ELAW in Africa
Building Capacity, Winning Victories & Making Connections Across Borders

2018 ELAW Annual International Meeting Participants at Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The Goldman Environmental Prize brought 26 Prize winners to participate in the Arusha meetings and connect with ELAW partners. Many thanks to the Goldman Prize.

ELAW’s work in Africa began 25 years ago. Since then, we have helped young lawyers in Tanzania, Liberia, and Zimbabwe launch their nations’ first environmental law organizations, and collaborated with lawyers in 26 nations to strengthen and enforce environmental laws to protect the rights of local communities.

ELAW identifies lawyers working to protect communities and the environment, provides legal, scientific, and organizational support, and connects them with each other. These lawyers are giving voice to communities and NGOs, and they become stronger by sharing information and expertise.

More than 100 grassroots leaders from 42 countries participated in this year’s ELAW Annual International Meeting, hosted by partners in Tanzania. This Advocate features our work in Africa, including reports on our Tanzania gathering, recent ELAW Fellow Brice Séverin Pongui from Congo-Brazzaville, and more work with grassroots leaders across Africa and around the world.

2018 ELAW Annual International Meeting, May 21 – 25, 2018

It was an epic gathering in Arusha, Tanzania. The world’s leading environmental defenders from 42 countries shared successes, strategized about new challenges, and inspired each other with their work defending communities around the world.

ELAW Annual International Meetings build the bonds that make our network strong. Participants at this year’s gathering worked together to protect communities from extractive industry abuses, move nations toward sustainable energy, and seek climate justice.

This year’s meeting was co-hosted by the Lawyers’ Environmental Action Team (LEAT, based in Dar es Salaam) and the Association for Law and Advocacy for Pastoralists (ALAPA, based in Arusha). LEAT and ALAPA held an inspired meeting and organized an unforgettable field trip to Ngorongoro Conservation Area. They also hosted the African Public Interest Environmental and Human Rights Law Conference, which followed the ELAW Annual International Meeting.

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ELAW has collaborated with lawyers in 26 African nations to strengthen environmental laws to protect the rights of local communities.

CAMEROON
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
CHAD
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
EGYPT
ETHIOPIA
GAMBIA
GHANA
GUINEA
KENYA
LIBERIA
MAURITIUS
MALAWI
MAURITIUS
MOZAMBIQUE
NAMIBIA
NIGERIA
UGANDA
TANZANIA
TOGO
UGANDA
ZAMBIA
ZIMBABWE

ELAW In Africa : 2018 ELAW Annual International Meeting

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Sharing Victories

ELAW Staff Attorneys and Staff Scientists collaborated with the Katiba Institute, Natural Justice, and Save Lamu to ensure the port project does not devastate coastal communities, mangroves, coral reefs, and sea turtle habitat.

Annual meeting participants worked hard to replicate successful strategies and collaborate for greater impact. We were inspired to see that in all corners of the globe, skilled and committed advocates are working to build a greener future. By linking across borders and working together, we become stronger and win more victories.

Protecting the Climate in Uganda

ELAW partners Samantha Atukunda and Frank Tumusime are representing Greenwatch and four youth asking the Ugandan government to protect the rights of Ugandans that are impacted by climate change. When we saw them at the meeting in Arusha, Samantha and Frank were preparing for a hearing in June, but that hearing has been rescheduled for 14 November 2018. Check back for updates!

Kenya Outreach

En route to the 2018 ELAW Annual International Meeting, ELAW Staff Attorney Jennifer Gleason spent a few days in Nairobi working with local partners at Kituo Cha Sheria, the Center for Environment and Development (CED) and connect with ELAW partners. Many thanks to the Goldman Prize.

Outreach to Francophone Africa

Earlier this year, ELAW contracted with francophone lawyers to help ELAW provide more robust support to lawyers in French-speaking Africa. ELAW launched its work to reach more francophone lawyers at the Tanzania meeting.

ELAW recently learned about a public interest law organization in Guinea – Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT). We brought an MDT lawyer, Adrien Tossa Montcho, to Arusha, where we learned about MDT, found ways for ELAW to support MDT's work, and connected MDT lawyers to other lawyers in Africa.

We also built ties between anglophone and francophone African lawyers. We have been communicating for years, by email, with lawyers at the Foundation for Environment and Agriculture (FEABG) from the anglophone portion of Cameroon. When the FEDEV team learned we would be in Arusha, they sent Akwen to help us.

ELAW advocates from 11 countries take a lunch break during a field trip to Ngorongoro Conservation Area.
We welcomed Brice Séverin Pongui for a 10-week ELAW Fellowship this summer to strengthen his work protecting communities and the environment in Republic of Congo. Brice is Executive Director of Institut Cerveau Vert 2063, a leading non-profit organization in Central Africa. Brice says Institut Cerveau Vert 2063 (Green Brain Institute) seeks a prosperous Africa, based on good governance, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law – by 2063.

“We want a peaceful and secure Africa, with people-centered development that realizes the potential of women and youth,” says Brice.

In 2016, Brice did not have connections with other public interest environmental lawyers in Africa. He was pleased to find ELAW! Brice is now connected with other lawyers, including ELAW attorney Erick Kassongo who works across the border in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Erick is Chair of the Centre Congolais pour le Droit du Développement Durable (CODED).

One strength of the ELAW network is connecting grassroots advocates across borders to share experience and replicate victories. Erick traveled to Brazzaville to meet Brice in person and participate in a community forum on land rights.

“ELAW is now working with Brice to build the capacity of riverside communities near Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park,” says Erick. “There are conflicts with park guards and residents mistaken as poachers are subjected to summary trials. We are also helping Brice monitor mining activity in Congo-Brazzaville.”

During his ELAW Fellowship, Brice worked one-on-one with the ELAW team to advance his work protecting forest communities and build the capacity of his organization. He also completed the Intensive English Program at the University of Oregon’s American English Institute (AEI), where he was provided a Director’s Distinction Scholarship.

Many thanks to AEI for supporting the ELAW Fellows Program!

Protected by an ELAW Fellow

Brice Séverin Pongui
Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville)
June 21 – August 28, 2018

ELAW Fellow Brice Séverin Pongui visits the Dee Wright Observatory in the Willamette National Forest, Oregon.

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in northwest Republic of Congo is home to pristine tropical rainforests with elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, bongos, giant pangolins, leopards, and hundreds of bird species. The park, established in 1993, includes a Ramsar wetland of international importance.

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park is off limits to hunting, fishing, logging, and agriculture, but Brice says communities are unclear about park boundaries and details of the park’s management plan. Brice has plans to make the park’s management plan available in the local language (Lingala) and in a format that residents can understand.

“Conflict can be avoided if communities have access to information about the management of natural resources and land use law,” says Brice. “We want to have a dialogue, and help citizens defend their economic, social and environmental rights.”

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Brice Séverin Pongui
Executive Director of Institut Cerveau Vert 2063

In the Mayoko District of southwest Congo, Brice is beginning work with forest communities near the Mayoko iron ore project. The exploration permit for the project was granted in 2013, for 25 years. The current project owner is Congolese mining giant Sapro. Business Day reports that Sapro has expansion plans to raise production by 150-million tons, with exports being shipped through Pointe Noire and a port at Owendo in neighboring Gabon.

This would place Republic of Congo among the world’s top iron ore producers (May 17, 2018).

Brice wants to work with local communities to ensure that the air, water, and soil near the massive open pit Mayoko mine is not contaminated. He plans to work with ELAW Staff Scientists to analyze the project’s environmental management plan and support community-based monitoring.

ELAW will help Brice draw on the experience of partners in other countries who have successfully organized community-based monitoring and help develop indicators that community members and local NGOs can use for reporting.

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