

FIRMIN MBALA

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BIO-DATA

- Born on the 1/2/1976. Cameroonian citizenship. Married with two children.

PROFILE

Summary

A Human Rights and International Development specialist with +10 years of experience in human rights research, advocacy and project management and coordination. A passionate and qualified expert on gender and human rights issues, especially in the West & Central Africa region. A proven leader and team player with excellent communication, coordination and interpersonal skills. A fluent speaker and writer of English and French.

+10-year Program/Project management experience

- Experienced in designing and monitoring development projects in human rights and social change
- Conversant with related tools/techniques: Logical framework, results-based management, evaluation and review techniques, gender equality planning tools, gender analysis frameworks and participatory planning techniques.
- **Recent projects experience include:**
- Project Manager: 'Strengthening mechanisms and resources to combat female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage' in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Sierra Leone (2021–2023). Funded by Foundation for Just Society International; Budget USD \$1,299,675.
- Project Key Expert: 'The Social and Political Challenges of Providing Sexual and Reproductive Health care to Adolescent Victims of GBV in Senegal' (2021 – 2023). Funded by IDRC; Budget: CAD \$450,000.
- Project Manager: 'Fight against Impunity in Mali' (2020–2022). Funded by European Union; Budget: EURO 450,000.
- Project Supervisor: 'Combating sexual violence in Guinea' (2021–2022); Funded by Hewlett Foundation & IPPF; Budget: USD \$95,000.
- Project Manager: 'Fight against Impunity in Mali' (2020–2022). Funded by European Union; Budget: EURO 450,000.
- Project Supervisor: 'Prevention of SGBV against youth at selected universities in Ghana and Nigeria through policy change and capacity building' (2020-2021). Funded by CISU/DANIDA; Budget: EURO 60,000
- Project Manager: 'Reducing the rates of female genital mutilation (FGM) and early and forced marriage (EFM) for girls in West Africa – Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Senegal' (2017 – 2020). Funded by FCDO; Budget GBP £1 million.
- Project Manager: 'Legal Support and Assistance to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Benin' (2018-2019); co-funded by UNHCR and Amnesty International; Budget USD \$ 25,000.

+10-year Capacity building experience and gender mainstreaming

- Experienced in identification of training needs, designing training modules, implementing training courses; facilitated training for various audiences including CSOs, CBOs, National HR Institutions, and defence forces across Africa.
- Recent training experiences were held in Senegal, Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Chad, Sierra Leone, Togo, etc.
- Trainings provided include: 'Monitoring, documenting, and reporting HR violations'; 'Protecting Human Rights defenders'; 'Submission to UPR'; 'Following-up recommendations of treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council mechanisms'.
- Competent to provide technical support for developing gender sensitive policies, programs/projects; evaluation of projects and organizations from gender dimension – gender audit.
- Led advocacy efforts and provided advisory inputs for gender mainstreaming in the sectors political participation, legislative reforms, law enforcement, education for numerous organizations and countries in Africa including African Union (2016-2018); Senegal (2017-2022), Burkina Faso (2017-2022) and Sierra Leone (2017-2022).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

REGIONAL RESEARCHER (since October 2022)

Amnesty International – West and Central Africa Regional Office, Dakar, Senegal (www.amnesty.org)

DUTIES

- Lead on the development of impactful research and advocacy strategies for human rights defense and promotion.
- Monitor and analyze HR-related developments to provide impartial assessments and expert advice on abuses/crises.
- Carry out field research and other missions to document human rights concerns.
- Draft reports and other materials for external publication and internal use; and contribute to knowledge dissemination about human rights issues.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Contributed to a comprehensive research on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women's rights in Africa, highlighting the increased risks of gender-based violence, discrimination and inequality faced by women during the crisis. The research was published as a brief to inform future Amnesty International programming on gender justice.
- Established and maintained effective working relationships with Amnesty International's sections, networks and partners in West Africa, as well as with other relevant stakeholders such as UN agencies, government authorities, civil society organizations, media outlets etc. I ensured regular communication, coordination, and collaboration with these stakeholders, building trust, mutual respect, and strategic alliances. I also represented Amnesty International at various meetings, events, and forums with these stakeholders, advocating for human rights issues in West Africa.
- Provided technical support to Amnesty International's section in Nigeria to conduct a human rights impact assessment of the Gender Equality Bill, which aimed to promote gender equality and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in Nigeria. The assessment was used to provide recommendations to the Nigerian parliament to improve the bill and ensure its compliance with international human rights standards.
- Prepared and submitted alternative reports to the UN Human Rights Council on the human rights record of Burkina Faso, as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. The reports highlighted the main human rights challenges and achievements in the two countries, as well as the recommendations made by Amnesty International to address them. The reports also supported the UPR submission processes by engaging with relevant stakeholders, such as national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, and UPR Working Group members.
- Responded swiftly and effectively to specific cases of human rights violations in West Africa, by publishing public reactive pieces such as press releases, interviews and tweets. The pieces denounced the violations, called for accountability and justice, and urged the authorities to respect and protect human rights. The pieces also raised awareness and mobilized public opinion on the human rights issues in the region.

CONSULTANT, UNDP - DR Congo (May 2021 - January 2022)

DUTIES

- Hired as an international expert to provide an assessment of women's rights defenders contribution to address GBV, and propose relevant recommendations in line with international requirements.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Conducted a situational analysis of women rights defenders in addressing gender-based violence in DR Congo, identifying key features and dynamics, trends, challenges and opportunities for effective prevention and response.
- Developed a comprehensive strategy, and action plan for UNDP support to the government of DR Congo, in the protection and promotion of women human rights defenders in addressing gender-based violence, in alignment with the national legal framework, international prescriptions and best practices, including the UN Security Council resolutions, and the Generation Equality Forum commitments.
- Facilitated the establishment of a network of women rights defenders for the prevention of, and response to, gender-based violence in DR Congo, involving UN agencies, government authorities, civil society organizations, donors, and other relevant actors.
- Provided technical assistance, and capacity building to UNDP staff, partners, and beneficiaries on gender-based violence prevention, and response.

AFRICA REGIONAL COORDINATOR, HUMAN RIGHTS & EDUCATION (2016-2022)
Amnesty International – West and Central Africa Regional Office, Dakar, Senegal (www.amnesty.org)

DUTIES

- Define and execute Amnesty International's Human Rights Education (HRE) regional strategy for Africa
- Supervise a network of 12 HRE-dedicated staff in AI entities across Africa
- Manages regional projects executed by AI Regional Office in West & Central Africa
- Oversees national projects implemented by AI national entities in West Africa
- Narrative and financial reporting; monitoring and support visits in the field

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Coordinated Amnesty International's regional program on human rights education in West Africa, overseeing the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and activities. Some of the projects and activities included: supporting the protection and empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers in West Africa; promoting women's rights and gender equality in West Africa; Working with and empowering communities to prevent and reduce various harmful traditional practices; defending freedom of expression and access to information in West Africa; etc.
- Managed a team of program officers, consultants and interns working on various human rights issues in West Africa. I provided leadership, guidance and supervision to the team members, ensuring that they delivered high-quality work within deadlines and budgets. I also facilitated regular communication and feedback among the team members, as well as with other Amnesty International staff at the regional and global levels.
- Developed proposals, budgets and reports for various donors supporting Amnesty International's regional program in West Africa. I identified potential funding opportunities from different sources such as governments, foundations, corporations, etc. I prepared proposals that clearly articulated the objectives, outcomes, indicators, activities, budget and timeline of the projects. I also prepared reports that demonstrated the results, impact and challenges of the projects. I completed various donor-supported multiyear projects; secured funding from such donors FCDO, European Union, UNHCR, FJSI, DANIDA, IDRC, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, *Agence Francaise de developpement*, CISU.
- Organized regional events, workshops, trainings, and campaigns on human rights issues in West Africa. Some of the events, workshops, trainings, and campaigns included: organizing a regional conference on the situation of human rights defenders in West Africa, bringing together over 100 participants from different countries and sectors to share experiences, challenges and best practices on human rights protection and promotion;
- Conducting a regional workshop on gender mainstreaming in human rights work, training over 50 Amnesty International staff, partners and beneficiaries on how to integrate gender perspectives and analysis in their research, advocacy and project management;
- Represented Amnesty International at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris in June 2021, with a presentation on the role of civil society in advancing women's rights and gender equality in Africa. I also participated in several panel discussions, workshops and networking events with other human rights activists, experts, donors and policymakers.
- Conducted a regional campaign on ending child marriage in West Africa, mobilizing over 20 Amnesty International sections, networks and partners to raise awareness, influence policies and support girls at risk or affected by child marriage;

PROGRAM OFFICER (2013-2015)

Open Society Initiative for West Africa, Dakar (<https://www.osiwa.org/>)

DUTIES

- Designed and implemented grant strategy and programs in sub-Saharan Africa
- Managed a grant portfolio of 5+ million USD related to strengthening CSOs, CBOs, and education institutions capacities towards the advent of democratic, inclusive and accountable societies.
- Performed organizational audits, risk analyses of prospective grantees
- Led needs assessments missions in various countries
- Maintained relationships with numerous stakeholders to align projects with local priorities and the Foundations mission and areas of focus

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Initiated and managed a dozen grants to with a focus on democratic governance and civic engagement, women's rights, youth empowerment and access to justice, in West Africa in collaboration with local partners and beneficiaries. Some of the projects included: supporting the establishment and functioning of human rights clubs in schools and universities in West Africa; facilitating the participation of young people in democratic processes and governance in West Africa; promoting the use of social media and digital tools for human rights awareness and action in West Africa;

- Conducted research, analysis and documentation of human rights situations, challenges and opportunities in West Africa, with a focus on women's rights, youth empowerment and access to justice. Some of the research topics included: the impact of extractive industries on women's rights and livelihoods in West Africa; the role of youth movements in advancing human rights and democracy in West Africa; the barriers and enablers for access to justice for marginalized groups in West Africa; etc.
- Produced reports, articles, policy briefs and advocacy materials on human rights issues in West Africa, targeting various audiences such as media, policymakers, donors and civil society. Some of the publications included: a policy brief titled "Fortifying Africa Against Instability Caused by Climate Change" published in June 2014; policy brief titled "Access to Justice for All: Challenges and Opportunities for Marginalized Groups in West Africa" published in December 2015; etc.
- Participated in national, regional and international forums, events and meetings on human rights issues in West Africa, representing Open Society Initiative for West Africa and its partners. Some of the forums, events and meetings included: a national dialogue on women's rights and extractive industries in Ghana in July 2014; a regional conference on youth participation and democracy in Senegal in November 2015; an international symposium on access to justice for marginalized groups in South Africa in January 2016; etc.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY & SENIOR LECTURER (2010-2013)

APDHAC, Academy for Peace and Human Rights in Central Africa / Catholic University of Central Africa, Yaounde, Cameroon (<https://www.facebook.com/apdhac>)

DUTIES

- Coordinated the academy, reporting to the Director.
- Headed a master's degree program in Human rights, non-degree programs and special training sessions
- Designed, delivered teaching programs; tutored students, including supervision of dissertations.
- Supervised a 15-staff team; publications, relations with partners-donors, budget management.
- Oversaw outreach projects: 'The effectiveness of human rights'; 'Inclusive access to justice'; 'Women rights legal clinic'
- Maintained a network of human rights organizations in Central Africa
- Engaged with officials to promote and defend specific human rights or democracy issues in the region.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Coordinated the Academy's program on human rights education and training for civil society actors and human rights defenders in Central Africa. The program aimed to enhance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of civil society actors and human rights defenders on human rights issues, principles and mechanisms, as well as to strengthen their capacities to protect and promote human rights in their contexts.
- Developed curricula, modules and materials for human rights education and training, based on international human rights standards and best practices. The curricula, modules and materials covered topics such as: the history and evolution of human rights; the international, regional and national human rights frameworks; the roles and responsibilities of different human rights actors; the methods and tools for human rights research, monitoring, documentation, advocacy, etc.
- Facilitated human rights education and training sessions for various groups of participants, such as journalists, lawyers, judges, teachers, students, etc. The sessions used participatory, interactive and learner-centered approaches, such as group discussions, case studies, role plays, simulations, etc. The sessions also tailored to the specific needs, interests and experiences of the participants.
- Monitored and evaluated the impact and outcomes of human rights education and training activities, using qualitative and quantitative methods. I collected data from various sources such as pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observation, etc. I analyzed the data using descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as thematic analysis. I prepared reports that presented the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the monitoring and evaluation process.
- Established and maintained effective partnerships and networks with other human rights organizations, institutions and experts in Central Africa. I collaborated with these partners and networks to share information, resources and experiences on human rights education and training. I also invited them to participate in or contribute to the Academy's program on human rights education and training. I trained several cohorts of experts championing the cause of HR in many institutions across the continent.
- Led and successfully delivered the project 'Access to Justice in Central Africa: Cameroon, CAR' (2010-2012), which aimed to identify and address the challenges faced by marginalized groups in accessing justice in the region. The project involved conducting extensive research, developing advocacy strategies, and engaging with relevant stakeholders such as local authorities, civil society organizations, and international partners. The project resulted in increased awareness, capacity, and collaboration among the stakeholders, as well as improved access to justice for the target populations.

- Supervised and mentored the team of legal clinic hosts who provided support to survivors of gender-based violence in disenfranchised neighborhoods in Cameroon. The support included providing legal information, counseling, referral, and accompaniment services to the survivors, as well as facilitating their access to medical, psychosocial, and judicial assistance.

PROJECT OFFICER (2007-2009)

Institut d'Etudes politiques de Bordeaux, France, (www.sciencespobordeaux.fr)

DUTIES

- Coordinated GARNET project (EU-funded Network of Excellence) operation, reporting to the lead Scientist.
- Supported research team and administrative coordination, budgeting, and budget management
- Organized international scientific and outreach events
- Maintained relations with the 42 institutions members of the network
- Performed individual research on regional integration, peace and security issues.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Organized and coordinated the annual conference of the Garnet Network (Bordeaux, 2008) with +300 participants from the corporate world, academia, NGOs, Think Tanks, as well as govts and multilateral organizations.
- Contributed to a major collective book: 'The EU and World Regionalism' (Ashgate).

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Political Science, with distinction (*Universite de Bordeaux, France 2010*);

M.A. in African Studies (*IEP Bordeaux, France 2001*);

Postgraduate in Social Sciences (*UCAC, Yaounde, Cameroon 1998*).

OTHER SKILLS

- **Languages:** English: Fluent; French: mother tongue.
- **IT Literacy:** Proficiency in the MS Office environment
- **Editorial refereeing:** *Politique africaine* (Paris: Karthala); *Africa. Journal of the African Royal Institute* (London: Cambridge University Press); *Journal of African Elections* (Johannesburg: EISA)
- **Award and Honours:** Cadbury Fellow, University of Birmingham, Center of West African Studies, UK, 2006; Doctoral Research Fellow, *Institut de Recherche sur le Développement*, France 2005-2008.

REFEREES

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