

An interview with Professor John Mukum Mbaku JD PhD

Please describe your general background and 1-2 highlights of your career:

I was born in Cameroon and educated there through high school. I then came to the United States for further education and earned degrees in Chemistry and Mathematics (BSc), international business (IMBA) and economics (PhD). After completing the PhD, I took a job teaching economics at university level and, in the process, developed an interest in poverty alleviation as well as in economic, social and human development in Africa. Over the years I have researched and published many books and articles on peaceful coexistence, entrepreneurship, wealth creation, and development in Africa. I eventually came to recognize the importance of an effective legal system to economic and human development. Hence, to improve my ability to fully appreciate the role that law plays in economic development, I returned to school and obtained a law degree, qualifying as an attorney and counsellor at law. Since then, I have extended my research interests to include the relationship between law and development, particularly in Africa.



What in your life has led you to an interest in development and how do you think law can shape positive development trends? What do you think are the most important law and development trends currently?

My interest in development came primarily from my experiences growing up in Cameroon where extreme poverty, especially in rural areas remains a major problem. In addition, work for African-based organizations such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Economic Research Consortium (Nairobi), and several African governments, has exposed me to the pervasiveness of poverty even in countries with significant endowments of natural resources. In recent publications I have examined customary and traditional practices (e.g., FGM/C and child marriage) that harm children and prevent them from developing the skills and competencies they need to function as productive and contributing members of their communities. I have also examined threats to the rule of law and why an effective and fully-functioning rule of law system is critical for the creation of the wealth that each African country needs to deal with poverty and to promote human development. What I have learned from this line of research is that, in order to improve national conditions for economic development, each African country must provide itself with institutional arrangements undergirded by adherence to the rule of law.

When were you first introduced to Lex:lead and what are your thoughts on the initiative?

I first met Anne Bodley when I served as co-Chair of the American Bar Association (ABA) Section of International Law Africa Committee. I was impressed by Anne's interest in and dedication to African issues, particularly those dealing with the training of lawyers. Anne's work with and leadership of Lex:lead has had significant impact on the training of lawyers in many countries throughout the African continent. Anne has been quite instrumental in making it possible for more young women in Africa to enter the legal profession.