Reflections and Testimonials from Academic Forum Participants Class of 2020/2021

Afronomicslaw established the Academic Forum to bring together undergraduate and graduate students as well as early career researchers from across the world interested in international economic law issues as they relate to Africa and the Global South.

The following reflections and testimonials of the first cohort of the Academic Forum (2020-2021) ought to be seen against the goals of the Academic Forum:

(i) to encourage and build core research skills in teaching, research, theory, methods and writing;

(ii) to build a forum that is inclusive and accessible;

(iii) to develop content for Afronomicslaw.org and where possible to encourage authors to submit to the African Journal of International Economic Law;

(iv) over time, to hold workshops and masterclasses on core research skills in teaching, research, theory, methods and writing;

(v) organise annual poster/essay competitions on international economic law issues.

Reflections and Testimonials from Members of the Academic Forum Class of 2020

- **Abdullahi Abdirahman, Strathmore University, Kenya**

The Academic Forum has allowed me the chance to meet amazing colleagues with whom I share a common vision: a decolonising and liberating vision in knowledge production and ideas. I have learnt and grown throughout my time in the Forum, and I will be forever grateful.

- **Anne Mburu, Strathmore University, Kenya**

In my third year of Law School, I was exposed to Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) in a human rights class. This piqued my interest in the field and led me to read various articles published by the Afronomicslaw touching on the same subject matter. I came to learn about the academic Forum from one of the contributors of the blog who then encouraged me to join the Forum and benefit from its mission to mentor, teach and equip young people like me with knowledge that can be used to create a better Africa. The academic Forum has a very flexible curriculum and classes that allows its members to delve into the current and emerging issues that have had an impact on countries in the global South and through this, I have been exposed to a lot of work by scholars and theorists that I would not have had the opportunity to get in a normal class setting. This newly founded knowledge and skills will propel not only me, but other students to come up with innovative solutions to deal the socio-economic, political and legal issues that Africa is facing.

- **Wairimu Manyara, Strathmore University, Kenya**

When I joined the Afronomicslaw Academic Forum, I had expectations based on my experience having read TWAIL authors such as BS Chimni. This experience so far has been exceptional. It has surpassed my expectations. My most profound learning experience in the Forum was in the guest lecture by

Professor Rohini Sen. I had read her piece on a feminist critique of the teaching international law, which I found very interesting. Her training session with the Forum was on the place of gender in international law. It was not only an informative session but also challenging. She gave a propounded and extensive analysis on the need for the Global South to create their own form of identity that is distinct from western norms and conceptualisations of feminism. This was addressing elitism, which is usually a main critique of the feminist movement. She argued that it could be remedied through internalising and exploring the experiences of Global South women to form a unique identity that is distinct and really representative of African feminist experiences. Notably, the session conducted by Professor Babatunde Fagbayibo was amazing. It perhaps enhanced my knowledge on lack of the African Union's autonomy over peace and security initiatives. External donors fund these initiatives, and they do have their own agenda, which are not always in line with ours. My experience with the Forum thus far has been incredibly instrumental.

- **Hassina Uzamushaka, University of Rwanda, Rwanda**

Being part of the Afronomicslaw Academic Forum has been an awe-inspiring journey to me so far. It is inspiring to witness and be part of a group of young Africans from all over the East African region. These young minds are committed to reshaping Africa's political economy. Different renowned professors and policymakers take precious time out of their busy schedules to quench our thirst on different topics and to answer our questions, which are most of the time unusual and challenging. To them, I simply say a few words from Chinua Achebe: "When mother-cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth". I am excitedly looking forward to what the coming days months are holding. I believe it is going to be good.

- **Ali Abdilatif, Strathmore University, Kenya**

I am a third-year Law Student at Strathmore Law School. The Afronomicslaw Academic Forum has been nothing short but surreal. As a Kenyan Regional Representative of the Forum, I have enjoyed the different lectures that different legal TWAIL scholars have taken us through. Professors Ohio Omiunu, Babatunde Fagbayibo and Rohini Sen have been some of the great scholars we

have interacted with. They have challenged our understanding of decolonization in many areas that affect our lives as Third World peoples. These include international economic law, generally, the place of gender in international law; and financing peace and security in Africa. Prior to every lecture, readings are shared with us. This makes it that, during our lectures, we come ready with questions that may help us understand better the topic of the day.

- **Nciko Arnold, recent Graduate Strathmore University, Kenya**

As a member of the Afronomicslaw Academic Forum (in its early stages), I took part in a Policy Hackathon on Model Provisions for Trade in Times of Crisis and Pandemic in Regional and other Trade Agreements. Before my participation in the Hackathon, my knowledge of International Economic Law (IEL) was foundational. For instance, my fellow members and I did not understand how the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) system and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) work. We equally did not understand a difference as basic as that between Trade Law and Investment Law. To remedy this situation, the Director of the Academic Forum, Professor Ohio, took us through an about-an-hour crash course on these matters. After this, we were able to successfully produce a policy brief, focusing on the amendments that may be made to the GATT/WTO regime regarding trading in personal protective equipment (PPEs).

This was a humbling experience, especially because I was working with a team of people, from diverse backgrounds (Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, etc), each bringing a fresh Global South perspective to our policy brief. It was interesting to realise that in many ways the IEL system does not cater for the unique circumstances of Global South countries. Therefore, a major takeaway for me from this experience was the crash course. It pushed my thinking further. I noticed that there was a gap in the way IEL courses are taught in our universities, at least if one is to look at them from a Global South perspective. Because for me it was not a coincidence that my fellow members from Nigeria and Tanzania, who are undergraduate students or fresh graduates, and I did not have a proper grasp of the GATT/WTO regime.

It is reacting to this reality that I took it upon myself to help establish the Afronomicslaw Academic Forum in the East African region. At the back of my

mind and that of those, I approached to help establish the Forum was the idea that if we can be successful in East Africa, then we can take our experience in East Africa as proof of concept to be implemented in other regions of Africa and the Global South (these being the general focus of the general Afronomicslaw family). This has been actualised now.

Learning from my experience with the Policy Hackathon, I approached a few friends with the vision of modelling the Afronomicslaw Academic Forum around the realization that international (economic) law is usually taught and researched within the Western and/or Anglo-American categories of thought. As the Academic Forum, our core business is to empower undergraduate students, therefore, graduate students and early career researchers from across the world with critical skills to help them strike a proper balance between international (economic) law and the lived experiences of Third World peoples. This is indeed a noble cause. We recruited our members – the Regional Representatives for East Africa – through written applications and zoom interviews. We come from different backgrounds and countries. We come from Burundi, Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Nigeria and Uganda. We profess different faiths, subscribe to different ideals, and respect each other's opinions, with no room for personal prejudices.

We are reaching out to seasoned scholars and experts in the field to take us through this course. They are to avoid, as much as possible, the banking model of teaching and are encouraged to problematize their teaching. In this vein, we expect to be taken to the loopholes in the discipline so that we can help fill them up. So far, we have had a general course on IEL by Professor Ohio, Professor Babatunde from the University of South Africa has taken us through a course on 'Financing Continental Integration in Africa: Practice, Problems and Prospect'. We have also had Professor Rohini Sen from Jindal Global University for a course on Gender in International Economic Law. In the coming weeks/months, we are to have other courses on the place of food security/agriculture in IEL, the relationship between the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund with Africa, the World Trade Organisation, etc. The scholars and the policy experts we have approached have scheduled dates with us regarding these sessions. The Afronomicslaw institutional backing has been our 'credibility' pass. Everyone we have approached trusts Afronomicslaw. They respect Afronomicslaw. They want to be associated with it. They are also willing

to serve as mentors of our Regional Representatives whose interests may tie in with their field of expertise.

- **Khalil Badbess, Strathmore University, Kenya**

From my experience, the Afronomicslaw Academic Forum offers a critical lens in the study of international law from Global South perspectives. Its members consistently engage in deconstructing international law's infallibility while attempting to re-construct a more egalitarian version. Without a doubt, this exercise has significantly influenced my thinking on the subject. In the coming years, the Forum is likely to produce several scholars and professionals who will be conscious of international law content and the contexts it must cater to.

- **Sumaya Hussein, Strathmore University, Kenya**

It is a blessing to be a part of the Afronomicslaw Academic Forum. This is because Afronomicslaw is more than just a group of editors but rather a community passionate about the African narrative and one ready to reflect on the African heritage. I had the privilege to attend an introductory class to international economic law with Professor Ohio Omiunu, a lecture by Professor Babatunde Fagbayibo on the problems and prospects of continental integration in Africa and a lecture on gender in international law by Professor Rohini Sen. All three lecturers were keen on giving an Afrocentric view of each topic. Being a part of this community in these last few months has opened my eyes to the possibility of a GREAT Africa which we will create together under OUR terms!

- **Mitchelle Kang'ethe, Strathmore University, Kenya**

The Afronomicslaw Academic Forum has had a huge impact on my knowledge and understanding of the world around me. Being a safe space, I've had the opportunity to listen to different ideas that challenge my line of thinking and push me to think critically about the issues that affect Third World countries. I have also been exposed to different worlds of academia that I was not familiar with prior to the Forum. With this, I have learnt more about key institutions and organisations in Third World countries (such as the African Union) and their role in resolving the issues facing these countries. Due to the exposure of the

Forum, I have also identified potential areas that I would like to study further for my future career. I have benefited tremendously from the Forum, and I am therefore very grateful to Afronomicslaw for creating this platform and allowing me to be a part of it.

- **Mwendwa Gatuiku, Strathmore University, Kenya**

What led to me join the Forum is the idea that information received from higher learning institutions can be one way to colonise our minds. I was excited to be a part of something that challenges the way we view research and how we think about information fed to us in schools. The Afronomicslaw Academic Forum, through its devotion to retelling international economic law (IEL) from African perspectives by questioning its 'internationality', has been something exciting to me. To say the least, I have been challenged in every session I've attended thus far. I'm excited, not just to be a part of the team, but to be a part of something that could challenge the Eurocentrism present in IEL research. I am hopeful for what lies ahead.

- **Steven Caleb, University of Kigali, Rwanda**

I joined the Forum with doubts as to whether it would be just another establishment that required me to submit to the pre-determined norms and perceptions of international economic law scholarship. I always thought we were doomed to live within the confines of our colonial past and that it would remain difficult to meet people from the Global South who were opposed to Eurocentric approaches and beliefs. Fortunately, Afronomicslaw became, to me, a revolutionary preparatory ground with high profile academics and enthusiastic young scholars merging their skills and shared beliefs. We challenge each other to think differently but work together to advance perspectives from the Third World that are considered alien by those who subscribe to Eurocentrism. While the Global South's education systems immerse emerging scholars into Westernized syllabi, Afronomicslaw is pushing students and scholars to education systems that align with the realities of their own societies. From learning how to research and write objectively and think critically and creatively, Afronomicslaw has offered me a novel world view and entirely altered my view of the global macro-economy. There's an immense

feeling of responsibility that comes with being a member of this diverse community. The Forum elevates the strengths of members so they can work towards a better Global South. It's been a fulfilling journey riding along with the best within their fields, and my expectations remain high.

- **Miriam Charles, Lex Scripta, Tanzania**

Before joining the academic Forum, I had some knowledge of International Economic Law from a class I took in my last year, called International Trade Law. My level of expertise in this area is foundational because we learned about the various areas of International Trade Law and their principles in the class. Yes, through the Academic Forum, I was privileged to participate in the UN Policy Hackathon competition. With this experience, I was able to learn more about the relevance of WTO in international trade, where I was also introduced to the history of the GATT and how countries can compromise the defence of necessity during hard times, like the pandemic, so that despite taking care of their domestic economy, countries can work together to help one another, especially the developing countries. My Academic forum participation has raised my interest in starting a legal consultancy in International Trade Law, mostly for Tanzania and the United Kingdom.

- **Kayode Olude, Associate, Perchstone & Graeys, Nigeria**

I have participated in two IEL related activities. My first activity was the UN Policy Hackathon competition, wherein we were tasked with researching the impact of trade restriction on personal protective equipment (PPEs). My second task was tailored at preparing three finalists for the TANA Forum on how best to structure their presentations at the Forum. I learnt about the depth of trade imbalances between African countries and its foreign counterparts. I also realised Africa is not politically structured to harness huge benefits of trade agreement given their over-reliance on foreign countries for finished products in which case the raw materials for the finished products were sourced from Africa. I have been able to leverage my experience at the academic Forum to secure admission into a top-ranked university in Africa to study International Trade and Investment Law in Africa.

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