Advancing International Criminal Justice in Africa

Although the sources of conflict on the African continent are varied, the results are the same: massive loss of life, egregious human rights violations and various crimes of atrocity. Local populations pay the price, and once the hostilities have ended, bereaved communities rarely have an opportunity to seek redress and accountability. Moreover, when they go unpunished, crimes of atrocity breed a culture of impunity where historic grievances give rise to recurring cycles of violence.

Processes that promote truth, justice, and reconciliation play crucial roles in rebuilding communities affected by conflict and advancing the prospects of peace, democratic governance and equitable development. They can help uncover the underlying causes of violence, hold those responsible to account and provide restitution to victims. They can also foster healing within societies, prevent atrocities from being repeated and pave the way for improved governance.

At TrustAfrica, we believe that victims and their communities must be at the center of accountability processes as they are the main constituency for justice, reconciliation and restitution. The demands and concerns of victims must be at the foundation of all attempts to remedy past injustice, from prosecutions to truth commissions to reparations, in order to render these processes more meaningful and legitimate.

At the same time, we recognize that these processes present a number of complex political issues. The selection of cases before international tribunals reflects the inequalities in the global system; yet national and regional courts often lack the resources or political support to prosecute those responsible for atrocity crimes. Such challenges need to be addressed by engaging civil society organizations, scholars, legal advocates, and state authorities in developing innovative strategies to improve accountability measures at the national, regional and global levels.

Strategies

TrustAfrica has begun working to build an effective advocacy movement to advance international criminal justice (ICJ) in Africa. The project focuses on Mali, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, and Nigeria, with plans to expand to Central Africa in a next phase. In these countries, we are taking steps to:

• Strengthen the capacity of human rights organizations to contribute to transitional justice policy making at the national level; and
• Develop informed and concerted advocacy strategies to promote accountability at the regional and international levels.
Activities

The project will advance these goals over the next three years by:

• Conducting research on the legal and institutional landscape for international criminal justice in post-conflict countries across Africa;
• Convening CSOs to network and develop strategies for improved accountability at the national, regional and international levels;
• Providing technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of CSOs to engage in national transitional justice policy processes;
• Promoting dialogue between advocacy organizations and national, regional and international bodies involved in implementing international criminal justice policies; and
• Supporting efforts to monitor transitional and international criminal justice processes at the national, regional and international levels.

Impact

The Fund’s work to date has supported victim-centered approaches to accountability in each of the focus countries and grown the capacity of nascent civil society platforms to engage with TJ/ICJ policy processes at the national, regional, and international level. Specifically, the fund has:

• Raised the profile of local organizations advancing innovative approaches to accountability in select countries;
• Fostered greater collaboration and networking between ICJ advocates in different parts of the continent;
• Facilitated more coordinated action by civil society organizations engaging in regional and international advocacy; and
• Bridged linguistic and regional divides in order to build a more concerted pan-African ICJ advocacy movement.

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