An introduction

We are excited to present to you the first Issue of the Newsletter for the Network of Women in Law and Policy against Organized Crime. The purpose of the Newsletter is to showcase the achievements of our Network Members and the invaluable role that women play in the fight against organized crime. We believe that the stories in the newsletter will inspire female policymakers, legislative drafters, criminal justice practitioners and law enforcement from West and Central Africa, and beyond, to forge the path towards a safer and more equitable society for all.

This issue provides an introduction to the Network and its first event and presents the inspiring stories of our Network Members: Victoria Ibiwoye (p7) who set up her own NGO, Saffiatou Nyang who works at the Attorney General’s Chambers and Ministry of Justice (p4), and Francine Aka Anghui (p5), the President of Côte d’Ivoire Association of Women Lawyers. We are also excited to present to you UNODC’s new publications and the next event for the Women’s Network (p9).
Globally, the lack of women’s participation in the development of legislation and policies against organized crime continues to present a significant obstacle to the effective mainstreaming of gender and human rights considerations in the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). Despite women’s representation in decision-making positions being an internationally agreed priority in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, women are underrepresented at all levels of legislation and policy development.

To address this gap, UNODC has launched the Network of Women in Law and Policy against Organized Crime in West and Central Africa, with the aim of supporting female policymakers, legislative drafters, criminal justice practitioners and law enforcement in the meaningful participation in the development of legislative and strategic frameworks to prevent and counter organized crime.

The Network consists of over thirty members, and growing, from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal.

The agreed vision of Network is to:

“Utilize various platforms to engage with female law and policymakers working on organized crime to contribute to the empowerment of women and to achieve a safer and more equitable society for all”
In November 2023, UNODC held the launch event for the Network of Women in Law and Policy against Organized Crime for West and Central Africa in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. The three day event brought together 24 women from across West and Central Africa. The event was dedicated to building connections, agreeing on a vision for the network and designing activities that the Network will undertake.

It was also an opportunity for the Network to learn more about the work of UNODC to support State Parties in the implementation of UNTOC, and the recently launched Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender and Human Rights in the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

The three day-event proved a great success with the members of the Network committing to specific action points to contribute to the vision of the network.

As emphasized in the closing remarks: "Ce n’est que le début," this is only the beginning, and we look forward to the next event taking place in February this year.

“I am stronger, I walked through fire but came out stronger, been hurt by those I loved but wiped my tears determined to move on, I am committed to encourage women with my story.”

Jennifer Suoya Aga
Can you give an introduction to yourself and the work that you do?

My name is Saffiatou Nyang, I was born and raised in The Gambia. I am a Legal Practitioner by profession currently working at the Attorney General’s Chambers and Ministry of Justice.

What inspired you to start a career in combating organized crime?

I have always wanted to be a lawyer, however I decided to join the Public Service after I worked at the Commission of Inquiry established to investigate the corrupt practices of former president Jammeh and his close associates. I realized that our Public Service was in a disarray and the onus was on us, the young people to get involved and fix the country.

I am inspired by female Gambian lawyers such as Fatou Bomm Bensouda, former chief prosecutor of the ICC, Ms Amie Bensouda and Ms Janet Sallah-Njie Commissioner of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights.

What are some of the challenges you have faced as a woman working in this area of work?

As a woman working in the Public Service, you have to go the extra mile to prove your worth. At times you may be looked down upon just because you are a woman. The civil service is mainly male dominated so there have been meetings were I am the only woman in the room.

What strengths do you believe that you bring as a woman?

As a woman, I believe I am more relatable to victims of Sexual and Gender Based Violence. I am better placed to advise on policies affecting women and children because I am one of them and I can relate to their struggles.

What does the future look like for you?

I look forward to growing and climbing up the leadership ladder within the Ministry of Justice. I believe we need more women in leadership positions in Government. I therefore will use every opportunity to develop myself both academically and professionally.

If you could give one piece of advice to a young woman wanting to start her career in this area of work, what would it be?

Your dreams are valid, don’t stop at the first obstacle, and keep pushing. The keywords are “hard work and determination”, with hard work and determination, everything is possible.
Can you give an introduction to yourself and the work that you do?

My name is Maître Francine AKA-ANGHUI and I was admitted to the Côte d'Ivoire Bar in August 1993. I worked for 15 years in banking and anti-corruption institutions. I was also the national focal point for monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption for six years. In addition to my work as a lawyer, I am currently the President of Côte d'Ivoire Association of Women Lawyers and Secretary General of the Women Caucus for Lobbying, a movement that works to improve the representation of women in elected assemblies and decision-making positions. I am married and have 5 children.

What inspired you to start a career in combating organized crime?

I've always wanted to be a lawyer. For me, it is essential that everyone knows their rights as a human being and can exercise them with respect for others. I believe that it contributes to the development of human beings and societies. Working on issues related to financial crime and corruption has opened up new horizons for me, even if it still involves respect for the law. I'm inspired by people who are committed to others, people who work for the well-being of others and people uphold the law.

What are some of the challenges you have faced as a woman working in this area of work?

As a woman, you first have to show your skills, especially in what are considered to be male domains. You have to show intelligence and tact if you want to be respected. What is more, as a French-speaking African woman, the challenges of language are often multiplied. You need to put in more effort to make yourself understood and to legitimise your presence in this field of work.
What strengths do you believe that you bring as a woman?

One of our greatest assets is our versatility. Women have a great capacity to adapt. I also think that the integrity of women is an asset, as this is an area of work with a lot of financial temptations.

If you could give one piece of advice to a young woman wanting to start her career in this area of work, what would it be?

The fight against organized crime is a field in which there are many career opportunities, both in terms of diversity and quality. It is a field in which you can acquire cutting-edge professional skills and develop national and international networks. This provides a lot of opportunities.

What does the future look like for you?

I'm reaching the end of my career, so I am hoping to consult for organizations and to continue to support young women who are starting their careers in this field.
The Story Behind OneAfricanChild
Victoria Ibiwoye

My mother was my inspiration to start OneAfricanChild. As early as I can remember, she has shown boundless kindness and compassion to those in need. Seeing how she embraced people in the community that have been ostracized by society, I had the courage to start OneAfricanChild as a college student in 2013. Our organization has brought hope to thousands of children and youth in Nigeria and beyond, giving them the torch to discover their own paths to success through global citizenship and peace education training programs.

As I reflect on the journey that led me to OneAfricanChild, I am reminded of the transformative power of education and how it changed the trajectory of my life as a timid young girl who grew up in the suburb of Lagos and struggled with finding her voice, to becoming a global advocate contributing to several high-level education dialogues and working with the United Nations to drive policies informed by young people’s voices and experiences.

My passion and dedication to education advocacy didn't start overnight. It became possible as a result of the wonderful role models around me who sacrificed a lot to give me the best education possible.

Growing up, I saw girls around me fall victim to early pregnancy or school dropout, trapped by cycles of poverty and lack of opportunity. Witnessing my mother’s determination to ensure that I don’t become a part of these statistics and working hard to give me the opportunities she never had, became a motivation to use my background as a legal professional to champion the rights of at-risk youth and establish an organization that empowers them through education.
Leading an organization comes with unique challenges such as fundraising and motivating a diverse team of volunteers but there is nothing more rewarding than seeing the smiles on the children’s faces and the spark in their eyes as they discover their potential. Every outreach program, every empowered educator, every young leader stepping forward – these are the victories that fill my heart. OneAfricanChild has been a journey of shared growth, of learning and unlearning alongside the communities we serve.

I have seen firsthand how education provides young people with the tools to navigate life’s challenges. Hence, our organization works with children at the early stages to equip them with future skills like critical thinking and problem solving to allow them to make informed choices and empower them to advocate for themselves and their communities. Education doesn't just open doors to opportunity; it builds a bridge away from the cycle of crime and despair. By equipping young people with knowledge and skills to navigate societal barriers and limitations, we are building a path towards a future where they can be agents of positive change and not victims of circumstance.

If you're considering a similar path, my advice is to let your passion guide you, and don't underestimate the power of preparation. Seek knowledge, build your skills, and surround yourself with mentors and allies. Also, starting an organization isn't the only way to make a difference. If you already belong or choose to support an organization, it is important to identify your most impactful contribution. Whether you will lead, donate, advise, or volunteer, understanding your strengths and aligning them with project needs ensures effective resource allocation and maximizes your impact. Above all, remember that the journey is as important as the destination. Embrace the challenges, celebrate the victories, share your story and never lose sight of the difference you can make in the world!

**FIND OUT MORE AT:**  [https://oneafricanchild.org](https://oneafricanchild.org)
NEW PUBLICATIONS

UNODC has published a new regional annex to the UNODC Organized Crime Strategy Toolkit. The Regional Policy Brief: An Aid to Strategic Responses to Organized Crime in West and Central Africa was produced as an aid for the development of strategies and response frameworks against organized crime in West and Central Africa.

The UNODC Toolkit in Mainstreaming Gender and Human Rights in the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is now available in French, Spanish and Russian!

The second online event for the Women’s Network will take place on 20 February at 10:00-12:00 (CET). Join us to hear from our key note speaker and to discuss the implementation of activities designed during the first meeting. More information will be available soon.

INTERESTED IN JOINING THE NETWORK?

CONTACT US AT:

implement.UNTOC@un.org