

Institution: De Montfort University		
Unit of Assessment: 18		
Title of case study: Afronomicslaw.org: Empowering and Amplifying Marginalised Voices in Economic Governance Processes in Africa		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Ohio Omiunu	Associate Professor/Reader in Law	February 2016–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: March – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Omiunu's research under the auspices of Afronomicslaw.org, where he is an Editor, has empowered and amplified youths and NGO groups, respectively, as stakeholders in Africa's economic governance processes. Notably:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Omiunu led a team of African youths who designed a development-focused Covid-19 model trade clause in a United Nations toolkit for international trade negotiators. 2 Omiunu's research shaped the agenda for an intergenerational debate on economic integration between African youths and high-level political actors at the Tana High-Level Forum – the leading annual peace and security forum in Africa. 3 Omiunu's research was foundational in establishing a consortium of African NGOs pressing for economic justice in Africa. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Three strands of Omiunu's research underpin the impacts in this case study.</p> <p>(1) CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS AS A HINDRANCE TO THE PARTICIPATION OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN THE GLOBAL TRADING SYSTEM</p> <p>A special issue publication edited by Omiunu et al. [R1] critically explored capacity constraints militating against Africa's participation in international economic relations. The research, which emanated from an international conference co-organised by Omiunu (<i>The AfIELN Biennial Conference – Diversity of Scholarship and Representation</i>, 12 July 2019), identified an often-overlooked nexus between knowledge creation and curation in the international economic law (IEL) discipline and Africa's marginality in global economic governance [R1: 3].</p> <p>In R1, Omiunu et al. identified how the marginalisation of African perspectives and voices in the IEL discourse is inimical to African countries' effective participation in the global economic discourse [R1: 7].</p> <p>Given the circumstances, Omiunu et al. advocated for informal spaces to consolidate the scholarship, teaching, research, practice and policy relating to IEL in Africa [R1: 6–9]. Omiunu et al. highlighted the importance of nurturing future IEL scholars who are appropriately equipped with knowledge relevant to the African continent [R1: 8]. The research by Omiunu et al. also emphasised that 'the early study of IEL is important and critical to constructing the present and future generation of IEL in Africa both as a field of study and legal practice' [R1: 6].</p> <p>(2) AMPLIFYING AND EMPOWERING AFRICAN YOUTHS IN ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE THROUGH THE AFRONOMICSLAW.ORG ACADEMIC FORUM</p> <p>Responding to the findings in R1, further research by Omiunu has explored practical and innovative methods to build capacity among a new generation of African youths who are keen to</p>		

engage with IEL but have limited opportunities to do so due to the issues highlighted in R1. Specifically, Omiunu developed a mentoring programme for African youths focusing on technical issues relating to IEL (detailed in section 4). Notably, Omiunu's research with several youth volunteers participating in the mentoring programme led to the publication of a peer-reviewed model clause [R2] in October 2020. R2 focused on the challenges faced by Global South countries in the multilateral trade system of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which have found it difficult to secure much needed personal protective equipment (PPE) during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research connected the shortage in PPE to restrictions invoked by contracting parties under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). More importantly, the research emphasised the adverse impact of these restrictions on developing countries heavily dependent on developed countries for critical medical supplies. The research proposed a model WTO GATT clause that will prevent the use of GATT provisions (Art. XI:2(a); Art. XX(b); Art. XXI(b)(iii) and any other provision of GATT 1994 inconsistent with our proposed clause) to justify exceptions to restrictions in trade of PPE during a pandemic or any future global public health emergency [R2: 9–10]. The recommendations in R2 built on a symposium convened by Afronomicslaw.org, which highlighted salient socio-economic implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for Global South countries [R3]. The publication of R2 gave the African youths involved an opportunity to contribute their voices to important interventions and debates by stakeholders across the world on how to 'build back better' after the Covid-19 health crisis. Leading this initiative has also highlighted the need for informal supporting mechanisms to introduce young people on the African continent to technical aspects of IEL early on in their academic careers, as recommended by Omiunu et al. [R1: 6]. R2 is also a response to the observation by Omiunu et al. in R1 that there must be a commitment from stakeholders to nurture 'policy experts that strive for innovation in the design and negotiation of African trade agreements' [R1: 8]. As such, the successful publication of R2 demonstrates the potential of African youths to contribute to the technical design of trade rules that affect Africa when given the opportunity. It also provides a step in the right direction to remedy a finding by Omiunu et al. that there is a 'shortage of personnel with expertise and understanding of the dynamics of international economic relations on the continent; particularly technical, historical and substantive knowledge of the field of IEL in Africa' [R1: 8].

(3) ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AFRICA

Under this strand, Omiunu's research critically explores the important role of NGOs in exposing corruption by public sector officials in African countries such as in Mozambique, where the highest court in the country overturned a sovereign-backed debt which was procured through fraud and abuse of due process by government officials in connivance with foreign investors [R4]. In R4, Omiunu and Akanmidu focus on underexplored connections between economic justice and dispute resolution in international forums involving African host states. Against the backdrop of recent court decisions in high-profile disputes involving two African countries, Mozambique and Nigeria, R4 highlights parallels and opportunities for learning, especially as it pertains to the role of African NGOs in holding public officials accountable and exposing odious deals with corrupt foreign conspirators.

3. References to the research

- [R1] Akinkugbe, O.D., Omiunu, O., Vanni, A., Simo, R.Y. and Dirar, L. (2020) 'Africa's participation in international economic law in the 21st century' (special issue), *Manchester Journal of International Economic Law*, 17(1): 1–162; <https://www.electronicpublications.org/catalogue/243>
- MJIEL is a peer reviewed leading journal focusing on International Economic Law. The papers in the special issue publication, which went through 3 rounds of peer review, emanated from an international conference that Omiunu co-organised with the other guest editors between June 2018 and July 2019.
- [R2] Gathii, J., Omiunu, O., Kayode, O., Nciko, A., Nkomalago, M., Mbori, H. and Maritim, P. (2020) 'Proposing a model clause for global public health emergencies – trade-related measure', UN ESCAP Policy Hackathon on Model Provisions for Trade in Times of Crisis and Pandemic in Regional and other Trade Agreements;

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/online-repository-contributions-policy-hackathon-model-provisions-trade-times-crisis-and>

This publication was subject to peer review by leading experts in the field. Making the final selection for inclusion in a United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) online toolkit for international trade negotiators is evidence of its quality.

[R3] Gathii, J., Akinkugbe, O., Adebola, T., Mapefane, N. and Omiunu, O. (2020) 'International Economic Law in the Global South and COVID-19', Afronomicslaw COVID-19 Symposium on International Economic Law in the Global South, UK, May 2020.

[R4] Omiunu, O. and Akanmidu, O. (2021) 'Reflections on Nigeria vs Process & Industrial Developments Limited (P&ID)', *NYU Journal of International Law & Politics* (accepted for publication, 23 December 2020).

The original version of this output, which was published as an opinion piece on Afronomicslaw.org, was read by a public relations firm and legal counsel representing one of the parties involved in a high-profile dispute between the Republic of Nigeria and Process and Industry (P&ID) featured in the paper. An updated version of the paper accepted for publication by the NYU Journal of International Law & Politics was subject to 2 rounds of peer review.

4. Details of the impact

(1) TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO IMPACT: THE ROLE OF AFRONOMICS.LAW.ORG

Omiunu is one of four Editors of Afronomicslaw.org, a blog set up in January 2019 to empower marginalised African voices in the economic governance discourse. Omiunu formally joined Afronomicslaw.org in May 2020 as its Lead Editor to spearhead its flagship youth mentorship scheme – the Academic Forum (the Forum). Before this, Omiunu had played an instrumental role in setting up the blog in 2019, including coming up with its unique name – 'Afronomicslaw.' The primary aim of Afronomicslaw.org is to complement existing forums that analyse, discuss and debate IEL issues related to Africa and the Global South. Using blogs, public webinars and informal mentorship as an advocacy and empowerment strategy, Afronomicslaw.org has significantly amplified Global South perspectives on IEL in a short period. With over 400 high-quality blog posts published in 2019-2020 and a daily readership comprising academics, policymakers, legal practitioners and political actors, Afronomicslaw caters to a broad audience. With over 100 unique users visiting the website per day, sometimes rising to an average of 300–450 visitors during special events, Afronomicslaw.org is now synonymous with Global South IEL perspectives within the broader international law community.

(2) EMPOWERING MARGINALISED AFRICAN YOUTHS IN ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE THROUGH MENTORSHIP

Under Omiunu's leadership of the Forum, Afronomicslaw.org has made significant strides. There are 23 volunteers from across Africa (including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Nigeria and Uganda) now signed up as academic representatives on the Forum as of 31 December 2020 [C1]. Since its introduction in May 2020, the Forum has grown in popularity [C2] due to several accomplishments in a short period, including the publication of R2 and the introduction of a four-month training programme focusing on general and specific IEL topics of relevance to Africa. Under the guidance of Omiunu, the training programme was initiated and is coordinated by one of the volunteers (the Forum's Lead Representative in East Africa – an undergraduate student of Strathmore University Kenya) [C3, C4].

Led by Omiunu, a team of volunteers from the Forum actively participated in designing a model trade clause to mitigate the impact of future global health emergencies on international trade corridors [R2]. A team of UN expert reviewers selected R2 in a competitive process for inclusion in a United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) online toolkit for international trade negotiators [C5]. This is a remarkable feat achieved by a team comprising four novices in international trade law who, aided by research-based mentoring from

Omiunu, were able to meaningfully contribute to the design of the trade clause. This achievement's significance is further underscored by the fact that the Forum's proposal was among only four entries selected from African teams out of 20 proposals accepted in the category for 'Essential goods/Import-Export restrictions' [see online toolkit in R2]. The Forum's proposal was also the only entry prepared by an African team comprising two or more undergraduate students.

More importantly, participation in the mentorship scheme has significantly enhanced the education and career pathways of the students involved. As a result of work on the model clause, the student volunteers received certificates of participation from the United Nations and gained practical insights on how to draft trade clauses [C6]. Inspired by this experience, one of the volunteers who participated in the design of R2 reports how involvement with this mentoring scheme aided his application for graduate opportunities in prestigious universities outside of Africa [C7].

Omiunu was invited by the Secretariat of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa (THLF) – the leading annual peace and security forum in Africa – as the sole academic expert on African economic integration to assist in the agenda-setting for the 2020 THLF event. The theme of the 2020 THLF was the nexus between the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and peace and security in Africa. Omiunu was further invited to judge and select winning entries for an essay competition – the THLF's flagship youth empowerment programme designed to foster intergenerational discussions on pressing peace and security issues affecting the African continent. As a result of these invitations, previous work as Editor of Afronomicslaw.org's Academic Forum and success at the UN Hackathon, the THLF formally approached Omiunu to mentor the three winners of the youth competition ahead of their presentation to high-level political leaders, including several heads of state. This is the first time in the nine-year history of the THLF that youth mentoring has been outsourced outside of the THLF's secretariat, and this was due to Omiunu's expertise in the area and previous track record with the Forum [C8].

(3) IMPROVING PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND LOBBYING POWER ABOUT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AFRICA

Afronomiclaw.org's expanding reach has benefited important stakeholders involved in championing economic justice causes in Africa, such as the Open Society for Southern Africa (OSISA). Notably, Omiunu (supported by HEIF funding) initiated and organised Afronomiclaw.org's first public webinar, which was done in collaboration with the OSISA [C9]. The webinar helped OSISA generate public awareness about a significant public interest litigation case – the Mozambique Constitutional Court Decision discussed by Omiunu and Akanmidu in R4. The webinar had over 90 unique viewers from across five continents during the event (and 90 maximum concurrent views at one point) [C10]. The webinar participants included academics, other Africa-based NGOs (including representatives of the NGO – Nweti Mozambique - that initiated the successful public interest litigation), journalists, students and members of the general public. This webinar has proved to be an effective strategy for centring African NGOs' voices working on critical economic justice issues in Africa. In the words of one of the NGO panellists at the webinar organised by Omiunu, 'I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to everybody, and it's a great thing for the organisers to have done, and I hope you'll do it again soon' [C11: 32]. The webinar series is now a staple of Afronomiclaw.org, with subsequent webinar collaborations with important Global South stakeholders, including – UNCTAD, UNDP and South Centre and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations [C12].

Building on the success generated by the webinar, OSF has given Afronomiclaw.org a USD100,000 grant (10-2020) to set up an economic justice network comprising high profile NGOs involved in sovereign debt advocacy in Africa. Achieving the grant money has provided Afronomiclaw and its NGO partners greater lobbying power to design advocacy tools and focused public campaigns to aid future public interest litigation and advocacy on issues of illegally procured debt by African governments [C13].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

ACADEMIC FORUM–RELATED IMPACT EVIDENCE

- [C1] List of academic volunteers signed up to Afronomicslaw.org academic forum led by Omiunu; <https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/academic-forum/report-academic-forums-activities-2020>
- [C2] Email correspondence between the Forum’s Lead Representative in East Africa and Omiunu highlighting the growing popularity of the Academic Forum in the region.
- [C3] Testimonial (by the Forum’s Lead Representative in East Africa) showing how Omiunu’s research-led mentorship influenced the initiative he took to set up an East African chapter of the Academic Forum.
- [C4] Participant feedback on the positive impact of the four-month training course initiated by the Forum’s Lead Representative in East Africa under the guidance of Omiunu; <https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/academic-forum/report-academic-forums-activities-2020> and <https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/academic-forum/reflections-and-testimonials-academic-forum-participants-class-20202021>
- [C5] Email from UN Policy Hackathon organisers informing Omiunu of the successful selection of R2.
- [C6] UN certificates from the student team members who participated in the UN Policy Hackathon.
- [C7] Testimonial from an Academic Representative that participated in the UN Policy Hackathon.

THLF-RELATED IMPACT EVIDENCE

- [C8] Testimonials from the THLF Secretariat acknowledging and appreciating Omiunu’s contribution to the agenda-setting and processes to foster intergenerational debate on economic integration between African youths and high-level political actors at the Tana High-Level Forum – the leading annual peace and security forum in Africa.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE / NGO NETWORK–RELATED IMPACT EVIDENCE

- [C9] Omiunu’s correspondence with OSF and Afronomicslaw.org editors about the Mozambique webinar and flyer corroborating that Omiunu organised the webinar.
- [C10] Webinar attendance records during the webinar session.
- [C11] Webinar transcript provided to OSF.
- [C12] Afronomicslaw.org webinar collaborations since the first webinar initiated by Omiunu.
- [C13] African Sovereign Debt Justice network dedicated website on Afronomicslaw.org; <https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/afsdjn>