria so that freedom of movement encompasses access to motor-able and

passable roads. It is possible in the 21st century that within the specific context of a nation state, availability of electricity power supply for domestic and public usage is not only taken for granted but also considered human right.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR RESOURCE COLLECTION BY LIBRARIES**

Human rights education (HRE) refers to learning, education, training and information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010). Human rights education does not just encompass learning about human rights and the mechanisms that protect them, but also the acquisition or reinforcement of skills required for the application of human rights in a practical manner in daily life, the development of values, attitudes and behaviour which uphold human rights as well as taking action to defend and promote human rights. Human rights education also aims towards developing an understanding of everyone's common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community and in the society at large (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010).

Globally, libraries are considered as institutions for expanding access to human rights education (HRE) and resource collection on human rights (Gorham, Taylor, & Jaeger, 2016). In fact, there exists specialized public-access resource collection on Human Rights Education and Training (HRET), which was created as part of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Library (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021). This specialized public-access resource collection on HRET was initiated with the aim of contributing to the United Nations (UN) Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training defines HRET as comprising "all education, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of human rights



and fundamental freedoms (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010). It also states that HRET encompasses education about human rights, education through human rights and education for human rights. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training recognizes that HRET is a lifelong process that includes all parts of society, at all levels and should be based on principles of equality (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010).

The United Nations declaration on HRET states that everyone has the right to know, seek and receive information about their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Deducing from the United Nations declaration on HRET, the roles of libraries in expanding people's understanding and access to human rights education and training cannot be overstated. Libraries can help to achieve the goal of HRET by collecting and providing access to trainers' guides, handbooks and manuals for the incorporation of human rights into professional practices and enhancement of human rights awareness among specific groups like the police, prison officials, medical professionals, women, minorities, and indigenous peoples. Also, libraries can help to achieve the goal of HRET through collection of and providing individuals with access to teaching resources like textbooks, curricula and guidelines for teachers and school administrators that promotes the integration of human rights into the education system. Libraries can also facilitate the attainment of HRET goal through collection of and providing individuals with access to pedagogical tools like picture books, cartoons and games for use with children and adults. Libraries foster the achievement of goal of HRET through collection of and providing individuals with access to learning materials focusing on human rights education issues at the local, national, regional and international level. Further, libraries can be of assistance in achieving the goal of HRET through collection of and providing individuals with access to reports/papers on HRE conferences and seminars. Finally, libraries can facilitate the goal attainment of HRET

through collection of and providing individuals with access to reference materials like bibliographies and directories and audio-visual material for human rights education. Existing literatures revealed ongoing collaborations between libraries and various agencies aimed at promoting and ensuring human rights for children and adults (Fogarty, 2015). According to Fogarty (2015), libraries are providing supports for human rights through the integration of innovative concepts, programs and resources. Overall, libraries can incorporate the UN Declaration on Human Rights with their library policy documents to promote effectual access to quality education and information rights for all.

## **CONCLUSION**

Human rights are purposed to make citizens better off. They are the givens of human agency, contextually determinable and setting-dependent, when not regarded as kind acts of the ruling elite and the generic privileged minority. National perceptions of human rights are measures of the values a people place on human lives as propagated by their political and other leaders. Human rights are in truth not certified by the number of international treaties on such subjects to which countries and their governments are signatories. The international documents are only the benchmarks of further protections expected from the state by citizens. Findings of this study validate the suppositions that the human rights records of the Nigerian state have over and over remained unimpressive even in the 21st century. The paper deplors the state of affairs under which constitutional provisions for the citizens' wellbeing have habitually remained contravened in the country. Contrary to the orthodoxy in the conceptualization of human rights in the case study country and elsewhere, this paper recommends that the availability of operative streets and highways, and the accessibility of electric energy for domestic and public usage in Nigeria of the twenty-first century be made human rights. This paper also underscores the roles of libraries as institutions for expanding access to human rights education and resource collection on human rights. The authors

pointed out libraries can integrate the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights with their library policy guidelines to promote effectual access to quality education and information rights for all.

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