



LAW

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Connecting Communities
Protecting the Planet

ELAW Pioneers: The Next Generation

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The Next Generation**

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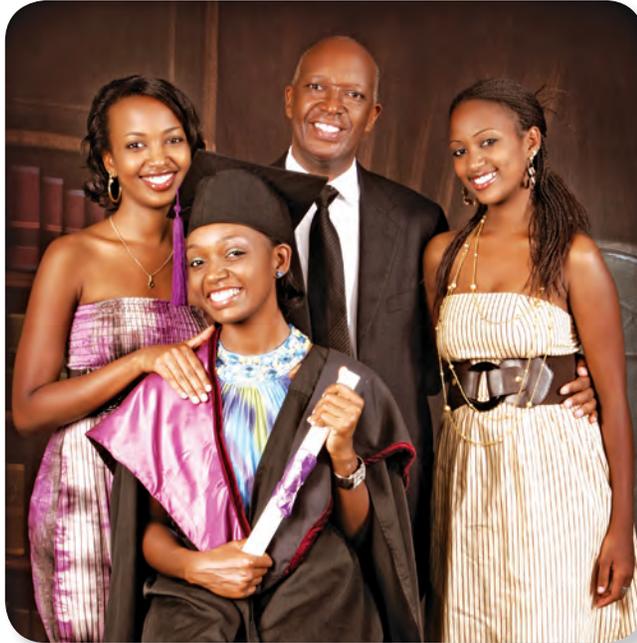
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Samantha Atukunda with her father, Kenneth Kakuru, and sisters Tracy (left) and Rose.

The Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide celebrates 20 years of collaboration with the world's leading grassroots advocates. After two decades, we are now celebrating the arrival of the next generation of environmental leaders.

ELAW partner Kenneth Kakuru from Uganda founded Greenwatch. His daughter Samantha is now on staff. Raquel Gutierrez has dedicated her life to protecting Mexico's Lake Chapala. Her son Pedro has joined her organization. Harper Johnson, daughter of ELAW Executive Director Bern Johnson, is one of many young ELAW volunteers with a passion for protecting the planet.

"My father has always told me to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves."

Samatha Atukunda

ELAW has built an international corps of environmental defenders – 300 strong in 70 countries. We now welcome Samantha, Pedro, Harper, and the many others who are carrying on the important task of building a sustainable future, for all the world's children.

Samatha Atukunda

What are the biggest environmental challenges facing Uganda?

Our biggest challenges are land and forest degradation, non-compliance with environmental laws, and political interference. Our economy is agriculture based and population pressure has brought over-cultivation, soil erosion, and encroachment in areas such as wetlands. Over 90,000 hectares of Uganda's forest cover disappears ever year. This and climate change aggravate an already challenging situation, especially for the rural poor. We are seeing landslides and floods.

Uganda has very good environmental laws, but we lack enforcement. Politicians tend to side with the electorate, promoting their own interests, not protecting and conserving the environment. There is a lack of political will as regards enforcement mechanisms.

How has your dad influenced you?

I am inspired by my father's passion for protecting and conserving our environment, and his public interest litigation. He always told me to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

What are your plans for the future?

I have a burning passion to leave the earth better than I found it, for my children and generations to come. Given the reality of climate change and environmental degradation, I know this is a huge challenge. I plan to be a dedicated advocate for the protection and conservation of the environment, especially through public interest litigation.

What is your hope for Uganda?

Uganda has very good environmental protection laws. I hope these laws do not just remain in the statutes, but are implemented and enforced. I hope to bring these laws to life. I hope that Uganda becomes conscious of the environment and dedicates itself to protection and conservation to promote sustainable development.

Samantha Atukunda is Research Assistant at Greenwatch. She received her law degree from Uganda Christian University and will soon embark on a masters in law (LL.M.) in environmental and natural resources law at the University of Oregon School of Law. At Greenwatch, Samantha drafts bylaws to empower communities to protect natural areas, conducts workshops to educate communities and government officials about environmental crimes, and provides training to law enforcement officials and the judiciary on environmental law. Samantha also conducts research on climate change, food security, and land rights, and shares her findings with the public.

The Next Generation (CONTINUED)

Pedro Leon

What are the biggest environmental challenges facing Mexico?

Water pollution, access to clean water, the booming mining industry, and dealing with GMO's and pesticides are the most pressing issues. Climate change is a problem, but Mexico is not taking it seriously, yet.

What is your hope for Mexico?

I hope for many things. Unfortunately, we are facing very hard times and there are challenging years ahead. I am grateful to be involved in the process of seeking solutions and advocating for change.

Has your mom been an influence?

My mom walks the talk, at work and in her daily life. She is a great example of how someone can move through life and achieve many things along the way. Her struggle, perseverance, and passion to fight for what is right made a big impression.

What are your plans for the future?

I want to work for things that I care about and try to solve even the smallest of problems. Human rights and the environment are two things I care deeply about. I will remain focused on this. Someday I would like to get a Ph.D. to perhaps better understand and analyze some of the problems I encounter.



Pedro Leon works on contract for ELAW, helping environmental advocates around the world protect the environment through law. He also coordinates the Human Rights and the Environment Program at the Instituto de Derecho Ambiental (IDEA), in Guadalajara. Pedro's mother, Raquel Gutierrez Najera, founded IDEA and won a 2009 Environmental Merit Award for her work protecting Lake Chapala. Pedro received a law degree from the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Occidente in Guadalajara and a masters degree in international human rights law from Lund University in Sweden. Pedro is currently seeking relief for families in Juanacatlan and El Salto who suffer due to severe pollution in the Santiago River.

Harper Johnson



What are you doing at ELAW?

I am an ELAW volunteer, trying to help, in a small way, advance ELAW's mission of protecting the global environment. I am learning about environmental problems and how to become an effective advocate. I haven't spent much time thinking about what I want to do when I grow up, but I know that I would enjoy a job where I educate people about the environment.

What environmental problems are you concerned about?

I want to protect the ocean as habitat for native marine life.

Has your dad been an influence?

When I learn about problems that my father is working to solve, I am inspired because I know that I too could help make a change and protect the global environment. When lawyers from different countries visit, I enjoy learning about where they are from, what they are working on, and how people everywhere are concerned about the environment.

Harper Johnson (14 years) will be a freshman at South Eugene High School. She started volunteering at ELAW when she was 11 years old. This summer she is helping with ELAW's database, mailing lists, and other administrative tasks. She enjoys rafting in Oregon and Montana, and going fly fishing with her dad. She is a budding photographer, plays piano, and has traveled to Belize. Harper's father, Bern Johnson, has served as the Executive Director of ELAW for 20 years.