



Africa's engagement with the responsibility to protect in the 21st century

edited by Nicholas Idris Erameh and Victor Ojakorotu, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 421 pp., EUR 119,99 (hardcover), ISBN 978-981-99-8162-5

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BOOK REVIEW

Africa's engagement with the responsibility to protect in the 21st century,
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'Africa's Engagement with the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) in the 21st Century,' edited by Nicholas Idris Erameh and Victor Ojakorotu, provides a comprehensive analysis of RtoP's theoretical foundations, historical context, and practical applications within Africa. As an installment in the 'Africa's Global Engagement' series, this book delves into the implementation, obstacles, and future potential of RtoP, considering Africa's unique political, social, and economic landscape. The interdisciplinary approach of this work emphasizes the significance of African agencies while exploring the complex relationship between international intervention and regional autonomy. By effectively combining theoretical discussions with practical case studies, this book makes a significant contribution to both global and African scholarship in the fields of peace studies, conflict resolution, and human rights.

The opening chapter offers a conceptual and chronological examination of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP), detailing its development in response to the global community's shortcomings in averting atrocities such as the genocide in Rwanda and the Kosovo conflict. The editors highlight RtoP's fundamental tenets: states' primary duty to safeguard their citizens, the international community's supportive role, and the necessity for intervention when nations fail to shield their populations from atrocities, such as war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This introductory segment lays the groundwork for subsequent chapters that explore the intricacies of applying RtoP in Africa. This underscores the persistent conflict between national sovereignty and the imperative for humanitarian intervention, a recurring motif throughout the book.

The latter half of the publication delves into the real-world implementation of the RtoP by examining various African conflicts, including those in Libya, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire. These examples shed light on both the achievements and shortcomings of the RtoP in tackling mass atrocities. For example, Libyan intervention is scrutinized for its contentious results, where the goal of civilian protection was eclipsed by claims of forced regime change. Likewise, the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon and Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency demonstrate the difficulties in executing RtoP within intricate sociopolitical contexts. The authors contend that these interventions often fall short of addressing the underlying causes of conflict, leading to minimal long-term effects. This portion of the book effectively showcases the arbitrary and inconsistent application of RtoP, prompting important questions regarding its credibility and efficacy.

A notable feature of the book is its in-depth examination of new challenges related to the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) doctrine. The third part of the book investigates how global issues, such as climate change, human migration, and economic disparities, interact with RtoP principles. One chapter, for instance, advocates incorporating environmental factors into the RtoP framework, acknowledging how climate change can intensify conflicts and humanitarian disasters. The text also emphasizes the importance of regional bodies, particularly the African Union (AU), in implementing the RtoP. The AU's 'non-indifference' stance is portrayed as a significant shift from traditional sovereignty concepts, demonstrating a commitment to collective action against mass atrocities. Nevertheless, the book criticizes AU's constrained

capabilities and internal conflicts, which impede its effective application of RtoP. These discussions broaden RtoP's scope beyond immediate conflict scenarios, underscoring its significance in long-term peacebuilding and sustainable development efforts.

The book's concluding chapter explores the consolidation and potential of the RtoP in Africa. It assesses the evolution of RtoP from a theoretical concept to a practical implementation, utilizing the 'norm life cycle' model. While recognizing notable achievements, such as the creation of early warning mechanisms and deployment of peacekeeping forces, the authors stress the necessity for enhanced political commitment and capacity enhancement to reinforce these accomplishments. They also highlight the often-overlooked 'responsibility to rebuild' in post-conflict situations as a crucial component of RtoP. The text advocates for a more comprehensive and context-specific approach to RtoP, urging the incorporation of African perspectives and inputs to guide its execution.

A notable aspect of the publication is its cross-disciplinary methodology, incorporating perspectives from various fields, such as political science, international law, sociology, and environmental studies. This multifaceted approach enhances the depth of the analysis and offers a thorough grasp of the challenges and prospects associated with RtoP. The book's contributors and editors exhibit a profound understanding of African governance complexities and conflict resolution strategies, providing valuable knowledge for academics, decision-makers, and field experts. By blending theoretical discussions with practical case studies, the book's organization ensures a well-rounded and subtle examination of RtoP.

The book, while possessing notable strengths, also has certain limitations. Although it offers a comprehensive analysis of RtoP's application in Africa, it could further explore alternative models or supplementary approaches that address the weaknesses of the doctrine. Moreover, some sections rely heavily on theoretical discussions, potentially reducing their usefulness for practitioners seeking concrete solutions. The inclusion of more perspectives from African civil society and communities affected by the doctrine could enhance the book's pertinence and effectiveness. Additionally, while the text examines the function of regional entities, such as the AU, it could offer more specific suggestions for enhancing their capabilities and resolving internal conflicts. Despite its thorough critique of the RtoP in Africa, the book could benefit from a more in-depth exploration of practical alternatives and a broader range of African voices.

The book's examination of specific examples is particularly persuasive, as it exposes the intricacies and inconsistencies in applying RtoP across various situations. For example, the section on Libya emphasizes the difficulties in reconciling humanitarian goals with geopolitical concerns, a theme that frequently emerges in discussions about international intervention. Likewise, the analysis of the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria demonstrates the shortcomings of solely depending on external assistance to tackle deeply ingrained systemic problems. These case studies reinforce the importance of adopting a more localized and situation-specific approach to RtoP, one that emphasizes prevention and long-term stability rather than reactive measures.

The book's future-oriented approach is another significant feature. By exploring how the RtoP intersects with new global issues, the authors highlight the importance of a comprehensive and unified strategy for humanitarian intervention. The suggestion to include environmental factors in the RtoP framework is especially relevant, considering the increasing awareness of climate change's role in triggering conflicts and forced migration. This viewpoint expands the reach of RtoP and emphasizes its significance in addressing current worldwide challenges.

The publication also addresses crucial concerns regarding the future of the RtoP in Africa. It emphasizes the necessity for improved alignment and synchronization between worldwide

and regional frameworks, as well as the significance of cultivating political determination and dedication among African leaders. The authors contend that effectively implementing RtoP demands not only institutional changes, but also a transformation in societal beliefs and objectives. They advocate for a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to RtoP that enables local communities and civil society to assume a pivotal role in averting and addressing mass atrocities.

To sum up, 'Africa's Engagement with the Responsibility to Protect in the 21st Century' offers a captivating and insightful examination of a crucial topic in modern international relations. The book's multidisciplinary approach, critical evaluation, and emphasis on the African initiative make it an invaluable resource for those seeking to comprehend the intricacies of humanitarian intervention and the pursuit of global justice. While acknowledging the obstacles and constraints of RtoP, this study also presents an optimistic vision, stressing the importance of collaborative efforts and creative solutions to safeguard the most vulnerable. By contextualizing RtoP within the broader framework of African politics and global governance, the book delivers a sophisticated and impartial perspective that appeals to readers from various backgrounds. It is a must-read for academics, decision-makers, and advocates navigating the complex interplay of sovereignty, responsibility, and human rights in the current era.

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