

CHI ADANNA MGBAKO

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ACADEMIC BIOGRAPHY

Chi Adanna Mgbako is clinical professor of law and director of the Walter Leitner International Human Rights Clinic in the Leitner Center for International Law and Justice at Fordham Law School. She and her students work on projects in partnership with grassroots social justice organizations, international organizations, foreign universities, and United Nations agencies focusing primarily on gender equality, anti-carceral human rights advocacy, access to justice, and the rights of marginalized communities. She has conducted human rights fieldwork in Botswana, Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and the United States.

Mgbako is the author of *To Live Freely in This World: Sex Worker Activism in Africa* (New York University Press). Her scholarship has also appeared in the *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender*, *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Social Change*, *Berkeley Journal of Criminal Law*, *Georgetown Journal of International Law*, *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law*, and the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, among other publications. Her writing for the popular press and scholar-activism have been featured in the *New York Times* International Edition, BBC News Focus on Africa, the *Guardian*, *HuffPost*, *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, and the *Washington Post: Monkey Cage*.

Mgbako is a graduate of Harvard Law School and Columbia University and a former fellow with the International Crisis Group. She has been honored as a *New York Law Journal* Rising Star, *National Law Journal* Top 40 Lawyer of Color Under 40, Fordham Law School's Public Interest Professor of the Year, and the Police Reform Organizing Project's Citizen of the City Awardee. She is also a recipient of the Association of American Law Schools Section on Clinical Legal Education's M. Shanara Gilbert Award, one of the highest honors in clinical legal education.

EDUCATION

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL, J.D., 2005

Honors: Gary Bellow Public Service Award
Dean's Award for Community Leadership
Henigson Human Rights Fellowship
Kaufman Public Service Fellowship
Reginald F. Lewis Human Rights Grant
Human Rights Program Grants

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, B.A. in History, *magna cum laude*, 2001

Honors: John F. Kluge Scholar
King Crown's Leadership Award

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

Clinical Professor of Law

Clinical Associate Professor of Law

Founding Director, Walter Leitner International Human Rights Clinic

New York, NY

2014 – present

2007 – 2014

2007 – present

PROFESSIONAL HONORS

M. Shanara Gilbert "Emerging Clinician" Award, AALS Clinical Section (2017)

Rising Star Award, *New York Law Journal* (2015)

Citizen of the City Award, Police Reform Organizing Project (2013)

Public Interest Professor of the Year, Fordham Law School (2012)

Top 40 Minority Lawyers Under 40, *National Law Journal* (2011)

BOOKS

TO LIVE FREELY IN THIS WORLD: SEX WORKER ACTIVISM IN AFRICA (New York University Press 2016)

Reviewed in *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, *African Affairs*, *DiGeST: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, *Feminist Collections*, *Feminist Review*, *Human Rights Review*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Make/Shift Magazine*, *Perspectives on Politics*, and *Tits and Sass*. Assigned in university courses at Brandeis, Butler, California Institute of Integral Studies, Emory, Howard, McGill, McMaster, NYU, Oregon State University, Spelman, University of New Hampshire, University of Toronto, and Washington University in St. Louis, among others.

LAW REVIEW ARTICLES, BOOK CHAPTERS, POLICY REPORTS & BOOK REVIEWS

Novel Sex Work Anti-Discrimination Protections, 32 *Virginia Journal of Social Policy & the Law* 332 (with ElDabh, Falk & Pennie) (2025)

A Roadmap for Sex Workers' Rights Reform: Lessons Learned from Recent Legal Advancements, 29 *Berkeley Journal of Criminal Law* 103 (with ElDabh, Butler & Kemunto) (2024)

Anti-Carceral Human Rights Advocacy, 26 *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Social Change* 2 (with Johnson et al.) (2023)

The Mainstreaming of Sex Workers' Rights as Human Rights, 43 *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender* 92 (2020) (solicited)

Sex Work/Prostitution in Africa, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2019) (solicited) & *OXFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S HISTORY*, Oxford University Press, Hodgson et al, eds. (2025)

The Case for Decriminalization of Sex Work in South Africa, 44 *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 1423 (with Bass et al.) (2013)

Book Review, *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa by Ashley Currier 2012*, 35 (2) *Human Rights Quarterly* 517 (2013)

Witchcraft Accusations and Human Rights: Case Studies from Malawi, 43 *George Washington International Law Review* 389 (with Katherine Glenn) (2012)

Engaging Legal Dualism: Paralegal Organizations and Customary Law in Sierra Leone and Liberia in *THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN CUSTOMARY LAW*, Cambridge University Press, Fenrich, Galizzi, and Higgins, eds. (with Kristina Scurry Baehr) (2011)

Sex Work and Human Rights in Africa, 33 *Fordham International Law Journal* 1178 (with Laura A. Smith) (2010)

Penetrating the Silence in Sierra Leone: A Blueprint for the Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation, 23 *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 11 (with Cave et al.) (2010)

Forced Eviction and Resettlement in Cambodia: Case Studies from Phnom Penh, 9 *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 39 (with Cave et al.) (2010)

Exporting Confusion: U.S. Foreign Policy as an Obstacle to the Implementation of Ethiopia's Liberalized Abortion Law, *Leitner Center for International Law and Justice* (with Degol et al.) (2010)

Silencing the Ethiopian Courts: Non-Judicial Constitutional Review and its Impact on Human Rights, 32 Fordham International Law Journal 259 (with Degol et al.) (2008)

We Will Still Live: Confronting Stigma and Discrimination against Women Living with HIV/AIDS in Malawi, 31 Fordham International Law Journal 528 (with Fenrich and Higgins) (2008)

Rights-Based Sex Worker Empowerment Guidelines: An Alternative HIV/AIDS Intervention Approach to the 100% Condom Use Programme, Sampada Gramin Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM) (with Smith et al.) (2008)

Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment, International Crisis Group (2006)

Liberia: Resurrecting the Justice System, International Crisis Group (2006)

Frontline Rwanda: Disappearances, Arrests, Threats, Intimidation and Co-option of Human Rights Defenders 2001-2004, Front Line, the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (with Toy-Cronin and Waldorf) (2005)

"Ingando" Solidarity Camps: Reconciliation and Political Indoctrination in Post-Genocide Rwanda, 18 Harvard Human Rights Journal 201 (2005)

COMMENTARY

Sex worker activism has exploded throughout Africa, The Washington Post: Monkey Cage (with Kim Yi Dionne) (July 8, 2016)

The Global Labor Rights Movement You've Likely Never Heard Of, HuffPost (May 26, 2016)

U.S. Global AIDS Funding and Its Discontents: Why the Supreme Court Must Strike Down the Anti-Prostitution Pledge, 8 Yale Journal of International Affairs 133 (2013)

Overturn US anti-prostitution pledge to support sex workers and combat HIV, The Guardian (April 22, 2013)

African Voices of Legal Empowerment, HuffPost (January 10, 2013)

There Are No 'Perfect Victims,' HuffPost (August 14, 2012)

Police Confiscation of Condoms from Sex Workers Compromises Public Health, HuffPost (July 20, 2012)

New York Lawmakers Compromise Public Health by Failing to Pass 'No Condoms as Evidence' Bill, Rewire (July 3, 2012)

Greek Sex Workers Face Forced HIV Tests; Malawi Workers Fight Back, Ms. Magazine Blog (June 11, 2012)

Why the Women's Rights Movement Must Listen to Sex Workers, Rewire (May 22, 2012)

Why Economic Justice Is Central to LGBT Rights, HuffPost (May 7, 2012)

Criminalization of prostitution as a violation of sex workers' right to health, IntlLawGrrls (December 17, 2011)

Police Abuse of Sex Workers: A Global Reality, Widely Ignored, Rewire (December 15, 2011)

Africa's LGBT Rights Movement, HuffPost (May 3, 2011)

The Architecture of Maternal Death, Rewire (with Tarek Meguid) (April 4, 2011)

Aiding Children Accused of Witchcraft, HuffPost (March 14, 2011)

Witchcraft Legal Aid in Africa, The New York Times International Edition (February 17, 2011)

Honoring the International Day to End Violence against Sex Workers, HuffPost (December 14, 2010)

Sierra Leone Youth Call for an End to Female Genital Mutilation, HuffPost (November 26, 2010)

Three African Vignettes: Nigeria, Benin, Rwanda, Afrik-News (September 15, 2010)

Africa's Women Turn 50, HuffPost (August 20, 2010)

Rwanda: Media Censorship Will Breed Resentment, allAfrica.com (August 11, 2010)

Ethiopia: U.S. foreign policy and unsafe abortion in Africa, openDemocracy (August 3, 2010)

Rwanda: Gov't 'Manipulates' Genocide Memory, allAfrica.com (July 21, 2010)

A call for sex workers' rights in Africa, Pambazuka News (June 24, 2010)

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Presentations at academic institutions, governmental institutions, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, and private organizations, including the Institute for Human Rights Studies, Columbia University ("*Sex Work and Human Rights in Africa*"); Columbia University Women in Law and Politics ("*Let's Talk Public Interest Law*"); Falcon Management ("*Female Genital Cutting in Sierra Leone*"); Leitner Center for International Law and Justice, Fordham Law School ("*To Live Freely in This World: Sex Worker Activism in Africa*"); Maloney Library, Fordham Law School ("*Against Criminalization: Gender, Activism, and the Pursuit of Justice*"); International Law Association ("*LGBT Rights in Africa*"); Harvard College, Harvard University ("*The Future of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda*"); Human Rights Program and Harvard African Law Students Association, Harvard Law School ("*To Live Freely in This World: Sex Worker Activism in Africa*"); HLS Celebration 65, Harvard Law School ("*Training Women's Rights Advocates through the International Human Rights Clinic*"); House of Councillors and Ministry of Justice, Tokyo, Japan ("*Proposals for the Treatment of Prisoners Sentenced to Death in Japan*"); Department of African History, Howard University ("*To Live Freely in This World: Sex Worker Activism in Africa*"); Montclair Literary Festival ("*Fighting for Truth, Safety, and Freedom*"); Department of Cultural and Social Analysis, New York University (Guest Lecturer, *Intersections: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Global Perspective*); Sex Workers Project, Urban Justice Center ("*To Live Freely in This World: Sex Worker Activism in Africa*"); United Nations Commission on the Status of Women ("*Which Policies Best Respect Sex Workers' Rights? A Conversation with Sex Workers' Rights Defenders*"); Center for the Study of Public Life, Wesleyan University (Guest Lecturer, *Human Rights Advocacy: Critical Assessment and Practical Engagement in Global Social Justice*); University Network of Human Rights, Wesleyan University ("*The Mainstreaming of Sex Workers' Rights as Human Rights*").

MEDIA COMMENTARY

BBC News Focus on Africa, HuffPost, IRIN News, The Nation, Malawian radio and newspaper outlets

SELECTED REPRESENTATIVE CASEWORK

GENDER EQUALITY

United States: Jailhouse lawyers manual focused on gender justice, including access to healthcare in women's prisons and criminalized survivors of violence. (2025)

Japan: Policy paper on inclusive education as it applies to disability, gender and sexuality, poverty, and race/ethnicity/language/religion presented to Japanese Ministry of Education. (2023)

Lebanon: 175-page handbook detailing best practices of national and local advocacy campaigns for decriminalization of abortion, sexual orientation and gender identity, and sex workers' rights. (2022)

Kuwait: Drafted sexual violence bill focused on trauma-informed care for survivors presented to Kuwaiti parliament. (2021)

Japan, Kenya, and the U.S.: Gender equality and human rights workshops for hundreds of community-based activists, high school students, teachers, and university students in Japan and Kenya. Online instructor's manual and student workbook on gender justice and human rights in the U.S. (2017 – 2020)

United States: Research support to legal working group against the Trump administration's reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule. (2017)

Ethiopia: Report on effect of U.S. foreign policy on Ethiopian women's access to safe abortion services based on fieldwork in Ethiopia. (2010)

Sierra Leone: Human rights anti-female genital cutting workshops in schools in northern Sierra Leone with thousands of students participating. (2010)

United States: On-site surveys assessing level of reproductive healthcare being provided to Native American women through government-run Indian Health Services in South Dakota. (2009)

Malawi: Human rights workshops for 200 HIV-positive women in four towns/cities in Malawi. (2007)

SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS

Global: Research and publication of guide on human rights mechanisms and follow-up advocacy for sex workers' rights advocates. (2018 – 2020)

Namibia and Uganda: Submissions to international human rights bodies (Human Rights Committee, Universal Periodic Review, and Committee Against Torture) documenting abuses against Namibian and Ugandan sex workers. (2016)

Africa: Human rights workshop in Mauritius for activists from Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda on the use of national, regional, and international human rights mechanisms to advance sex workers' rights in Africa. (2015)

Zimbabwe: Policy paper on decriminalization of sex work in Zimbabwe. Comparative memo on models of sex worker legal empowerment. (2013)

United States: Advocacy paper submitted to Association of Attorneys General critiquing “end demand” approach to sex work. (2012)

South Africa: Policy papers on behalf of sex worker-led national campaign to decriminalize sex work in South Africa. (2011)

Malawi: International and comparative constitutional law research for successful public interest lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of forced HIV testing of sex workers. (2011)

India: Policy document crafting rights-based alternative guidelines for HIV/AIDS interventions targeting sex workers. (2008)

ANTI-CARCERAL HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

United States: Jailhouse lawyers manual focused on restorative justice (2024)

United States: Human rights report documenting non-carceral local efforts throughout the United States to invest in social and economic resources for low-income communities of color. (2020)

Kenya: Advocacy paper documenting the experiences of incarcerated girls and calling for abolition and reforms of the juvenile punishment system in Kenya. (2019 – 2020)

United States: Public health and human rights-based policy report calling for the decriminalization of all drugs for personal use in Washington D.C. (2017)

Japan: Policy report advocating for the rights of prisoners on death row in Japan presented to the Japanese Ministry of Justice at the Japanese House of Councillors. (2017)

United States: Policy reports critiquing NYPD broken windows policing and NYPD harassment of Black and Latinx communities, Muslim-American communities, sex workers, queer youth of color, street vendors, and homeless people. (2012 – 2017)

Malawi: Submissions of individual claims on behalf of Malawian people in prison to United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. International and comparative constitutional law research for public interest lawsuit on the right to trial within a reasonable time. (2008 – 2010)

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Syria: Legal and policy consultancy for the U.N. Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP) regarding Syrian migrants and asylum-seekers missing on migration routes. (2025-2026)

Africa: Victim-centered strategic litigation guide focusing on enforced disappearances prepared for distribution to activists in Algeria, Libya, Sudan, and Zimbabwe and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (2020)

Global: 100-page handbook detailing best practices for community-based paralegal programs handling sexual violence cases. (2015)

Malawi: Mobile legal aid clinics in three villages in rural Malawi providing individuals in 110 cases with legal assistance on witchcraft accusations, property grabbing, domestic violence, and child maintenance; Handbook to assist in improving the design of community-based paralegal program based on fieldwork in Malawi. (2009 – 2011)

Liberia: 200-page handbook to improve design of community-based paralegal program based on fieldwork in Liberia. (2008)

RIGHTS OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Japan: International and comparative legal arguments in support of marriage equality for Plaintiff's Bar and public interest lawsuits fighting for marriage equality in Japan. (2023)

Global: Submission to serve as input for United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent's draft declaration on rights of people of African descent. Submission analyzes intersectional discrimination against women and girls of African descent, LGBTQ+ people of African descent, and people of African descent with disabilities in the African Diaspora, including Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the United States. (2022)

New York City: Submission to Office of the Inspector General–NYPD documenting racially discriminatory effects of NYPD's broken windows policing policy. (2015)

New York City: Consultancy work for Black Lives Matter activists regarding recommendations for legal, policy, and human rights interventions targeting police brutality in New York City. (2015)

South Africa: Report documenting employment and housing discrimination against LGBT refugees in South Africa. Human rights workshop for LGBT refugee rights activists on the use of national, regional, and international human rights mechanisms. (2013 – 2014)

Lebanon: Needs assessment report outlining employment discrimination faced by Lebanese transgender community. (2010)

PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW	New York, NY
Crowley Fellow in International Human Rights	2006 – 2007
Taught seminar on feminization of HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ethiopia and Malawi. Authored report on feminization of HIV/AIDS in Malawi. Co-produced documentary entitled "The Face of AIDS: The Feminization of HIV/AIDS in Malawi" (documentary broadcast on Malawi TV for World AIDS Day, International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, and featured in university courses).	

INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, WEST AFRICA PROJECT	Dakar, Senegal
Harvard Henigson Human Rights Fellow	2005 – 2006
Authored Crisis Group policy reports on justice sector reform in Liberia and constitutional and legal reform in Nigeria. Drafted daily briefings and monthly internal reports on security situation in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Conducted advocacy meetings with international donors and interviews with international press.	

ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROJECT	New York, NY
Law Clerk	Summer 2004

CLEARY, GOTTlieb, STEEN & HAMILTON	New York, NY
Summer Associate	Summer 2004

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL TRIBUNAL FOR RWANDA	Arusha, Tanzania
Clerk	Law Summer 2003

FIELD RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Kenya on gender and juvenile punishment system (2019)
 Kenya on gender and human rights education (2018)
 Japan on gender and human rights education (2017)
 Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda on sex worker activism (2010 – 2014)
 South Africa on employment and housing discrimination against LGBTQ+ refugees (2013)
 South Africa on decriminalization of sex work (2011)
 Malawi on access to justice and community-based paralegal programs (2011)
 Ethiopia on Global Gag Rule and access to safe abortion (2010)
 Lebanon on employment discrimination against transgender people (2010)
 Cambodia on Cambodian-American deportees (2010)
 South Dakota Lakota reservations on Native American women's access to reproductive health services (2009)
 Cambodia on forced eviction (2008)
 Malawi on arbitrary detention (2008)
 Liberia on access to justice and community-based paralegal programs (2008)
 India on HIV/AIDS programs targeting sex workers (2008)
 Sierra Leone on female genital cutting and child-care maintenance (2008)
 New Zealand on intimate partner violence (2008)
 Ethiopia on non-judicial constitutional review (2008)
 Malawi on feminization of HIV/AIDS (2007)
 Ethiopia on feminization of HIV/AIDS (2006)
 Nigeria on federalism and constitutional reform (2006)
 Sierra Leone and Liberia on judicial reform, customary law, access to justice, gender justice and community based paralegal programs (2005)
 Rwanda and Uganda on abuses against human rights defenders and journalists (2004)
 Rwanda on *ingando* solidary camps and post-conflict reconciliation (2004)

PEER REVIEWER

African Studies Review
 Cambridge University Press
 Health and Human Rights Journal
 Journal of African Law
 Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism (Duke University Press)
 Religion and Gender
 Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters

FACULTY SERVICE

Experiential and Clinical Education Committee (2022 – 2023), Chair (2025 – present)
 Public Interest and Service Committee (2007 – 2024), Chair (2015 – 2017)
 Special Committee on the Status of Clinicians and Clinical Hiring, Co-Chair (2019 – 2020)
 Teaching Committee (2014 – 2015; 2017 – 2019)
 Diversity and Inclusion Committee (2016 – 2018); (2025 – present)
 Long Range Planning Committee (2015 – 2016)
 Women Law Students Committee (2013 – 2014)

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Clinical Status Committee (2011 – 2012)

Student Faculty Public Interest Committee (2010 – 2011)

Ad-Hoc Clinical Hiring Committee (2010)

SJD Candidates, Faculty Advisor (2019 – 2025), Dissertation Committee Member (2016 – 2018)

Fordham Law Student Advocates for Sexual Health and Rights, Faculty Adviser (2013 – 2019)

Stein Scholars for Public Interest, Faculty Mentor (2010 – present)

REAL Scholars Program, Faculty Mentor (2022 – 2026)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Columbia University Odyssey Mentorship Program, Alumni Mentor (2019 – present)

Namati: Innovations in Legal Empowerment, Board of Directors (2012 – 2020), Secretary (2015 – 2019), Chair (2019 – 2020)

Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) (2012 – 2021)

African Studies Association (Women's Caucus) (2017 – 2020)

African Studies Association (2015 – 2018)

National Women's Studies Association (2015 – 2018)

Timap for Justice USA, Board Member (2007 – 2011)

Bar Admission: New York