

Our World In a Glance



DRLI...OUR WORLD IN A GLANCE!

Hi, welcome to [Digital Rights Lawyers Initiative](#) (DRLI), we knew you would check us out and we are glad you eventually did. While the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has been a veritable platform for global stakeholders on internet governance for the past fifteen years to deliberate and make recommendations for better governance of the internet, this year virtual gathering with the theme [INTERNET FOR HUMAN RESILIENCE AND SOLIDARITY](#) is very timely. This timeliness lies in the fact that the current global pandemic has given us so much reason to appreciate the internet as a true “marketplace of ideas and information” and the obvious need to protect it jealously in the face of daily threats to shrink it. It is therefore my pleasure to introduce you to a group of lawyers who are using the instrumentality of the law for protection of the internet and of all digital rights. Whether you are contemplating becoming a part of a group of amazing lawyers who daily work to protect digital rights or you seek to be a project partner in this important field, it is my pleasure to take you on an exciting journey of an overview of our world at DRLI, hoping this will trigger in you a lofty decision to be part of our success story. Once again, welcome to our world where protection of digital rights remains our goal!

IN THE BEGINNING



As the internet and digital platforms became the new “village square” where citizens inform, engage, socialize and more importantly, call governments to account. One of the important contributions of the internet is that it has democratized the media. Interestingly, the internet had lately come under attack by governments around the world and digital authoritarianism has become an order of the day. The common manifestations of digital authoritarianism include surveillance, censorship, social manipulation and harassment, cyber-attacks, internet shutdowns, and targeted persecution against online users. Troubled by this development and burdened with a need to protect digital rights from all attacks with the instrumentality of law in and out of court, two lawyers, **Olumide Babalola and Solomon Okedara** came together in 2018 to build what is now known as Digital Rights Lawyers Initiative.

OUR TEAM



DRLI by its legal status is a not-for-profit Non-Governmental Organization. While the DRLI was co-founded by [Olumide Babalola](#) and [Solomon Okedara](#), the organization has a Governing Council that comprises accomplished lawyers and a legal academic. There are project-focused networks by the organization which are peopled by competent and specially trained volunteering lawyers for different areas of digital rights. While we have a network whose members litigate to protect online expressions, we also have another network whose members litigate to protect data protection. Given that deepening our impacts across geographies and all areas of digital rights requires us adding the best digital rights lawyers to our networks every minute. Are you a lawyer and these networks appear like what you should be part of? Write to us at prorams@digitalrightslawyers.org today.

Current Projects



Litigation Surgery

Our objectives are only effectively realized by having specially trained lawyers in our networks. These lawyers will be specially groomed in the art of challenging threats to digital rights and protection of same in courts. It is not a subject of debate that the digital rights field is an evolving practice area all over the world. While most litigation lawyers, including specialists in human rights appear to be familiar with digital rights, it is a fact that efficient challenge to threat to digital identity through courts requires specialized skill which this project essentially seeks to impart. Our Surgery program extends beyond the traditional training of lawyers to the art of anatomical analysis of digital rights cases in national courts and regional mechanisms. The learning process for our participants is similar to that of “resident doctors” in the theatre. This program is always conducted in major cities of our project coverage. In October 2020, we conducted a virtual Litigation Surgery for some lawyers in our network in Nigeria.

Workshops

Through workshops, we disseminate knowledge about digital rights and litigating them. While most of our workshops often relate to litigation lawyers, we sometimes organize workshops on subjects that draw or attract participants who include non-litigation lawyers and non-lawyers alike. On September 4, 2020 we organized a virtual workshop on Nigeria's Data Protection Bill and this was well attended by 278 participants from across the world.



THE CASES



Digital rights are human rights that are exercisable on digital platforms or online and they include right to freedom of expression and the press, right to privacy, right to assembly and association. As at date, we have filed over 30 cases for individuals in national courts in Nigeria ranging from matters on data protection to online expressions. For cases on online expressions, we have filed constitutional challenges to some digital rights infringements while we daily defend those who are being prosecuted in connection with expression of their digital rights under the guise of criminal defamation, cybercrimes, sedition, intentional insult, incitement, hate speech and offensive reference. For cases on data protection, we are daily filing legal challenges on behalf of citizens against unlawful processing of their personal data.

Strategic Cases

For Strategic Cases, we have filed lawsuits in national and regional courts challenging repressive cybercrime statutory provisions, criminal defamation, repressive broadcasting code among others. In July 2020, we excitedly welcome a judgment of the ECOWAS Court which declared the vague, broad and ambiguous provision of **Section 24 of Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act** as an infringement of right to freedom of expression and directed Nigeria to amend or repeal the provision in one of our strategic cases. Everyday and in every city, we are filing one strategic case to protect the citizens' digital rights.

Proposed Projects

Having noted what we have done and are still doing, below are what we proposed to do according to the timeline stated under each of them.



Fellowship

The Fellowship is a very important component of the project as it provides a robust form of grooming digital rights lawyers. Modules in the Fellowship programme include **Introduction to Digital Rights (DR 101)**, **Digital Rights Litigation (DR 102)**, **Brief Writing (BW)**, **Resource-Sourcing (RS)**, **Court Appearances (CA)** and **Litigation Project (LP)** among others which are carefully designed to thoroughly mold a digital rights lawyer. The fellowship is non-residential but will provide the fellows with adequate supports including provision of stipends and tools to maximize the fellowship experience. The Fellowship seeks to run yearly and admit ten (10) fellows per country in each cohort through a competitive application process. In admitting fellows into the programme, lawyers in active practice will be given preference as this is meant to be a fellowship to groom digital rights litigators. We seek to kick start this fellowship in 5 countries in Africa within the next one year.

University Introduction Programme (UIP)

This is training for final year **Law Students of Universities** with the aim of introducing them into the field of digital rights. For us, this is very strategic as over the years, as we groom digital rights lawyers who advance in their careers, we also start “catching Law students young” and introduce them to this field with a view to avoiding skill gap in the field. This programme will be delivered in two (2) days to a select group of law students based on interest and academic qualifications. The programme is projected to start from Universities in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Cameroon and Togo. We plan to commence this project within the next one year too.

Digital Rights Hub

Digital Rights Hub is a hub which will provide ready resources for capacity development of digital rights lawyers whose areas of practice cover Digital Rights. The Hub will be fully equipped with resources for maximal productivity of users. This hub will also serve as venue for the project meetings including trainings and meeting points for fellows. With the right funding we hope to set up this hub within the next 24 months.

Finally, it must be noted that if we have achieved any objectives so far it is because we have partners on whose “financial shoulders” we are standing. Currently, we have amazing partnerships with **Media Defence**, **Omidyar Network** and **Paradigm Initiative** with whose generous funding we keep reaching new landmarks in protection of digital rights everyday. We can yet achieve much more with more strategic partnerships particularly in respect of our proposed projects. Is your organization looking at making tremendous impacts in the area of digital rights? Or are you glad to fund any of our proposed projects? Talk to us now by sending a mail to us at programs@digitalrightslawyers.org

You can also follow us on Twitter at [@DrliRights](https://twitter.com/DrliRights)

Solomon Okedara, *Director of Projects*