

Katie Duff – Tanzania internship, Summer 2016

This summer I completed a Human Rights and Legal Aid internship with AWLAHURIO (Arusha Women Legal Aid and Human Rights Organisation) in Arusha, Tanzania. The AWLAHURIO mission is 'to promote access to justice, good governance and lobbying and advocate gender responsive policies for women and children.'

The main issues that the organisation deals with are issues of gender based violence, inadequate legal awareness, property rights, and matrimonial disputes and domestic violence. The organisation aims to combat and tackle these issues through the education and promotion of women's rights to local women in the community and media as well as the provision of free legal aid to vulnerable women. The legal aid clinic runs twice a week and women are free to drop by the clinic during any of the opening hours.

During my month long internship, I prepared and wrote many grant proposals to secure funding from local, national and global organisations; as well as observing the legal aid clinic sessions; attended court; went to conferences with the organisation. As I had been studying Swahili for the year previous to my trip I was able to pick up certain issues that were spoken about during the legal aid clinic as well as communicate on a basic level with the women and families that came in to speak to Martha (the coordinator and main lawyer of the organisation). This basic communication was very important to me as it allowed me to recast myself from the strange foreign woman in the room to simply being another person who was there to listen, support and help them. The legal aid sessions provided the opportunity for me to see how Martha practically dealt with women who came and explained their difficulties. Mediation sessions between spouses were usually provided for those affected by domestic violence and marital disputes. However, Martha also provides further legal representation to the women who are struggling with land disputes especially regarding inheritance or child custody, or very serious issues of gender based violence.

I was lucky enough to attend various court sessions at the Tanzanian High Court, where I was pleased to see that almost all of the judges were female. One of the most heart-breaking and interesting cases was that of Zainab and her 3 children who she has been petitioning to get custody of for two years. The father of her children bribed the judge to have the custody hearing without her present and thus she was not afforded the opportunity to put forward her case to secure custody of her children. I was so pleased to be given the opportunity to truly sample the workings of the Tanzanian legal system and the extent of protection it provides for women.

This experience was invaluable and one that I will definitely look to draw on in my future career, as I hope to go back and work in this exact area of law in East Africa.