



AMANDLA!

AFRICAN WOMEN IN LAW SPEAKER SERIES

WOMEN TO WATCH EDITION

(Vol. 1)

WHY AMANDLA?

Amandla is a word that means "power" among the Nguni languages of South Africa. Amandla became a rallying cry against apartheid in South Africa and continues to be a rallying call for social justice.

The Amandla! African Women in Law Speaker Series is a **global diversity awareness program** that aims to amplify the achievements and stories of African women in law. The Series is a collection of short stories on women's achievements, challenges, resistance, resilience, and solidarity. Through this project, we hope to inspire, encourage, and provide hope for future generations of young women across the globe.

Women across Africa have made remarkable strides in the legal profession, yet these achievements are often hidden in global discourses on the legal profession. As a scholar-activist, I constantly encounter discourses and spaces that attempt to erase or marginalize the voice and agency of the African woman. Whether it is in the telling of our history, in decision-making processes, or in mainstream discussions, this erasure occurs in multiple spaces across the profession. From Algeria to Zimbabwe, women continue to play important roles in the fight for social justice.

However, women's sacrifices, bravery, and contributions to nation-building are frequently relegated to the annals of history, rendering their achievements invisible. The silencing of women's experiences finds expression in the "African" proverb "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." The Amandla Series aims to disrupt the "hunter's story" by creating a platform for the "lioness" to be her own historian and tell her own story.

The roadmap to achieving the United Nations and African Union gender equality targets must begin with acknowledging the strength, resilience, and contributions of women. To loosely interpret the Akan Adinkra symbol, Sankofa— we should not forget our past, for it guides our future. Through legal narratives grounded in African storytelling, the series makes visible the professional trajectory of African women in law.

Through legal narratives and storytelling, African women in law **speak truth to power!**

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D.
Founder and Executive Director

Legal Narratives

"If the African woman's life experiences and story could only be told in the context of other people's lives and experiences, and not exclusively through her own voice, then how can she be independent of those external filters? Although her existence itself wouldn't be doubted, the objective reality of her identity would be obscured."

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Esq. Ph.D.

Founder and Executive Director-- Institute for African Women in Law
Quoted in Introduction to International Courts and the African Woman
Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018)

"Legal narratives are an important tool in telling stories—especially those that would otherwise not get told. Storytelling is a salient part of the African and African-American experience."

Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald

Former Judge/President, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former
Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Quoted in Foreword to International Courts and the African Woman
Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018)



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Adejoké Babington-Ashaye (Nigeria)

Senior Counsel, World Bank Group, Washington, DC.

WHY LAW?

I grew up under military rule in Nigeria and witnessed great abuse of power. At around 8 years old, I witnessed two soldiers dragging and beating a crying woman. She had allegedly spoken to them in a manner they deemed rude. I recall standing with other residents in the neighbourhood feeling disempowered and paralyzed by fear of the soldiers and their guns. As I began to make career choices, I realized that law was a vehicle through which I could help people like the woman brutalized by the soldiers. Since then my career has been characterized by the pursuit of justice and equity.

PROUD MOMENT

I cannot really pinpoint one moment - I would say that I derive a lot of joy and pride from helping others with career advice and guidance even as I try to navigate the professional world myself. When I can help someone, that is a proud moment.

HINDSIGHT

Speaking up more when I was new in my career and witnessing things I did not agree with. At times in the past I succumbed to a fear of being misunderstood and then silenced myself. Fortunately, this is a course of action to which I no longer subscribe. We should never silence ourselves out of fear of what another person may think or feel.



Adejoké Babington-Ashaye (Nigeria)

Senior Counsel, World Bank Group, Washington, DC.

CHALLENGES

I started my career at a young age and found myself having to justify my presence, even though I was well qualified to be present and heard. It was equally frustrating to be told that I could not hold certain positions because I was a young woman. With time, persuasion, or pure assertiveness it became clear my age did not define me and that I should be judged on my knowledge and the quality of my work. I have also encountered sexism, racism, and other micro-aggressions. I have been in spaces where diversity and inclusion were touted but not pursued. Yet we cannot afford to be tired. We must persist in doing good, speaking our minds, and supporting one another.

STRATEGIES

First, we are each blessed with many talents and we are more than just our profession. Develop your many talents as these allow you to create balance in your life. In addition to my work as a lawyer, I derive personal fulfilment from song-writing and performing as a musician activist (www.adejokemusic.com). Second, use whatever privilege you have to open doors and keep them open for other women and women of colour. It is never too early to create opportunities for others and expand your network. Third, while pursuing your dreams, give yourself permission to feel the fear and do it anyway. I have learned that it is ok to feel fear so long as I do not let it take over. Finally, try to do work that is connected with what gives you joy. You will be working in your purpose.



Adelaide Benneh Prempeh (Ghana)

Managing Partner, B & P Associates, Ghana.

WHY LAW?

I was very outspoken as a child, and considered studying law later on in my teenage years as an outlet for my personality. I had the privilege of attending a premier All Girl's boarding school in Ghana, where the focus was to empower young women; teach them to excel and to lead positive change for the benefit of the community at large. This training served me well and shaped up my view of the law profession as a calling; a useful tool to represent the vulnerable in society; to serve as a mouthpiece for those who needed one.

PROUD MOMENT

Setting up a law firm in 2014, following a great career at the English Bar, and running it as Managing Partner is my proudest professional achievement. I have witnessed growth to a team of 14 talented professionals, the majority of whom are women, and each of whom are a blessing.

HINDSIGHT

Early in my career, I was laser focused on my own goals and career conceptions, without regard to arising opportunities. I have since learnt more willingness to explore new paths which I may cross. The approach of putting on blinders, does not always generate the greatest achievements.



Adelaide Benneh Prempeh (Ghana)

Managing Partner, B & P Associates, Ghana.

CHALLENGES

As a woman in law, there are occasions where I find myself investing thrice the effort to prove myself amongst male counterparts in competition. Thus, not all opportunities are as seamless as they ought to be, and require a strategic combination of originality and preparation to edge out contenders. The good news is, as times evolve many clients will look beyond your gender, or even prefer it. I am not afraid to embrace my femininity and the innate advantages it affords me toward effective people management and networking. In addition, our culture often paints a picture of an inevitably bossy female leader. It takes patience, resilience, consistency and an optimistic mindset to overcome these and other organizational challenges; but I have learnt that for every employee who is not a team player, there are ten more who are waiting to be found.

STRATEGIES

I find myself in the minority as a female founder and managing partner of a law firm in Ghana. Upon reflection, my parents raised a family of 3 boys and 3 girls with a gender-blind approach; providing us equal opportunities and encouraging us equally. I, therefore, seldom consider myself as a female in a male dominated profession, but focus on seizing each opportunity to prove myself and excel in whatever I do. This mindset has always motivated and propelled me forward. When it comes to family life, I try not to focus on getting the work-life balance right, rather ensure that when I am with my family, I am totally present, spending quality time with no distractions. I am fortunate to have an incredibly supportive family network who ensure that things don't fall apart when I am swarmed with work and responsibilities.



Adesola Adeboyejo (Nigeria)

Trial Attorney, International Criminal Court, The Hague

WHY LAW?

I come from a family of eight girls and two boys. I recall in my younger years my Father encouraged me to pursue my education despite the cultural point of view that it was futile to educate a girl child. This early childhood support instilled in me a confidence in my capacity and ability and enabled me to pursue my dream of a law degree despite all the challenges I faced. I recall that when I was to get into the University to read law, the Professor in charge of admissions kept urging my Father to persuade me to study any other course but law because of my young age but I stood my ground, insisted I was going to read law and eventually the University accepted me for a law degree.

PROUD MOMENT

Every time the victims of these most heinous crimes, tell me in very simple words how appreciative they are of the efforts made in giving them a voice in the proceedings and allowing them have their day in Court to tell their story, it gives me the greatest professional satisfaction.

HINDSIGHT

I would not change anything for a minute.



Adesola Adeboyejo (Nigeria)

Trial Attorney, International Criminal Court, The Hague

CHALLENGES

As a woman, you must break through the glass ceiling that face women all over the world and the unconscious biases that comes with being a woman of color. My greatest professional challenge therefore has been to always strive to push through and push beyond any kind of limitation by giving my very best in any capacity I am called to operate in – whether in prosecuting some of the worst criminals from the genocide in Rwanda or handling some of the most complex cases at the ICC.

STRATEGIES

It is good to have a sound knowledge of the law and to pursue one's education to the highest degree possible, but it is more important to have a determination to make an impact in the legal profession. The dream of making an impact must be kept alive no matter the degree of opposition and challenges that we face. Continuing education and keeping a useful network is important to achieve the dream of making a worldwide impact in the profession.



Adwoa Ayisi-Salawou (Ghana/USA)

Public Sector Operations Lawyer, African Development
Bank, Ivory Coast.

WHY LAW?

I still have memories of when I turned 12, and motions of musing over admirable professions. My father is a lawyer and I recall comparisons often drawn of us two. Many considered we share similar traits: a passion for delving into books; poring over and finding solutions to issues; engaging in debates on a wealth of subjects leading to logical conclusions. By my latter high school years I became resolute about reading law, qualifying as a barrister and eventually using my legal and oratory skills in an international setting. Thankfully this fell within God's plans for me - I have done just that.

PROUD MOMENT

I have been blessed with obtaining experiences on high value transactions / projects that have impacted many African economies. That said, my proudest moment was when as sole counsel on the drafting team, we submitted a policy paper on the AfDB's third sovereign lending instrument, and received the Board's approval.

HINDSIGHT

In all humility, I believe every experience garnered, no matter how detrimental or negative has contributed towards propelling me to my current stage. Undoubtedly, there have been moments where I wished I could have done things differently, however those I believe serve as lessons for the next.



Adwoa Ayisi-Salawou (Ghana/USA)

Public Sector Operations Lawyer, African Development
Bank, Ivory Coast.

CHALLENGES

Earlier in my career, walking into a room of delegates for negotiations on a transaction I would often be the only female or one of a few. I grappled with plagues of self-doubt switching into “I don’t belong at the table” mode. In board rooms with male- dominated transaction teams, rather than targeting a seat at the table as would my male colleagues, I veered towards back seats, wearing the “I am not worthy” look. An enthusiastic read of “Lean in” by Sheryl Sandberg (COO, Facebook) proved revolutionary. Sheryl exposes the phenomenon of how as women we unintentionally hold ourselves instead of leaning in. This light bulb moment switched me to “I belong at the table” mode, with no remorse!

Juggling wife and mother of two boys (in formative years) with a hectic work cum travel schedule as an in- house operations lawyer, has been challenging, to put it mildly.

STRATEGIES

Do not feel pressured to mute your accomplishments and points of view to please others especially when you are the only female within a male- dominated team. Invest your time in the work and be confident in your abilities, your voice during those negotiations, meetings and discussions is just as important as those of your male colleagues.

Don't be petrified to obtain help or lean on a more experienced colleague especially after researching a subject matter and you remain unsure of findings. Cultivating the habit of discussing with more experienced colleagues especially when you're still debuting your career will only advance your knowledge, and potentially save you from incurring the wrath of a nasty client who wakes up to the realization of having been wrongfully advised.



Aïssatou Seck (Senegal)

Senior Counsel at the World Bank, Ivory Coast

WHY LAW?

I am an attorney, a development professional and a fervent advocate for the advancement of women's rights. I became a lawyer because I loved rules for the way they shaped societies, yet I struggled with accepting how their interpretation and implementation were different for certain groups. I embraced the paradox and it influenced my career choices, from White & Case to the World Bank and my commitment with the African Business Lawyers' Club, the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises and all the other organizations I am invested in, to ensure women's access to knowledge, resources and in fine decision-making power.

PROUD MOMENT

Measuring the positive impact the projects I work on have on peoples' lives is one of the most rewarding feelings one can have. On a more personal note, mentoring younger professionals, helping them navigate their careers and seeing them thrive is something I take great pride in.

HINDSIGHT

My mindset is: if I found three solutions to a problem, there is probably a fourth one I can try. This helps me lead with purpose, instead of regret.



Aïssatou Seck (Senegal)

Senior Counsel at the World Bank, Ivory Coast

CHALLENGES

I was born and raised in Africa, worked in Europe, Latin America and the United States, and somehow everywhere I went, women faced somewhat of the same challenges. As women, we are often told to let our work be the statement of who we are, yet there are far too many stories of talented women being overlooked or taken for granted. Because I lived many situations where I had to speak not only for myself, but also for others, helping women use their voice, build their capacity and be unapologetic about their ambitions became embedded in everything I do.

STRATEGIES

Sisterhood plays an important part in my life and the strength of the women whose shoulders I am standing on uplifts me, so find your tribe and inspire each other. Also find an environment in alignment with your values so your drive can be translated into excellence. I like to see myself as an eternal student because I know that what people call serendipity is in fact preparation. That's why I chose to start my career in an international law firm where I was trained to deliver high quality work to demanding clients before deciding to transition to the development sector and to contribute to solving the world's most pressing issues. Lastly, I would recommend to free yourselves of the limitations others project onto you and be deliberate about the choices you make to steer the wheel of your own careers.



Amanda Dakouré (Burkina Faso)

Senior Legal Counsel at African Development Bank

WHY LAW?

I am a very curious person and for as long as I can remember, I have always been inquisitive with a deep desired to learn and share that knowledge with others. Studying law gave me the privilege of knowing the rights and obligations in society and allowed me to inform others of their rights and obligations. That is why I decided to study law, knowledge is power and by giving power to people, you empower them.

PROUD MOMENT

Working in Africa had always been a dream of mine. I was born and raised in Canada, I had been a few times in Burkina Faso (my country of origin) and had always been curious about living and working on the continent. When I found an opportunity in Ivory Coast, I took it without hesitation. Having managed to adapt and thrive in a pan African context is one of my proudest accomplishments because it has taught me tremendously both personally and professionally.

HINDSIGHT

I would not have taken or done anything differently. Every decision I made led me to where I am today, and I would not change any of it.



Amanda Dakouré (Burkina Faso)

Senior Legal Counsel at African Development Bank

CHALLENGES

Women in law, face and continue to face many professional challenges. However, challenges are meant to make us stronger. A salient challenge that I can observe regularly in the profession is the lack of diversity at the senior management level. Diversity is not only about race, gender and sexual orientation but about minority representation. If people on top do not have commonalities with the minority, inclusion becomes difficult, while recognition and progression seem unattainable. Mentorship can be a key part of the solution to the problem of inclusion and diversity and that is why I encourage all women to find mentors, people you look up to and admire, to seek advice and guidance.

STRATEGIES

My practical advice to living your best life is to work hard and efficiently. By efficiently, I mean to be organized and to manage your time effectively to always find time to exercise, to eat well, and to keep a mental balance by doing what makes you happy. A more strategic advice is to invest in human relationship because it is very important to build a network in the legal profession.



Amne Suedi (Tanzania)

CEO Shikana Law Group, Tanzania

WHY LAW?

I wanted to know my rights and also fight for others who needed to be represented.

PROUD MOMENT

Opening my law Firm.

HINDSIGHT

I would not have studied for my LLM right after my university degree. It would have been better to wait.

CHALLENGES

Starting my legal firm and then maintaining it has come with many blessings but also many challenges particularly being in Africa where societies are very patriarchal I often have to navigate through people's prejudices of my incompetence because I am a black woman. I just have to prove myself more than others, but that is the world we live in. Otherwise, there have been more blessings than challenges.

STRATEGIES

It is important to know why you have chosen the legal profession and understand the vision very well because the path is long, difficult and demanding. It is important to find a mentor that you aspire to become and who can provide guidance in your career. Another important thing is to stop thinking that we have limitations as a woman in the legal profession. There are structural limitations, but they can be overcome with the mindset that YOU have no limitations.



Angela Mudukuti (Zimbabwe)

Human Rights Lawyer

WHY LAW?

I always thought that law was a good way to make a positive change. It was important to me to change the laws that are clearly an affront to human rights and use the others to protect and promote human rights. I recognised this as a way to empower myself and others and I have never looked back.

PROUD MOMENT

I'd replace "pride" with "gratitude." It's a privilege to be a human rights lawyer. Working on precedent-setting cases in pursuit of accountability for grave crimes is life-affirming. Every time I make a positive impact in someone's life, every time I take the opportunity to "smash the patriarchy" and lift the African women's voice, I feel tremendous gratitude.

HINDSIGHT

I would have started looking for opportunities to mentor and uplift other women earlier. It is something I am actively engaged in now but I could have started earlier. No matter what phase of your career you always have something to share that will help the next woman.



Angela Mudukuti (Zimbabwe)

Human Rights Lawyer

CHALLENGES

The legal profession, particularly at the international level, is still dominated by white men and as a woman of colour you have to work twice as hard for the same recognition as your white male colleague. Also fighting the erroneous notion that there is only one seat for a woman at the proverbial table is an ongoing struggle.

STRATEGIES

Find allies and help each other! I have found this incredibly helpful and have developed lasting bonds with like-minded people. Never give up- it is cliché but it is true. An unrelenting belief in who I am, and what I am capable of has been immensely valuable. Work hard- you will always be prepared for whatever comes your way and it will make it very difficult for detractors to second-guess you and the quality of your work.



Anna Fordjour (Ghana)

Partner, AB & David, Ghana

WHY LAW?

After my mother talked me out of my dream to be a nun, I wanted to be a medical doctor. Unfortunately, I lost interest in physics and I knew my dream of having a stethoscope around my neck and attending to patients would not materialize. It was then that the idea of becoming a lawyer crept in. I vividly remember my dad's wig in a black tin box with his name inscribed in gold on it and I longed to get one when I became a lawyer! Honestly, I cannot say at the time that I wanted to champion the cause of the under privileged in society or to right some wrongs. I just thought then that it would be "cool" to be a lawyer and have my name inscribed in gold on a black tin box!!

PROUD MOMENT

This will certainly be the custody battle I won for a client who was at risk of losing her children. As a mother, I empathized with the client whose ex-husband had surreptitiously taken the children from school in Italy (where they lived), flown them to Ghana, where he left them in a remote and dreary village with his extended family without my client's prior knowledge and returned to Italy. The client was in absolute agony when she came to Ghana and saw the condition in which her girls were living. Fighting for my client and re-uniting her with her two daughters made me so proud to be a lawyer.

HINDSIGHT

Looking back, I wish I had dedicated more of my time to working for underprivileged women and children as my practice grew. I am grateful, that I have clawed back some of that lost time in the work I currently do to support NGOs engaged in empowering women to appreciate how the law protects them and impacts their families and economic lives.



Anna Fordjour (Ghana)

Partner, AB & David, Ghana

CHALLENGES

Managing the home and active practice is no mean feat. My early years of practice were honestly very unhappy. Newly married with very young children coupled with an unyielding boss compounded my woes, but I managed to sail through those difficult years by the Grace of God through very hard work and the commitment to have a successful career and a peaceful home.

STRATEGIES

Being organized has kept my head above water. Time management has enabled me to prioritize the most important cases and high maintenance clients and to prepare adequately to represent them in court. Being prepared gives me the necessary confidence to seize the moment. It is noteworthy that nowadays, most clients are literate, ask questions and are very interested in proceedings in court. Such clients can easily decipher between a lawyer who understands her brief and one who is surface deep and only playing to the gallery. As a civil litigator, these practical tips have been extremely helpful in my practice and in line with a favourite quote by Oprah Winfrey; “..... luck is preparation meeting opportunity”.



Asha Singhania (South Africa)

Director of Woza Women in Law South Africa

WHY LAW?

Born in a country of absent opportunity, and unequal race based education I was conscientized from a tender age about the social injustices of apartheid, the hierarchy and limitations of one's birth and race. A further dimension to this awareness around discrimination and prejudice was the Indian caste system which was rife in the "Indian" segregated community I was born into. Apartheid's enabler was clearly the legislation which institutionalised racial discrimination and life as I knew it. Hence, it became abundantly apparent that if I wanted to make difference it would be through one of humanities most noble professions - Law!

PROUD MOMENT

Walking into the Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP offices on Fifth Avenue, New York to work on The Bank of Credit and Commerce International "BCCI" described as "the largest bank fraud in world financial history". Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that this would be possible for a girl from a township with inferior education.

HINDSIGHT

"Hindsight, to me personally is a useless tool. I am where I am at because of the decisions I have made. So I accept my past experiences... and try to regret nothing, because I cannot change it anyway". To paraphrase R.A. Salvatore, Sea of Swords.



Asha Singhania (South Africa)

Director of Woza Women in Law South Africa

CHALLENGES

As a Director of Woza Women in Law South Africa we hosted roundtables in 2019, to identify why women in the profession were not advancing on an equal basis compared to their male counterparts. The conversations revealed that traditional societal expectations of women as “mothers” and “wives” created professional barriers. Employers believed that women could not dedicate sufficient time and commitment to their professional duties. Family criticised ambitious women as “bad mothers” or “bad wives”. Gender stereotyping pegged women as too “emotional or soft” limiting their briefs to restricted areas of law creating significant skills deficits, skewed briefing patterns, impacting the fees they commanded exacerbating gender pay gaps. COVID-19 fast tracked the issue working from home and flexible working hours. Unconscious bias, skills deficits in specialised areas of law, skewed briefing patterns and the gender pay gap, remain the core impediments procrastinating the advancement of Women in Law in South Africa.

STRATEGIES

The suicide of two successful women lawyer colleagues in the past eight months, jolted me into realising that I was guilty of trivialising mental and financial wellness, which are undeniably the cornerstones to surviving the pressures of the legal profession. As women in law we are expected to be Superwoman! Juggling roles! Professionally and personally constantly striving to outperform in order to keep up. As problem solvers, we are not expected to have problems. Traversing these stresses in isolation frequently results in depression, suicide and even substance abuse. Sisters we are not alone, we all at some point feel overwhelmed, and it's ok. So reach out, to a peer, a professional, or helpline. Stay connected, laugh, remain positive, join a sisterhood. Be comforted that resilience is inherent and you will bounce back. Continuous mental and financial wellness education and support is quintessential and should be included in our legal curriculums. Financial stress through education and planning can be mitigated.



Barbara Tetteh-Charway (Ghana)

Justice of the High Court, Ghana

WHY LAW?

My secondary school teacher told me, after reading my essays, that I had what it took to become a lawyer so when I was faced with the choice between reading law or business administration at the University, I chose law.

PROUD MOMENT

When the President of Ghana appointed me as Legal Counsel to a Commission of Enquiry which was set up to investigate misappropriation of state funds.

HINDSIGHT

I should have worked in all the Departments of the Attorney General's Office before joining the bench.

CHALLENGES

It is common for parties who are aggrieved by what they deem to be unfair treatment to write a petition to the Chief Justice complaining about the conduct of a judge or other court officer. But where those petitions are full of misinformation, it can be extremely provocative. I recall an instance when a petitioner complained to the Chief Justice that I had sentenced an accused person to a prison term without conducting a trial. The Chief Justice assigned a Supreme Court Justice to look into the matter. I showed him the Record of Proceedings and he was satisfied that a full trial had been conducted contrary to the petitioner's complaint. When such petitions are filed in an ongoing case my inclination is to recuse myself from the matter. However this is subject to the approval of the Chief Justice.

STRATEGIES

It takes, among others, hard work, continuous personal development, having at least one mentor and the ability to relate with all kinds of people to survive in this profession.



Beene Ndulo (Zambia/USA)

Principal Legal Counsel, African Development Bank, Côte
D'Ivoire

WHY LAW?

I have always had a certain level of familiarity with the legal profession as one of my parents is a law professor. From a very young age, I was fortunate enough to have a front row seat to observing how individuals in the legal profession were using their expertise to influence and effect change within their professions and their communities as well as at a national or global level. Consequently, to me, the law seemed to be one of the most effective paths to becoming involved in and having an impact on some of the issues and causes that I am most passionate about, whilst pursuing a career in which I would remain intellectually engaged and challenged through exposure to the intellectually and conceptually challenging issues presented by the demands of the legal profession.

I started my career in the finance industry, and continued as a capital markets lawyer, which has empowered me, through the advice I provide on securities transactions, to become directly involved in the mobilization of significant amounts of resources raised in the international and domestic capital markets for sovereigns and public or private entities and institutions, enabling me to contribute to the flow of investments into and within various countries, and to indirectly have an impact on local economies, industries and communities within those markets. This has always been in alignment with my interest in seeing increased flows of investments into countries and regions in need of capital to address the development-related challenges faced by populations in those countries.



Beene Ndulo (Zambia/USA)

Principal Legal Counsel, African Development Bank, Côte
D'Ivoire

PROUD MOMENT

My proudest professional moment was starting my career at Goldman Sachs International as an Analyst - I was proud for my grandparents, who were born in and lived in Northern Rhodesia and in Apartheid South Africa. In spite of their educational accomplishments and other inspiring achievements, there were many opportunities they were not, by law, permitted to pursue; I was, therefore, proud for them because it was likely unimaginable, under the circumstances in which they spent most of their lives, that a granddaughter of theirs would start her career at one of the world's leading investment banks.

HINDSIGHT

There is not a lot I would have done differently, because I have come to appreciate over time that everything that we do, as well as every consequence of each decision we make, whether positive or negative, shapes us and contributes to where we are today. If there is anything I might have done slightly differently it may have been to have acted upon certain mentoring advice a lot earlier in my career than I sometimes may have; in some instances I had to go through certain experiences in order to appreciate the significance of the advice I had previously received.

CHALLENGES

Earlier in my career there were pressures that came from often being simultaneously highly visible and invisible. In my field, the transactional work often involves advising corporate and institutional clients on the due diligence process as part of the securities issuance process, which has required me to participate in Management due diligence meetings. These sessions typically involve inquiries and interviews of Senior Management, including the CEO, the CFO, the Chief Operating Officer, the General Counsel, the Head of Risk Management and other heads of departments.



Beene Ndulo (Zambia/USA)

Principal Legal Counsel, African Development Bank, Côte
D'Ivoire

Although not the case with the majority of clients, on occasion, I have attended all-day Management due diligence meetings and led some of these sessions as the only woman participating in all of these sessions.

It has been on such occasions that I have become acutely aware of my gender and that I am representing an entire segment of the population that is not present in the room at the time. On the other hand, earlier in my career, there were instances where I felt invisible in attempts to convince decision-makers of the merits of potential business development ideas – the profession and several institutions in the profession can be fairly traditional and not as flexible in considering new strategies and processes. I have, however, occasionally received validation that my instincts were correct and worthy of consideration upon becoming aware, sometimes several years later, of the implementation of certain business development ideas at previous employers.

STRATEGIES

I believe it is important to go above and beyond what is expected of you in everything that you do; it is not only the right thing to do but the effort is often not lost on the individuals that you assist and, in my experience, this has led to invaluable opportunities in the most unexpected of ways.

I would strongly recommend pursuing networking opportunities, both internally and externally, and on a consistent basis – individuals who share the same interests and ambitions tend to be drawn to the same events. By attending targeted networking events, you are increasing your chances of meeting people who will help you to achieve your goals and ambitions.

I would also recommend seeking mentoring opportunities but not restricting yourself to people in your own field or to people you personally know – finding a mentor is a significant challenge, particularly for young women professionals.



Beene Ndulo (Zambia/USA)

Principal Legal Counsel, African Development Bank, Côte
D'Ivoire

I have been fortunate to have had mentors throughout my career but have also gained insight and acted upon advice imparted by high achieving individuals I admire through some of the advice they have shared in publicly available interviews and other forums – I do not believe that you have to restrict yourself to obtaining mentoring advice from people that you personally know.

It is equally crucial for all professionals to mentor younger professionals where they can; mentoring is beneficial to a mentee but provides growth opportunities for both individuals. Career opportunities for you as a mentor can also arise from mentee relationships.

Finally, I would recommend maintaining strong interests outside of one's profession – when you face challenges in your profession, the successes in your interests outside your profession motivate you to remain positive and focused and empower you to overcome the challenges in your own profession



Brenda Mutale Chanda (Zambia)

Partner, AB & David, Zambia

WHY LAW?

My decision to study law was made a day before my course registration at the University. I had gone to university with the goal of studying economics but I talked myself out of it after hearing about so many of my seniors in high school who had not made the grade in math in the first year to qualify to the school of economics. Studying law amplified the sense of justice that I believe I have always had. Being the oldest child in my family, I always had the responsibility to guide and direct my siblings and my opinion mattered a lot to them. I had to be careful that I was fair and impartial in my dealings with them to earn their respect.

PROUD MOMENT

Leading and transforming our firm, AB & David, from a traditional law practice to a modern business law firm. This was done by becoming part of a Pan African network of firms. Proud to be part of a firm that continues to grow, transform and innovate.

HINDSIGHT

Now that I am older and wiser, I realise that not everyone will understand my actions or agree with me and I am perfectly at peace with that.

CHALLENGES

I believe that the challenges that women face in the work place are really a reflection of the challenges faced in the wider society. It is difficult for a woman's voice to be heard because, unfortunately, most people proceed from a premise that women have limitations in what they can offer. I find that women have to work harder to have a place at the table, and even when they have earned their place they constantly have to fight to maintain it.



Brenda Mutale Chanda (Zambia)

Partner, AB & David, Zambia

I believe that the best way to overcome these challenges is to recognise first that they exist and that they are not unique to me. As a woman you must remain true to your values and who you are at the core but also be willing to demand to be treated equitably and fairly.

The other challenge is constantly feeling that you are neglecting your family when you are always under pressure to meet deadlines. My view is that as a woman you should feel confident about taking a career break to attend to yourself and your family. I had to take a short break to gather myself after having 3 children within a short period. Some people will look at it as a weakness because they do not understand your stress but then you don't owe the world an explanation for your actions.

As a woman who is also a mother, I recognise that sometimes I have to prioritise work and be willing to get help from family and friends in order to meet career goals and deliver a good service to my clients.

STRATEGIES

The best strategy in my view is to constantly improve your skills and be so good at what you do so that you cannot be ignored. I also believe that as a woman you constantly have to sharpen your leadership skills so that you are able to lead with confidence. I have also realised that you do not need to change who you are in order to succeed as a leader. You need to draw on your authentic self in order to influence and lead others. You must always strive to earn the respect of the people you are leading by giving them a voice and space to express who they are without feeling judged.



Christine Sijuwade (Nigeria)

Partner, Udo Udoma & Belo-Osagie, Nigeria

WHY LAW?

My journey probably started after I read John Grisham's "A Time to Kill" where the protagonist had to overcome various challenges in order to achieve his goal of exonerating his client. The strategies he employed, and his sheer determination revealed purpose to me. I didn't end up practicing criminal law but, more importantly, I discovered that with the law, there is always room for growth and my areas of interest can continue to evolve.

PROUD MOMENT

My proudest professional moment was when I was selected to lead the drafting team of the Technical Advisory Committee, chaired by Ozofo Ogiemudia, that was established by the 8th Senate to review and draft bills to repeal and re-enact the Companies and Allied Matters Act and the Investment and Securities Act. These pieces of legislation are critical to doing business in Nigeria and economic development, and I was extremely honoured to have been selected to contribute to the development of the legal and regulatory landscape.

HINDSIGHT

We are the sum of our experiences and every step I have taken professionally, and the challenges that I have faced, have led me to where I am today. I am quite thankful.



Christine Sijuwade (Nigeria)

Partner, Udo Udoma & Belo-Osagie, Nigeria

CHALLENGES

As a young working mother, some of the professional challenges I have faced stem from balancing work and family commitments. I vividly recall having to join a major conference call to negotiate transaction documents on behalf of a client while in the hospital with one of my children. Thankfully, the negotiation was very successful, and the transaction was completed. Having the support of a great team as well as the ability to plan, organise, prioritise and multi-task will, therefore, always help with overcoming these sorts of challenges. There were times when tough choices had to be made, however, it was all worth it in the end.

STRATEGIES

Passion and determination are critical to survival in any profession, otherwise, it will be difficult to excel and put in the extended hours that may be required. Other strategies include having a strong work ethic, being teachable and enthusiastic and, most importantly, having an overwhelming and unapologetic desire to succeed. Achieving and maintaining work life balance is a delicate dance so it is critical that for women with families, we continue to manage and balance the expectations of family, clients and colleagues. My generation is fortunate because we can leverage on the successes of the battles that have already been fought and won by women that came before us. The benefit of seeking counsel from such wise women cannot be over emphasised. Lastly, it is very important to remain visible - which can be achieved by participating in industry-related capacity building initiatives and writing articles on topical issues.



Eki Yemisi Omorogbe, Ph.D. (Nigeria/UK)

Lecturer in Law, University of Leicester. Founder and co-chair of The International Law and Policy in Africa Network (ILPAN).

WHY LAW?

By my 13th birthday, I was fixed on getting a doctorate in Law. I had decided to model myself on two maternal uncles I adored and admired. One of these had completed his postgraduate degree in Mathematical Statistics at the University of Cambridge - his undergraduate degree in Maths was at Imperial College London. The other was studying law at the University of Buckingham. As it had become apparent to me that my mathematical skills were limited, I chose to follow the latter. The decision seemed natural, perhaps because I had other maternal relatives in the legal profession.

PROUD MOMENT

Being called to the Bar in Nigeria, because it made my father and grandparents happy and my grandfather told me how lucky he felt to be alive to see me in my wig and gown. There are other proud moments, including my nomination as a Woman to Watch in Law.

HINDSIGHT

I worked in the City of London for a while in the insurance industry, including as an underwriter of professional indemnity claims - I was the first black underwriter at General Accident. I am grateful for those opportunities, so no regrets. However, practising or researching law is my great love.



Elizabeth Bakibinga-Gaswaga (Uganda)

Legal Adviser-Rule of Law, Commonwealth Secretariat, UK

CHALLENGES

My research area is International Law and armed conflicts (with particular focus on Africa) and I also taught the Law of Armed Conflict. These are male-dominated areas. Some people, having read my work, are surprised to meet me. I once had to convince someone of my identity...

STRATEGIES

Some people underrate women and avoid giving them the same opportunities as men. That happened to me and I regret that I failed to challenge it. If it happens to you, do not give up, trust your knowledge and your body of work and challenge inequality.



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