



## Our March 2023 UDSM Alumna

This is a “light corner” on the UDSM portal intended to feature for one month in turns two among many of the University’s graduates—alumni—since its foundation in 1961. The corner is designed to inform the public and the University itself, without prejudice in terms of historical precedence but guided only by professional information search, on the past graduates of the University, their whereabouts, their current position or engagement, what is remembered of them as past ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ of their time and, finally, on what is reckoned about their contribution to their Alma Mater, their nation, the Africa region and/or the wider world.

### Helen KIJOBISIMBA



**Year of matriculation: 1979;**

**Year of graduation: 1982;**

**Award: LLB (Hons), University of Dar es Salaam (1982),**

**More info:**

- **LL.M., Univ of University of Dar es Salaam, 1994;**
- **PhD (in Law), University of Warwick, UK, 2011.**

Helen Kijobimba, a household name in the field of advocacy and defence of human rights in Tanzania and East Africa, is an alumna of the University of Dar es Salaam, where she graduated in the class of 1982.

She was born in Moshi district, Kilimanjaro region, on 10th October 1954 and had her primary school education in her home village. From there, she was admitted to Weruweru Girls’ Secondary School for four years of ordinary secondary education (1969-1972). From Weruweru she proceeded to advanced secondary education—popularly known as the ‘A’-levels—at Korogwe High School in Tanga region (1973-1974). It was from the latter school, upon passing the advanced certificate of secondary education examinations (ACSEE), that she undertook a diploma course in teacher education at Dar es Salaam Teachers’ College, qualifying as a teacher in 1977. She taught in schools in the country before applying for and getting admission into an undergraduate (bachelor) degree programme at the then Faculty of Law at the University of Dar es Salaam. She completed the programme in 1982 and earned her degree with honours.

In 1985, Helen worked as an intern at the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs in Dar es Salaam where she served notably at challenging levels of state attorney, parliamentary draughtsman and equivalent. From 1986 she was employed at the Institute of Adult Education for a decade, and while working there, she decided to enrol on a postgraduate programme in law at the University of Dar es Salaam where she earned her Master of Laws (LLM) degree in 1994.

Helen Kijobimba was appointed Executive Director of the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) when the Centre was first established in the country in 1995 and located at what was publicised as ‘Justice Lugakingira House’. The Centre was established as “a non-governmental, voluntary, non-partisan and not-for-profit sharing organization, with the purpose of working to empower and conscientize the people of Tanzania on legal and human rights.” This was a mission which—in the course of efforts to secure and/or protect human rights in society—found the Centre itself frequently in collision with resistant power centres within society. These included, on the one hand, traditional ethnic groups that upheld certain oppressive traditions and practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and, on the other hand, the government establishment which upheld certain anachronistic or else oppressive laws. These challenges notwithstanding, within the 23 years of Dr Kijobimba’s leadership (from 1995 to 2018), the LHRC was “able to empower Tanzanians to know their rights, [to] assert their rights and [to] speak out for their and other people’s rights”, as reflected in an interview published by the International Federation for Human Rights in 2014. At that time, as she recalls:

Civil Society wasn’t known much and we found that people in the villages were not aware of their rights. Now we have monitors in all districts following all human rights issues and paralegals in twenty-eight districts. Furthermore, we advocated for labour matters and today we have new laws governing this. We have been providing legal aid and currently, land matters have flared up since we started inviting investors. So, in short, my career highlights are about advocacy for change in terms of policy, laws and practice.

Dr. Kijobimbais a keen and reflective author or—or else commentator on—a number of legal works. A few of these can be cited, including:

- The legal process: Can it save girls from FGM? A case of three Maasai girls in Morogoro - A report on the enforcement of the FGM law (2004);
- Justice and rule of law in Tanzania: Selected judgements and writings of Justice James L. Mwalusanya and commentaries (2005);
- Report on HIV/AIDS and human rights in Tanzania: A report on the findings of the field research on HIV/AIDS and its impact on human rights in Tanzania (2005);
- Through a crucible of human rights struggles in Tanzania: A decade of the legal and human rights (2006); and
- Law and justice in Tanzania: Quarter of a Century of the Court of Appeal (with Chris Maina Peter and the LHRC, 2007).

Judging from the public record of her career, Helen Kijobimbahas done well as an exemplary social and legal reformer. Being a trained teacher and methodical educator [a diplomate of a teacher training college—Dar es Salaam TTC—back in the 1970s], she has helped influence younger professionals into dedicated legal counsellors and defenders. On her part, she has played a living example of a compassionate and methodical educator in matters of law and public relations. She is currently officially retired; yet, in her retirement, she is finding time to read and write some key notes and papers from her Warwick doctoral dissertation. The University of Dar es Salaam congratulates her on the high points of her career.



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*Flashback, March 20, 2013.  
Dr Helen Kijobimba, in an interview with journalist Elizabeth Ishengoma, reflects on the state of human rights as well as political, religious and other forms of tolerance in Tanzania and elsewhere.*

***Helen KIJOBISIMBA is Our March 2023 Alumna,  
and her great stories begin here!***