

Dear Higher Education

LETTERS FROM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOUNTAIN

Mother, Wife, Lecturer, and Dean in Pursuit of Academic Success

DR. SAIDAT NAKITTO

Dear Higher Education,

My name is Dr. Saidat Nakitto. I am a mother, a wife, and an employee of Gulu University, where I work as a senior lecturer and the acting Dean for the Faculty of Law. All of these roles require my attention, which at the moment I am not distributing evenly. You tie me down in the office to execute one assignment after the other and attend numerous meetings, workshops, and training under the pretense of mentoring me into a leader. The beauty of it, however, is that you are informative and empowering and add a voice to the plight of people who traditionally were excluded from public life and leadership roles. I happen to be one of them.

This is my story, relaying my experiences in academia as a lecturer and a leader who has roles in the family, at work, and within the local communities. This letter aims to demonstrate how you have shaped my career and given me a platform to communicate my ideas and empower other people, especially women and youth.

Since childhood, I have loved keeping to myself (one can call me an introvert), and I would proudly say so and demand to be left alone. Socialisation was not my passion, and I considered my hobbies to be staying indoors and watching TV. You were my choice as a career because I wanted a quiet life. All I needed was to engross myself in research behind a pile of books and academic papers, teach a few hours, and have time for my family. Little did I know that you would remove me from my comfort zone and require me to go out into the world, look for friends under the guise of networking, and intentionally poke my nose in other people's businesses simply because you want me to participate in solving societal problems as part of community engagement.

On a good note, you make me interact with many people, especially the youth with whom I share with my experiences, trying to inspire them to work hard to fulfill their career goals. I love every minute of it, watching as students give their perspectives reflecting diverse societal backgrounds, cultures, and religions. Such academic discussions draw me out, showing a side of myself that I never knew was part of me. Sometimes I laugh along with the students to lighten the moment and make learning enjoyable. It must be the teaching methodologies that I adopt, mainly the participatory approach. I am thankful for the pedagogy classes that I attended to enhance my teaching skills and make education enjoyable for all.

These moments of joy, however, are short-lived, because lecture hours are few and I spend many hours in the office to execute my administrative role as the acting dean. These duties take most of my time, to the extent that I take home some assignments to complete at night. Working long hours on end is the order of the day. This reduces the time for my family, children, and my husband. You make me burn out, and yet the remuneration does not cover the extra hours I put in to execute office duties at home. My children are complaining, "Mum is nowhere to be seen," and my husband also recently exclaimed, "You have to spend some time at home." That's the price I have to pay to stay afloat in your realm.

You see, you are partly to blame for my inadequacies at home. I am thankful for my Mum, who for so long has assisted me in the caretaking of my children. This is evidence that I cannot make any career progression without the support of my family members, who take on some roles so that I “chase” my dreams.

All is not lost; there is hope to redeem myself and pay close attention to my family, but at the same time not lose sight of my career. I have come to realise that I am not alone. Other women are experiencing almost similar challenges, and they have succeeded in their careers. Recently, during the 7th Academy for the Higher Education Resource Services East Africa (HERS-EA), I interacted with women academics, professors, and experts in different fields and established that I need to adopt mechanisms to break the barriers inhibiting my career progression. I realized my need to intentionally build networks of people who can offer different opportunities, collaborations, and advice for career advancement.

You have made me realise that I can no longer keep to myself; I have to spread out my wings and intentionally reach out to people for assistance or else perish in academia.

Regards,
Saidat

About the author

Dr. Saidat Nakitto is a Senior Lecturer in law at the Faculty of Law at Gulu University, where she serves as the Acting Dean. She also teaches law at the Islamic University in Uganda as an adjunct lecturer. She holds a bachelor’s degree in law from Makerere University, a Master of Laws degree from the University of Nottingham (UK), and a PhD from Brunel University (UK). She is passionate about teaching, research, and engagement in community outreach projects. She is an inspirational academic with over 10 years of experience in teaching and administration geared towards the creation of a supportive environment for promoting student success. Previous administrative appointments, such as serving as Acting Dean of the Faculty of Law at Islamic University in Uganda, nurtured her leadership skills, as did her experience in the development, implementation, and evaluation of curricula. Her passion for producing graduates who have a sound knowledge of the law and the necessary skills to prepare them for future careers has enhanced students’ participation in mootings, debates, and the internship program.

Being trustworthy, respectful, self-driven, and hardworking has enabled Dr. Saidat to collaborate with other universities to enhance research and collaboration. She works on several academic programs, especially at the postgraduate level, where she participates in the supervision and examination of graduate students at universities such as the University of the Western Cape and the Islamic University in Uganda. She has also served with dedication and integrity as a peer reviewer of academic journals in Uganda (*IUIU Comparative Law Journal*) and abroad (*Journal of African Law*, SOAS, University of London, and the Brunel Law Student Review). This work has enhanced joint publications, collaborative community outreach programs, and the sharing of knowledge and ideas among academics within Uganda and globally.

Dr. Saidat is married with children, and mixing a career with family is a bit complex, but she has managed to do her best in both respects. Saidat loves reading, writing, and watching television.