Power and Principle: Human Rights Programming in International Organizations (Advancing Human Rights)

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The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has instructed all UN specialized agencies and other affiliated organizations to consider how their work might advance the cause of human rights around the world. Many of these bodies have taken this call to heart, with a wide range of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) trying to play a more active role in promoting human welfare.

Power and Principle is a comparative study of how and why IGOs integrate human rights standards into their development operations. It focuses on the process of policy innovation in three UN-related IGOs: the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF,) the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (WHO). In his comprehensive analysis, Joel E. Oestreich uses case studies to demonstrate how their policies have evolved during the past two decades to reflect important human rights considerations.

Drawing on interviews with dozens of staffers from IGOs, Oestreich creates a gripping narrative of the inner workings of these large bureaucracies. In each study he describes how the organization first became interested in human rights standards, how these standards were adopted as a priority, how the organization defined rights in the context of their work, and what a rights-based approach has meant in practice. The book argues that IGOs ought to be seen as capable of meaningful agency in international politics, and describes the nature of that agency. It concludes with an examination of these organizations and their ethical responsibilities as actors on the world stage.

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