



## INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE AMINATTA L.R. NGUM – UNIRMCT

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

I was born Annie Lois Runeni RUREDZO on 07 June, 1953 in Salisbury [now Harare] Hospital, Harare Zimbabwe then Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. My father was the late Ishe John Zvenhamo RUREDZO MAKONI and my mother was the late Mrs. Venencia RUREDZO nee MBUTO. I only stayed with my mother for the first 6 years of my life and started school at St. John's Primary School, Mpanguri, Nyazura in January 1959. I was sent to stay with our late Auntie Effie Ndoora [Mrs. Mutambara] who was a Primary school teacher and this led to my moving to Daramombe Mission Primary School from 1960 to 1961, St. Faith's Mission Primary School in 1962, then moved from 1963 to 1966 sitting the Standard 6 examinations in Rujeko Government School, Dangamvura Township in Umtali now Mutare. St. Augustine's High School was my alma mater from January 1967 to December 1972 Forms I to VI respectively. I was in the Drama Club and the School as well as the Church Quoir, was a Companion to the Chita Che Zita Rinoyera [CZR] African Nuns and we used to teach Sunday School. It was there that I obtained my Cambridge "O" and "A" Level Certificates respectively. I applied for, went through a rigorous entrance examination and was admitted into the Law Faculty of the University of Rhodesia [UR] now University of Zimbabwe in February 1973 and may have broken the glass ceiling for African Female Law students. However, having participated in the July 1973 Student Demonstration, I was amongst the 6 female students that were arrested, detained first in Salisbury Prison. However, 2 female students turned State Witnesses and were released. The 4 remaining female students were later detained at the Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison Female Wing for one month seven days in solitary confinement. We were tried at the Rotten Row Magistrates' Court, where we each pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 6 months suspended for 3 years. On leaving the Courtroom, we were each served with a Banning Order – not to be seen in the area 20 kilometres from the Salisbury now Harare Post Office, for a period of 3 years. Since UR is 7 kilometres from that Post Office, it was physically impossible for us to return to UR. After a legal battle, that lasted for a few months, I was amongst those who were able to return to UR. However, there was no vacancy for me in the Law Faculty and I chose to join the Administration Faculty because I still wanted to study a subject that included law. Fortunately, in October 1974, I was awarded Keele University Students' Union Scholarship for students who had faced

hardship in Southern Africa. That's how I studied at Keele University for 4 years and obtained a Joint Honours Degree in Law and Sociology July 1978. After completing the requisite studies at the Inns of Court School of Law, Gray's Inn Place, London, I was called as an Utter Barrister as a Member of Lincoln's Inn in July 1979. I served 6 months Pupillage under Sir Henry Myers Esq at 9 Stone Buildings Lincoln's Inn. On arriving in The Gambia 15<sup>th</sup> March 1980, I was called to The Gambian Bar before commencing to serve as Magistrate Class I/ Stipendiary Magistrate. On marriage to a Gambian citizen 6<sup>th</sup> February 1981, I converted to Islam and was named Aminatta L.R. Ngum. We had 4 children until this was reduced on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2010 with the demise of our youngest son. The highlights of my motherhood career is that we had a grandchild in 2014.

My legal and judicial career commenced when I was appointed by the Judicial Service Commission [JSC] of The Gambia as an ex-patriate Class I Magistrate for the Judiciary of The Gambia. I believe that I broke the glass ceiling by this appointment in March 1980 as the first Female Magistrate Class I in The Gambia. In addition, each time that I was promoted in 1981 and became the first Female Senior Magistrate; promoted in 1987 and became the first Female Principal Magistrate and promoted in 1989 and became the first Female Master of the Supreme Court. It was during this period that, amongst other duties, I heard and determined civil and criminal cases, juvenile delinquency, traffic offences and applications for child maintenance. Some of the criminal cases involved domestic violence; violence against opposition party members; stealing of livestock; stealing of gold that was an exhibit in Police custody; assault and battery; possession and use of drugs; careless and dangerous driving. A disturbing case was when the Police charged an Accused Person for defilement of a girl under the age of 16 years. The maximum sentence would have been 2 years imprisonment. However, after hearing the testimony from the mother and the 4 year old girl, I was convinced that this was rape. I stopped the hearing, remanded the Accused Person in custody and wrote to the Honourable Chief Justice. The matter was reported to then Attorney General and Minister of Justice and the defilement charge was dropped and replaced with a new charge of rape. A Legal Practitioner was assigned by the State assigned by then Master of the Supreme Court, to represent him. I was directed to proceed with the case as a Preliminary Investigation. The matter was forwarded to the Honourable Chief Justice who then assigned it to late Judge O'Brien Coker of the Supreme Court [now High Court] for hearing. The Accused Person was tried and sentenced to the maximum 14 years, and his appeal failed. Administrative functions of assigning cases to other Magistrates and general administration of a Magisterial Division came with seniority as Head of a Division - Kanifing Magistrates' Court and Brikama Magistrates' Court in the Western Division respectively. I wrote and delivered judgments, orders and decisions. Hearing and determining juvenile delinquency cases was challenging. Additionally, I dealt with serious criminal cases involving politics e.g. violence against opposition supporters in a village as

well as the case of the opposition group for freedom of expression. At that time there was no Administrative Tribunal, so as Magistrates, we dealt with labour and administrative cases.

When I was appointed as Master of the Supreme Court, I had the judicial functions of a Judge in Chambers and wrote and delivered decisions on preliminary motions in civil cases and taxation of Legal Practitioners' costs. I heard and determined serious criminal cases before the Magistrates' court, wrote and delivered decisions, orders and judgments. I maintained and updated the Roll of Legal Practitioners eligible to practise before the Courts in The Gambia; enrolling qualified Legal Practitioners. In addition, I supervised the work of all Magistrates, legal and administrative staff. I dealt with Motions for setting a date for hearing; accounts for winding up companies as well as taxation of bills of costs for Defence Counsel. I successfully maintained and updated the Roll of Legal Practitioners registered to practise as Barristers and Solicitors in The Gambia. I also heard and determined serious Criminal Cases as a Stipendiary Magistrate e.g. Drug Trafficking by a Tourist who had swallowed 90 tablets and was caught at the Yundum International Airport. In addition, I heard and determined a case of stealing gold by Police Officers who were supposed to be guarding the stolen exhibit in another case. I was also the Accounting Officer for the Judiciary. I started using my newly acquired IT knowledge to prepare computerised Estimates for the Recurrent Budget and Nominal Roll. In addition, I was in charge of the Judiciary Development Budget and was involved in supervising the building of the High Court and Court of Appeal Complex in Banjul and the purchase of furniture and other equipment for the Judges and Staff, as well as the successful move to the new building. I also attended the First Commonwealth Judicial Administration Course for Commonwealth countries at the Royal Institute for Public Administration [RIPA] in London U.K. Finally, I organised, facilitated and took part in continuous Judiciary training programmes for Judges and Magistrates in conjunction with the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association. As Secretary to the JSC and assistant to the Chief Justice, I dealt with confidential administrative matters.

From May 1994 to January 1998 I was a Private Legal Practitioner, representing clients in Civil and Criminal cases before the Magistrates' Courts, the Supreme Court, now the High Court as well as before the Gambia Court of Appeal respectively. I was Counsel for the Plaintiff(s) or the Defendant(s) in Civil cases. I interviewed witnesses, prepared submissions, motions, pleadings, opening and closing statements and other requisite correspondence. As Assistant Editor, I edited several cases for The Gambia Law Reports 1994. As a Part-time Law Lecturer at the Gambia Technical Training Institute [GTTI], I researched, prepared for lectures and taught Criminal law, Contract, Tort and Company Law to ILEX "A" Level Law and Diploma in Law Students. In addition, as Senior Counsel

to the Commission of Inquiry into Land Administration, I liaised with the Investigators, checked the different layouts and survey plans, researched the requisite law, interviewed potential witnesses, wrote statements and discussed the issues with the Chairperson and Commissioners. Then I presented the case for the State, examined-in-chief, cross-examined and re-examined witnesses before the Commission as appropriate. I assisted in writing the Final Report that was presented to the President. I also attended continuous legal and judicial training programmes at home and abroad. Finally, as Chairperson of the Legal Aid Subcommittee, I advised and represented several persons *pro bono* when I prepared *habeus corpus* applications and other requisite documents.

I was the first holder of the post of Judicial Secretary that was created under the Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia 1997 which was equivalent to a Permanent Secretary post in other Ministries. From February 1998 to January 1999, I supervised the work of all judicial and administrative staff i.e. Master of the High Court - maintaining the Roll of Legal Practitioners eligible to practise in The Gambia, and Magistrates in all the Divisions, Sheriff's Bailiff, Registrars etc. In addition, I provided the requisite legal, judicial and administrative support to the Judges of the High Court, Court of Appeal and the newly created Supreme Court. As Secretary to the Judicial Service Commission I prepared all the documents for interviews of Judges, Magistrates and all senior staff, attended and participated in the interview panel and wrote the report to be sent to the President in case it was an interview for a Judge's post. I also prepared and controlled the Judiciary's annual budget and expenditure on the Recurrent Budget and Nominal Roll as well as the Development Budget that had previously been controlled by the Solicitor General and Legal Secretary. As the first JS I had to be creative in designing the requisite duties and responsibilities to be performed under the new Constitution 1997. I started the electronic version of the annual budget. I was the Accounting Officer for the Recurrent Budget, Nominal Roll and Development Budget for the Judiciary. I authorised expenditure, discussed the plan of the new Supreme Court building and ensured that the Contractor worked according to the plan. I authorised renovations of the Magistrates Courts in all the divisions and the provision of furniture and equipment. I organised, facilitated and took part in continuous Judiciary Training for Judges and Magistrates as well as Legal Practitioners. I passed the Alliance Franco-Gambienne Debutante I and II examinations as well as Intermediare I and II. I also took the IT part-time course for Permanent Secretaries. I drafted a program/plan of action for the Judiciary that was accepted by the Chief Justice and Judges and presented to the Secretary General Office of the President for inclusion in a National Plan to be used by the National and International Consultants for the UNDP funded Good Governance Project. As Secretary to the JSC and assistant to the Chief Justice, I dealt with very confidential as well as sensitive administrative matters. Another highlight of my national judicial career was that I was appointed by The ex-President of

The Republic of The Gambia under the recommendation of The JSC as Judge of The Gambia Court of Appeal [GCA] in January 2010 and served in that capacity February 2010 until January 2011. My duties included but were not limited to hearing and determining civil and criminal appeals on merit as well as interlocutory appeals to The GCA in a panel of 3 or 5 Judges of Appeal, depending on the issue at hand. Interlocutory appeals were heard and determined by me as a single judge in chambers. I conducted research, drafted and finalised judgments, orders, rulings and decisions in cases that were assigned to me. I made constructive comments on draft judgments, orders, rulings and decisions made by other Judges on the Panel. I actively participated and made informed discussions regarding cases before us. I finalised judgments, rulings and decisions written by me and wrote concurring and/or dissenting opinions as and when necessary. I made constructive comments to "The Gambia Government, The Gambia Judiciary Manual for Magistrates in Court Proceedings funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat." Honourable Justice Kalaille of the GCA was the Consultant. I attended continuous judicial training programs for Judges of Superior Courts as well as attended and actively participated in several workshops and Seminars e.g. I led the Gambian Delegation to the Seminar for West African Judges on Money Laundering that was held in The Gambia in June 2010. In addition, in November 2010, the Chief Justice appointed me Acting Justice of the Supreme Court of The Gambia, during the November 2010 session. I served in a Panel of five Justices of Appeal that heard and determined civil and criminal appeals as well as a panel of 7 that heard and determined an Application for Review, for which I wrote and read the lead Ruling.

My international career began with my appointment as Legal Officer in the Court Management Section [CMS] of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in July 1999. I served in different capacities as Deputy Chief CMS, as well as Acting Chief CMS. In addition, I served as Head of the Registry for the UNICTR Appeals Chamber Unit in The Hague, The Netherlands December 2001 to December 2003. It was during this period in September 2002 that I registered for and paid to study part-time for my LL.M. Having been reassigned to Arusha, I had to complete my course remotely. My LL.M thesis supervised by Professor John Dugard was entitled "Freedom of Expression and the Right to restrict that Freedom – the Experience of Africa and the Diaspora." I obtained my LL.M in Public International Law with an international Criminal Law Specialisation with Leiden University in The Netherlands. The highlight was that our eldest daughter obtained her First Degree the year that I obtained my LL.M. She graduated in July and I graduated in September 2005. On being reassigned to the Defence Counsel and Detention Management Section in December 2003 as Deputy Chief, I found that the challenges were different. I was also appointed Acting Chief DCDMS before being moved back to the CMS in June 2006. Another highlight was that in 2008 the Gambia Government nominated me for one of the 6 vacant posts of Judge on the International Criminal Court [ICC]. I honed my

negotiation skills by actively taking part in the campaign and actively participating in the Coalition for the International Criminal Court [CICC] organised Panel Discussions of Judicial Candidates held in The Hague November 2008 and in New York January 2009 respectively. I was interviewed by Ambassadors and or ICC State Party representatives from 50 States in the space of one week. Although I did not win, it was a learning curve. I completed my term of service and left UNICTR Arusha in September 2009.

Throughout this time, after a distinguished Civil Service career and rising through the ranks from 1976 to 1999 as Cadet Economist, Economist, Senior Economist, Principal Economist, Director of Economic Planning, Permanent Secretary and Secretary General and Head of the Civil Service; my husband was appointed The Gambia's Ambassador Plenipotentiary to The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, then to The European Union and finally to The United States of America in 1999 to 2000, 2000 to 2003 and 2010 to 2013 respectively. In addition, he was elected Executive Director [ED] for The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Liberia and Sudan at the African Development Bank [AfDB] 2013 to 2016. During his tenure of office, I was able to take part in some diplomatic chores like travelling to visit various cities when he is going to present his Letters of Credence, Inauguration Ceremony, Chapel Service and Reception/Dinner for President Obama's second term. I also participated in THIS For Diplomats and Spouses of African Ambassadors functions. I took this opportunity to raise funds for charity by participating in the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer in Washington DC and in New York as well as Mothers Against Drunk Driving [MADD] Walk in Baltimore. As spouse to the ED I participated in various activities in Tunis, Tunisia and Abidjan, Ivory Coast participating programs arranged for spouses during the annual meetings in Tunis 2013, Kigali Rwanda 2014, Abidjan 2015 and Lusaka Zambia 2016 respectively.

Fortunately for me, my legal and judicial career persevered. This was because whilst we were in Washington DC, I was again nominated by The Gambia Government for one of the 25 vacant posts of Judge for the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals [the Mechanism] in September 2011. I was recommended by then UN Secretary General to the UN Security Council. Although I did not go to New York this time, I successfully competed and won every round and was elected by the UN General Assembly in December 2011. As one of the 25 founder Judges, I am currently serving in the cases that have been assigned to me by the Mechanism's ex-President Meron and current President Agius to deal with as a Single Judge and in some cases as one of the five Judges on Appeal or Review. The highlights were successfully participating in *The Prosecutor v. Augustine Ngirabatware* Review Hearing for 5 days, Judges' deliberations as well as the delivery of the judgment in Arusha, Tanzania September 2019. Secondly, as one of the 5 Judges in the Appeal of *The Prosecutor v. Ratko Mladic*, I have just participated in the

Appeal hearing 25 and 26 August 2020 via video link, due to the COVID 19 challenges that made it impossible for 4 of the Judges to attend in person, in The Hague, The Netherlands. Additionally, time is spent reading and analyzing case law, writing articles and participating and contributing to Mechanism discussions sent from the President. In addition, I actively participate in Remote Plenary of Mechanism Judges by written procedure, made contributions and voted for changes to the Rules of Procedure and Evidence as well as for the Code of Professional Conduct for Mechanism Judges. Additionally, I have actively participated, made contributions and voted in in-person Plenary of Mechanism Judges held in The Hague, The Netherlands and in Arusha, Tanzania respectively. Finally, in June 2012, I actively participated in the review and finalizing of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence for the Mechanism by written procedure. Most of the Mechanism work is performed remotely.

## RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS:-

**2012** to date Public Orders and Decisions UNIRMCT See <https://www.irmct.org/en/cases>

**2014** Paper in The African Women Development & Communications Network FEMNET magazine <https://docplayer.net/63441779-African-women-in-power-politics.html> pages 30 to 36

**Jan. 2013** Women Cadi in The Gambia? See: <http://www.flag.gm/gambia/?q=publications>

**April 2012** African Women as Combatants and/or Perpetrators in International Law paper presented at Albany Law School's Conference on Africa and International Law: Taking Stock and Moving Forward.

**2012** Lecture on "Being a Woman Judge in The Gambia" presented at Pace Law School to the Summer Justice Academy for Young Women organized by New York State Women Judges and Pace Law School.

**2010 to 2011** Judgments, Rulings, Orders and Decisions delivered when I was a Judge Gambia Court of Appeal as well as when Acting Justice of the Supreme Court of The Gambia.

**2005** Thesis for the LL.M in Public International Law with an International Criminal Law Specialisation – Leiden University The Netherlands entitled "Freedom of Expression and the Right to Restrict such Freedom – the Experience of Africa and the Diaspora".

**1994** The Gambia Law Reports 1994 as Assistant Editor.

**1990** National Case Study for the U.N.D.P. Project RAF/87/042 "Improving African Women's Role in the Informal Sector Production and Management" entitled "The Statutory Legal Policies and Practices Pertaining to Women's Activities in the Informal Sector" funded by UNECA.

**1989** Research Paper Gambia's Women's Bureau "The Courts and the Legal Status of Women".

## 2. 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?

I am told that when I was born in Harare in 1953, my parents were the emerging African middle class, with my father as a businessman and my mother a Nurse Trainee.



However, because of his involvement in politics, by the time I was 5 years old and started school [Sub A] in those days, my father had already been arrested and detained, my mother had relocated to our rural area and had to start farming. The plot allocated to my father was sandy soil and we had no cattle. My mother had to re-invent herself, with assistance from me and my sibling brothers, she got us to collect cow dung and leaves to make a compost and hence enrich the sandy soil. By the time I went to High School in 1967, our Mother was a successful farmer. She managed this with the assistance in second hand clothing and donations first from Christian Aid in Rhodesia and later from Amnesty International Groups in Germany. However, it was by dint of hard work that our mother bought hybrid seeds and fertilizer, and after a few years she was a successful Farmer selling Grade A and B maize to the Grain Marketing Board [GMB]. This was an eye opener for me. I believed that my Mother had to go through this because she had not completed her education. However, this has not put me off farming as it is one of my passions. I like to eat what I grow and grow what I eat. Consequently, I grow fruits and vegetables and raise chicken, sheep and goats. In addition, the human rights violations that I witnessed as I was growing up led me to be determined to complete my studies in law. I studied Law because I felt that in future I could help in ensuring justice was seen to be done. When I left for studies in the UK, I joined Amnesty International at Keele University and was amazed at what could be achieved for families of Detainees who were in need. I took the opportunity to visit the Amnesty International groups in Germany, stayed with their families and advocated for assistance for others that were still detained in Rhodesia and elsewhere. Fundraising for charity is something that I continue to do. I became a Founder Member of Soroptimist International of Banjul [SIB] in 1987. The Club is affiliated to Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland. I am the immediate Past President SIB 2017 to 2019; 1994 to 1995; President SIB 1993 to 1994; Vice President 1992 to 1993; Legal Adviser 1994 to 1998. SIB adopted the Female Surgical Ward at the Royal Victoria Hospital now the Sir Francis Small Teaching Hospital, which became the SIB Ward. We provide requisite hospital materials and equipment for the women e.g. mosquito nets, bed sheets, curtains, morning gowns, TV, cleaning detergents etc as and when available. SIB adopted St. Joseph's Girls High School, Crab Island Middle School, Bakau new Town Primary School and provided fees for girl students in need, books, maintenance and additional toilet for the girls; seminars and workshops on human rights for girls and women. SIB has provided fees for 2 female students to enable them to complete studies at the University of The Gambia. SIB provided as well as raised funding for fencing of gardens used for growing rice during the rainy season and vegetables during the dry season by women entrepreneurs. With the kind assistance of Soroptimist International of Sigbourg in Denmark, SIB has provided and had erected 3 water tanks for a borehole in Kabekel Village Western Division during my tenure as President. We have also planted trees and flowers during the rainy season. In addition, I am a Founder Member to the Gambia Women Finance Association [GAWFA] since 1987 which was affiliated to Women's World Banking in New York. GAWFA has enabled women entrepreneurs who have no collateral, to obtain requisite training in financial management as well as access financing for their small and medium enterprises, thereby enabling them to grow

their businesses. I served as Chairperson to the Board of Directors in 1989/90. It was during this period that I attended a 3 weeks training program for Training of Trainers for Women Entrepreneurship in Abidjan, Ivory Coast in 1989. Consequently, my personal experience and passion to help those less privileged than myself, particularly women and children, has led me to appreciate the impressive work being achieved by the Lex:lead Group.

Additionally, as a Life Member, I funded myself and actively participated in the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association Biennial Conference in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania in September, 2017. Whilst I was on leave of absence as spouse Gambia's Ambassador Plenipotentiary to the USA, Mexico and High Commissioner to Canada, I served as Visiting Researcher at the International Law Institute; participated in requisite Diplomatic functions; and attended conferences as Member International Association of Women Judges; a Member of the Spouses of African Ambassadors Association; Board Member Mhina Tumaini Foundation; Board Member Policy Council of the Tahirih Justice Centre which works to protect immigrant women and girls seeking justice in the USA from gender-based violence. I fundraised for charity, walking 39.3 miles for the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer Washington DC and New York 2011 and Washington DC 2012 respectively. Additionally, I participated in the WALK LIKE MADD [Mothers Against Drunk Driving] Baltimore 2012. I have made presentations as a Guest Lecturer to students at Lehman College City University New York on "My Perceptions on the work of the UNICTR Registry"; to participants at Albany Law School's Conference on Africa and International Law: Taking Stock and Moving Forward "African Women as Combatants and/or Perpetrators in International Law". At Pace Law School to the Summer Justice Academy for Young Women organized by New York State Women Judges and Pace Law School, I presented a lecture on "Being a Woman Judge in The Gambia". Additionally, I participated in the International Association of Women Judges [IAWJ] Biennial Conference 5 to 9 May 2014 in Arusha, Tanzania and made a presentation on "Justice for all when Paradigms Shift and the Status Quo Ceases to Exist."

I therefore, believe that Law can shape development trends when the Government is ready and willing to ensure that good laws and policies are put in place to ensure good governance; reduction in crime; fairness in the distribution of wealth and a better life for all. I was appointed as Subject Matter Specialist Legal [SMS] by the Speaker of the Gambia National Assembly in 2017 and I have served as requested, in the Standing Committee on Finance and Public Accounts [FPAC]; the Standing Committee on Public Enterprises [PEC]; the Standing Committee on Defence and Security; the Select Committee on Human Rights; the Select Committee on Health, Women, Children, Refugees, Disaster Management and Humanitarian Relief; the Select Committee on the Environment, NGOs and Sustainable Development. I have since acquainted myself with the work of Oversight Committees commencing with actively participating in the Pre-Session Retreat for National Assembly Oversight Committees. Additionally, I have actively participated in Seminars and Workshops on Gender Based Violence and

Sharing of the Research Findings on Female Genital Mutilation [FGM]; the UNICEF funded Capacity Strengthening Training on Budget Scrutiny of the Public Health Delivery. With the Chairpersons and Committee Members, we have visited various health facilities to ascertain infrastructure, personnel and other human rights issues as part of the Committee's oversight activities. With the Health Committee, Universal Health Insurance for all, as well as Covid 19 has become a trending issue. The Environment Committee also visited fishing villages and dumping sites following up on complaints received from members of the public. Currently the different Committees are reviewing several Bills that have been assigned to them to review before being tabled before the National Assembly. Some Bills are simply amending old laws some even from Colonial times in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, some are new laws that are being put in place to ensure that The Gambia complies with its obligations to International Conventions and Treaties that it is a signatory to. It is challenging and I find that going through each Bill clause by clause with the requisite stakeholders ensures that the human rights issues are dealt with, discussed and entrenched in each Bill. Consequently, law is shaping positive development trends in The Gambia. Currently, I am serving on various Committees that are having bi-lateral meetings with the Line Ministries and departments and Organisations under them to ensure that the Proposed Budget for 2021 complies with the International Treaties that The Gambia is a signatory to and that it is also meeting the Sustainable Development Goals [SDG]s.

Finally, I think that the most important law and development trends in the world currently are issues relating to human rights for all particularly women and children. State Parties are making or amending laws in order to comply with Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]. In addition, the right to water has become a challenge with Covid 19. The environment has become crucial with global warming, the use of land, sea, rivers, wetlands and the resources found therein. States have to face challenges regarding health and safety for the populace. Education and good health for all; sustainable Agriculture for food self-sufficiency, good nutrition, food safety, preservation, quality and quantity. Poverty eradication is a trending issue. In addition, freedom of expression as well as other human rights obligations; how the State Resources are being utilized, corruption issues and impunity are trending. Moreover, with social media, more people are now aware of what is happening because they can access information immediately on their mobile phones. Rural water supply and rural electrification has improved the lives of many people. Alternative power sources like solar and wind has helped in development. Laws that facilitate the importation and/or manufacture of these products are trending. However, there are negative trends like human and sex trafficking, child abuse, those dying in the desert and at sea whilst attempting to go to Europe using the backway. In The Gambia, the Law of the Sea is also trending with the illegal fishing vessels being captured in our waters and the discovery of petroleum and hopes for a fruitful future. Consequently, the difference between urban and rural is reducing with the improvement in road infrastructure, water and electricity provision and education, health and agriculture infrastructure.

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

I was introduced to Lex:lead by Ms. Anne Bodley in 2010 after I had read an advertisement of the essay competition on LinkedIn. Since then I was asked to serve as one of the Judges and I accepted. I have since participated and marked several interesting essays and found the student participants to be full of wisdom. I have missed a couple of years when I could not participate as a Judge, due to circumstances beyond my control. However, I always ensure that I share the essay competition advert with Law Lecturers and Students. In fact when I checked in 2010, Zimbabwe was not included amongst the participating countries and I inquired about it. It has since been included in the list and I am pleased that one student made the mark. I believe that this initiative is exemplary because young lawyers get the opportunity to look at the law from a different angle. Development is usually not a topic that Lawyers would be talking about. One would expect them to discuss more civil, criminal, human rights and such issues. However, this initiative enables students to do research and think outside the box. This is helpful in that the world they will be working in has become a global village and development oriented. Consequently, I believe that this initiative is enabling young lawyers to start reflecting on finding the point where they can give back to their community, not just looking at how much they can make when they complete their studies and become lawyers. Whether they win the competition or not, the exercise itself of participating in such a challenging topic helps to hone their negotiating and other skills. For those who have won the competition, it is always a pleasure to follow up on what they achieve afterwards. I have not yet participated in mentoring or providing internship for successful students but believe that it is helpful to those who participate. May I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank Ms. Bodley and the Lex:lead Board of Directors, Sponsors, the Judges, Winners, Participants and well wishers for a job well done.