Voices of African Women
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Women’s Rights in Ghana, Uganda, and Tanzania

Johanna Bond

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Richard and Judy Bond, and to my husband, J.D. King.
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Preface

With two exceptions, the authors in this volume have all participated in a fellowship program called the Leadership and Advocacy for Women in Africa (LAWA) Program. The LAWA Program brings accomplished women’s rights lawyers to Washington, D.C. for a sixteen-month fellowship program in which the lawyers pursue an LL.M. degree at Georgetown University Law Center and work at a Washington-based non-profit organization for six months. As part of their degree program, each of the LAWA lawyers authored a graduate thesis concerning some aspect of women’s rights law in her home country. Those graduate papers formed the basis of the essays included in this volume. For this compilation, the papers have been excerpted and in many cases updated to reflect developments in the law.

Although the geographic reach of the LAWA program has expanded in recent years, the program began as a pilot project focused on Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda. As a result, the essays in this compilation address women’s rights concerns in those countries. As of 2003, the LAWA program has included thirty-nine participants from Botswana, Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.¹

The LAWA program is part of a larger women’s rights fellowship program called the Women’s Law and Public Policy Fellowship Program (WLPPF), which has been housed at Georgetown University Law Center since its inception in 1983. As a complement to the LAWA program, the WLPPF program brings women’s rights lawyers from across the United States to Washington, D.C. for a one-year fellowship, during which the fellows work for non-profit organizations dedicated to protecting and improving women’s rights. The WLPPF program is not merely a way to funnel talented attorneys into women’s rights organizations. The program, which convenes bi-weekly, substantive seminars that the LAWA and WLPPF fellows attend, invests in developing the leadership and professional capacity of each of the fellows. The two programs enjoy a symbiotic relationship; the interaction between the U.S. fellows and the LAWA fellows enriches both groups in innumerable ways.

Not surprisingly, the LAWA program attracts an applicant pool that is unsurpassed both in its credentials and its collective passion for women’s rights.

¹. The LAWA Program also included a fellow from Afghanistan in 2002.
activism—all of which makes the program fertile ground for a collection of women’s rights essays. Although the authors share some attributes, such as a deep commitment to women’s rights advocacy, they differ in significant ways as well. Although each is a lawyer, their human rights careers include a range of diverse experiences. The group includes a Member of Parliament, a law professor, a Labor Commissioner, a legal expert for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and directors of non-governmental organizations, to name just a few.

The research these lawyers accomplished while they were pursuing an LL.M. degree at Georgetown reflects not only their scholarly research but also their years of activism fighting for gender justice in their own countries. As such, many of these essays include pragmatic strategies born of years of activism in the trenches. Some of the strategies are transferable across borders and will interest like-minded activists in other countries. Many of the essays include broader theoretical questions, such as the role of judicial activism in the quest for social justice. Despite the range of topics and strategies, however, the authors share a steadfast commitment to gender equality. This book is intended to share their expertise and, in so doing, contribute to the global effort to promote and protect women’s human rights.
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