

Justice inspired: Education is key

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As part of their ongoing strategic partnership, LexisNexis South Africa and Africa Legal have launched the Justice Inspired initiative that seeks to shine a spotlight on those members of Africa's legal community whose actions are genuinely impacting and enhancing the rule of law in Africa.

In the first of a six-part series, Abidjan-based Jamal Fofana of Asafo & Co. in Côte d'Ivoire talks to Craig Sisterson about educating people on the rule of law concept and thus making an impact on society.



While historically Africa has known great leaders who have fought for justice and the rule of law, for Jamal Fofana it's not an individual who inspired his passion and commitment to the rule of law, but getting to see the direct impact of his own legal work on African people.

"At a personal level I was always driven by the consequences of my practice on people on the ground, those who are involved or directly concerned by the consequences of the enforcement of the rule of law," says Jamal, an Of Counsel for Asafo & Co. in Côte d'Ivoire.

Alongside his banking and finance practice at Asafo & Co., an Africa-focused international firm with offices across the continent and Paris, London, and Washington, DC, Jamal trains junior lawyers on a daily basis, shares his experience, and participates in master classes where he speaks to future lawyers and discussions on how to improve the legal process.

Education is key to preserving and strengthening the rule of law in Africa, says Jamal. This includes training legal practitioners and ensuring local people are aware of their rights.

"We should increase investment in education because that's the only way we can have people who are able to deal with the challenges that we are facing," he explains. "By mentoring general awareness we'll ensure the rule of law concept remains active, and we will have created legal minds who understand the rule of law and the needs of the continent. Because in the end by practising law on a day-to-day basis, we talk to political leaders, we talk to investors, and we have an influence on what is being done on the continent."

Ensuring fairness and equality under the law is relevant for all legal practice areas, and beyond, not just court work or constitutional or human rights law. Jamal believes there's a common will to work towards better legal systems in the interests of the African people.

"This is an unstoppable movement as people are more and more aware of their rights, and what they can achieve by building a secure environment for investments or public policies." Jamal's passion for the rule of law flows through all the legal matters he works on nowadays, and was on show even when he was a law student in Paris fifteen years ago.

"I was proud at that time to encourage my law faculty to participate in a moot court organised by a South African university, and attended by almost 70 universities in Africa," he recalls. "Our team finished runners-up, and it was an amazing

experience to meet almost 140 African law students, Supreme Court judges, and political figures to discuss the rule of law.” Students can have an impact on society by fighting for strong causes, says Jamal.

While the rule of law is a concept that should be embraced by many people in Africa, not just lawyers, the profession does have a key role to play. “Lawyers should not live in bubbles,” says Jamal. “The rule of law cannot evolve if lawmakers and the local profession are not paying attention to the continuous need for advancement of our legal systems in Africa.”

At Asafo & Co., Jamal and his colleagues aim to do that by helping states, development institutions and companies, ensuring every deal they do on the continent is tailored to the local environment while drawing on expertise forged by experience in Europe and the US, and using education and training to help the rule of law be adopted more globally across Africa.

This article is published as part of the ‘Justice Inspired’ content series presented by LexisNexis and Africa Legal.

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