

Dedicated Research Unit Supports the Anti-Corruption Division of the High Court

Although it began its work less than a year ago, the SUGAR TAF-supported Research Unit at the Anti-Corruption Division (ACD) of the High Court has quickly become indispensable.

The Anti-Corruption Division (ACD) of Uganda's High Court was established in 2009 with the passing of Uganda's Anti-Corruption Law. Since then, the court has seen a steadily rising number of cases, including cases filed under the Anti-Money Laundering Act (Amended 2017), the East African Customs Community Management Act of 2004, and others. As some laws are new or being tested and applied in new ways, the ACD plays a critical role in creating precedent in many of its rulings. As Head of the ACD Hon. Justice Lawrence Gidudu puts it, "Most laws are still grey; we're developing our own jurisprudence."

Both the establishment of ACD a decade ago, and its increasing capacity to take on ever-more cases under an array of often untested laws represent great accomplishments. However, the increasing case load also creates an immense amount of work for the court. SUGAR TAF has been able to support its work by providing a dedicated research unit of three people.

The ACD Research Unit saves time for the judges and magistrates by conducting quality legal research, providing case banks on substantive and procedural matters, and developing technical legal assessment of cases that test various scenarios, which the judges can review to draw their own legal opinion and judgement. Justice Gidudu says, "That's our resource pool, they empower us to make decisions based on evidence and the law."

Chief Magistrate Pamela Lamunu Ocaya also gives high praise to the research team. She particularly appreciates the case reference guides that the team has developed, which allow her to quickly find summaries of past cases and authorities relevant to those she must pass judgement on. As Her Worship explains, the judicial officers themselves don't have a lot of time to do the research, so having this resource helps to improve the quality of judgements and expedite the process.

The Research Unit team members are proud that their research is useful to the ACD. They can see the value of their work when the written judgements make reference to it. Judges have found the team to provide timely and dependable input on request, speeding the adjudication process. They've come to value the team's insights, often sitting with them to share their thoughts on ongoing cases. On the other hand, most members of the Research Unit are still early in their careers and are learning a great deal from the guidance of the judges. The judiciary report being impressed by their keenness and work effort, and so have been very generous in providing guidance on research and explanation about their judgements.

Mr. Byenka Tito, adjudications advisor at SUGAR TAF, explains that the Research Unit has been a pilot to test the value of providing specialized research facilities to a court. In less than a year, all indications are that the concept has proven itself and everyone would like to see it continue.

[Photo of research unit

Caption: Meet the Research Unit - Sandra Nowamani, Bonita Mulelengi, Rachel Kyamazima and Byenka Tito, SUGAR TAF Adjudication Advisor]

"SUGAR TAF provided us with research assistants who have done tremendous work. They've come in very handy, especially where we need a quick research on legal authorities.

As a product of their research, they gave us case reference guides. These have been very, very helpful in our work.

Previously, we [magistrates] didn't have research guides. Judges at the High Court are given research assistants, but we didn't have them, so it has been a great help."

- Chief Magistrate
Pamela Lamunu
Ocaya of the ACD