

Interviewer: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

Interviewee: Prof. Aimé Muyombano, PhD (AM)

Date: Thursday, August 1, 2024 and September 15, 2024

Location: Muyombano home, South Portland, Maine

Transcriber: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

NMS: Today is Thursday, August 1st, 2024. My name is Nicole Morin-Scribner. I'm a volunteer and the interviewer. I am a volunteer with the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center. Today I have the honor of interviewing Professor Aimé Mutambayo.

NMS: Muyombano. (laughter)

AM: Muyombano (laughter). I know it's a hard name.

NMS: Thank you for correcting me on that because I think it's important to pronounce people's names accurately. So, it's Professor Aimé Muyombano, Ph.D.

AM: Exactly. You've got it Nicole (laughter)

NMS: We are conducting this interview at Professor Muyombano home in South Portland. I usually start these interviews by asking, "What year and where were you born?"

AM: Thank you very much, Nicole. I'm pleased to be hosted by you and to be part of these interviews you have conducted since a couple years ago. By responding quickly to this question, My name Aimé Muyombano, as you mentioned. I was born on the eastern side of the Democratic Republic of Congo, known as Zaire at the time, in the Southern Province of DRC Congo, in the

territory called Bukavu, at Hospital Provincial General de Reference de Bukavu on December 27, 1981. It was the festival season, and everyone was excited for Christmas, New Year's, and the family festival. Numerous events were taking place. These seasonal events characterized part of our traditions. It was also part of the present for my family during this season. At the same time, my birth was a blessing and added value to the seasonal events. That's when I was born.

NMS: In preparing for this, I would admit that I know so little about the Congo. I'm going to ask you a tricky question. Is there a way that you can help us learn something about the Congo? The reason why it's hard is that it's been around for tens of thousands of years, so how can you, in a short capsule, help us understand something about the Congo?

AM: Thank you so much, Nicole. Congo is the largest country in Africa and the second biggest on the continent. It is also among the five most prominent countries in the world.

The DRC is located in Central Africa, with 905,567 sq mi, compare to the US size, is one-fourth the size. The DRC is the second-largest country in Africa and the 11th-largest globally. With a population of around 105 million of 250 ethnic groups, 242 languages recognized officially by the constitution and French, Kikongo and Lingala are the national languages. The DRC is the most populous Francophone country in the world. Congo achieved independence from Belgium on 30th June 1960. It was immediately faced with several crisis and conflict after secessionist movements, the assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, and the seizure of power by Mobutu Sese Seko in a coup d'état took place 1965 and renamed the country Zaire in 1971 and established a harsh personal dictatorship until his overthrow in 1997.

In various reports, particularly those from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), it has been noted that DRC Congo is the first country to possess a significant amount of minerals required in the global market. These minerals include cobalt, copper, diamonds, gold, lithium, tantalum, and tin. The mineral wealth of the DRC is a significant economic asset, with mining contributing to nearly 90% of the country's exports.

In 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was the world's largest producer of cobalt, contributing 130,000 tons, which accounted for nearly 68% of the global supply. Additionally, the DRC was the world's fourth-largest producer of industrial diamonds, generating 4.3 million carats in 2022. This is significant because many of today's technologies, including computers, cell phones, and vehicles, rely on raw materials from the DRC. Moreover, reports indicate that materials used in the production of various weapons, notably nuclear weapons, originate from the DRC.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is home to almost 250 tribes, Rwandophone community who speak a language similar to neighboring countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, central Africa, Kenya and Tanzania included, and I belong this tribes

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has over 120 armed groups and militias, which has been the source of these crises and conflicts, mainly in the resource-rich eastern and northeastern regions. These groups commit widespread violations and abuses against civilians, including war crimes, crimes against humanity,

and economic unrest. Since 2017, security has significantly worsened, leading to over 8.1 million people being displaced externally from their country. Also, 6.9 million people were internally displaced which means they left where they were from to other cities because of militias and armed groups. The last report, this year in 2024, showed that a staggering 25.4 million people in the DRC require humanitarian assistance. This means they need food, healthcare, and housing. They are in need because of this war. Additionally, the DRC has been dealing with disease outbreaks, disaster, increased food insecurity, and climate shocks, all amid prolonged conflict.

We can't forget that also, the same country which we are talking about that is the best and richest in terms of raw materials and minerals is also the most poor country in the world. The last report shows that Congo is ranked number 2 out of the last 5. Imagine a country that today is providing raw materials used to produce all of these minerals, producing all of this technology, computers, vehicles and weapons. All of these current materials are needed by the market and yet they are one of the poorest countries in the world. It's crazy, Nicole. But that's the DRC Congo that we are talking about today.

NMS: Has your family, going back for generations, been in the Congo?

AM: Yes. My great-grandparents migrated from Rwanda to the mountains concentrated on the High Plateau of South Kivu, at the end of 16th century. At that time, it was not called DRC Congo. Some others arrived in the area in the 17th century and created a Kingdom which

had a direct relationship with Rwagasabo, current Rwanda. This place was important to them because it could allow them to keep their Cows healthy as the place is cattle grazing.

My great-grandparents and their large family were cattle keepers/Pastorals who lived in the southern part of South Kivu province in Uvira territory. Their community lived there permanently, grew crops, and were considered wealthier than their neighbors due to the value of their cattle. The issue was when their neighbors started to see them being well developed, they started to create some hate between them and those from my community. Due to their prosperity, they became the target of violence throughout history. They have been attacked by their neighbors' communities of Bembe, Bafulero, and Banyindu armed units who tried to destroy my community which had been staying in the same area. This forced them to flee and move to other places because they couldn't keep fighting and having conflict with other Congolese. In 1996, After the second war of DRC, a big part of my community fled to the neighboring countries such as Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Kenya, and stayed in the refugee camps until when Samaritan countries such as USA and other European countries could take some people from the refugee camps and helped them. That's why you see many people from my community now staying in the USA, Canada, Australia and other places. Because of that good heart from Samaritan countries such as the USA it helped to save my community. Today, I think, even though that

happened, of course our motherland still was the DRC Congo.

NMS: Thank you for sharing that and I'm sure you are just scratching the surface, but that helps us to have some sort of understanding of some of the history of your family and their experience in the Congo. Can you tell us a little bit more about your father? What did he do for work? Is this something you feel comfortable speaking about?

AM: Good question, Nicole. My father was one of 13 children. He attended schools in the southern province of the Eastern region of DRC Congo. He graduated from the High School of Bukavu. After that, he went to Europe, earning his bachelor's and master's degrees at L'Université Catholique de Bruxelles in Belgium. After that, he did his PhD or Doctorate at Université Laval in Quebec, Canada. Finally, he returned to DRC Congo.

He held various public, academic, and international positions, including Senior Lecturer at different universities. He was Dean of the Faculty of Science at Lovanium Kinshasa, Vice-chancellor of Academics at the University of Lovanium Kinshasa, and Vice-chancellor of Academics at the University of Lubumbashi, both public universities in DRC Congo.

He then took on some political positions and became Secretary General of the Ministry of Education and then African Union Commissioner. Those were positions he held after his academic journey.

At that time, he had a connection with my uncle, Barthelme Bisengimana Rwema. My uncle was a director of the President's cabinet to President Mobutu Sese Seko, who was the President of Zaire from 1965 until 1997 when it changed back to DRC Congo. Additionally, he was connected with Gisaro Isaac Frederic, who was a National Parliament representative and General Secretary in charge of Finance at the University of Kinshasa. At

that time, the conflict between the tribes was already in process. So they tried to see how they could try to link and again bring unity, reconciliation and rights to the citizens.

There was a period when Rwandophone community faced conflict, mass killing, violation, women sexual harassment, because they used to consider them as Rwandese. What happened is sometimes there could be violence and hate speeches to mobilize the rest of the community to hate against Rwandaphones. caused by their neighboring Congolese communities under the militia's Army group called "Mai Mai". These were supported by foreigners Militias groups such as FDRL that made genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and Red Tabara of Burundi who also made some crimes against human beings. They tried to bring the same ideologies and tried to train them in terms of mind and also actions. So what was the reason behind why my father and all of these groups tried to fight against that? As intellectuals and participants in government leadership, they endeavored to advocate for their communities to be accepted as equal to other Congolese and to have the same rights. The rest of the Congolese considered our communities as Rwandans who immigrated to DRC Congo, which is wrong; the truth is that when the colonial traced the borders, they annexed this part of the Rwandophone community kingdom together with other parties and created a country of DRC. DRC did not exist during that time of the 18th century. There were different kingdoms. As I mentioned before, even the

Rwandophones had kingdoms there. Because of that richness and the minerals, Belgium annexed different parts, even the Eastern part and called it the DRC. This means no one left somewhere to emigrate to another place. But it is the politicians who took land and the communities in that land, annexed it to other lands and made the DRC. That is what the rest of the community didn't want to understand, which is still strange and hard for my people. That is what my father himself fought for until he reached the point at which he was killed because of that.

During this period, there were a lot of hate speeches and discrimination against Rwandophone and Rwandans Tutsi communities that were spread around that caused even some massive killing of young Rwandophone at different schools students, my brother included.

So my father with colleagues Gisaro and Rwema played a strong role as political activists as they were involved in various aspects of politics. Then, my father left and returned to academics because they couldn't understand each other.. It was during this time that I was able to understand and witness his work truly. Due to his academic career, we had to move from one country to another, depending on the university that sought his expertise. I particularly remember the time we relocated to Kenya. At that time, my mother was a high school teacher and struggled to comprehend why this move occurred. She voiced her concerns, saying, "Hey, I need to continue my work here." However, my father reassured her that she could secure a similar teaching

position wherever we went. Witnessing this conversation left a lasting impression on me.

We moved to Kenya, where he continued teaching. We went to Cameroon from Kenya, a bit on the western African side and not too far from DRC Congo. He also taught at the National University and was an expert in that field. While working there, he started thinking about how he could return home, whether the hate politics had changed and whether he could make a contribution. Eventually, we returned to DRC Congo and stayed close to his original countries, DRC Congo and Rwanda. Perhaps he thought that if anything happened, he could contribute to education. But it was still hard.

When we returned to the DRC Congo, we found that a lot had changed, especially in education and social and economic development. I distinctly remember his significant contribution. If I recall correctly, the first thing he did was to visit the Catholic Church in Bukavu City in eastern Congo. He engaged with the Church, which held substantial influence over politicians at the time, including the government. He inquired whether there was an opportunity to establish a university, which led to the opening of the University of Bukavu. It is one of the most distinguished universities in the eastern part of the country, especially in the DRC Congo. These are some of the achievements and activities my father made during that time.

NMS: You mentioned that your mother was a high school teacher. Can you tell us a little bit about your mother too?

AM: Yeah. She was a high school teacher when she finished college. She graduated in teaching; that was her field. That's when she started her teaching career. The first high school she taught at that time was the high school of Kisangani, which was close to the university where my father was also teaching. She was also a great teacher. I used to hear students appreciate her methodology because, at that time, I was at primary school as well. I used to meet some of her students who could recognize me as a son of their teacher." (laughter) Some of her students told me, "Your mother is a truly exceptional teacher. We deeply thank her for always believing in her students and nurturing their potential with dedication and care." That's why I used to see that and hear a lot of experience from what she had done at her Schools in DRC Congo, Rwanda, Kenya, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Burundi.

I remember her undergoing a change when we moved to Kenya. She used to be a high school teacher, but then I saw her start working with my father at the university. I recall sitting at a round table, having dinner, when my older brother asked, "Why did Mom switch from teaching at a high school to working at the university?"

I remember when my mother responded to my brother, saying that it wasn't just our father who should keep pursuing his career. She said, "I can do the same thing too." We all laughed, and my brother joked, "Well, in that case, all of us should become university teachers." That idea resonated with me, and I started seriously thinking about following in our parents' footsteps. That may be

when the idea first took root in my mind that I could become a university lecturer one day. And now, I am a Assistant Professor at a university, all thanks to my mother's inspiration.

NMS: Great inspiration for sure, and it worked.

Tell me a little bit about what growing up was like. What was family life like? I know you moved around a lot but what are your memories from childhood?

AM: Nicole, I am one of six children born to my both parents. Two of my siblings, my Brother Clovis, and my Sister Queen were killed, which impacted negatively our family. When I was a child, we used to go to different places to swim and play basketball and football with other children. Because our mother is a devout Christian, we were expected to wake up in the morning, do some cleaning, and find clothes and organize ourselves for going to Sunday's church services. We played for the choir. Even though all of us were recommended to join the children's Chorale hymn, I was one of the best alto voice singers and even decided to learn to play Piano (Keyboard) Music.

We had a relatively fortunate upbringing compared to many others. We could explore different paths due to our parents' social and economic advantages as education and career professionals. Despite the psychological impact on our community that was not accepted by the rest of the Congolese, who had always been considered Rwandans. Our general Congolese used to sometimes sing some songs which could affect us negatively. They said all of the people who are Rwandophone should go back to their country because we don't want them in our country. Even though I was a kid, I used to listen to that song and ask myself, "Who am I?" It was hard for me. That was a challenge that always existed in Africa.

So, my childhood was not bad if I could think of a person vis a vis my single family. But, sometimes, when I could look at the general environmental aspect, people were close to me. Sometimes, it could be hard for me to say, “OK, my life is OK. I’m good, when the rest of my generation are suffering due to widespread poverty, forcing families to choose which children can attend school, often prioritizing boys over girls; ongoing armed conflict which sometimes involved children of my age, displacing families and disrupting education; lack of adequate school infrastructure, especially in remote areas; and the need for children to work to contribute to household income, with girls particularly vulnerable to early marriage and domestic responsibilities.

All of this affected not only me but seeing people around me, the young generation suffering, I could be OK because of where I was from but for those around me, it was hard. It was hard to say, “OK”.

NMS: We talked about your childhood. You went to primary school. You were in DRC Congo during primary school. Where did you go for secondary school?

AM: After completing my primary education at Mwamusombo Primary School in DRC from 1983 to 1989, I attended Maranatha High School in the South province of DRC. That period was when there was conflict and hate speech was starting. It was hard for me to continue my schooling in DRC. In 1995, my parents decided to send me to Rwanda to continue my high school. It was there where I graduated from College Saint Emmanuel Hanika, Nyanza-Rwanda in 1996.

NMS: What was school like? You’ve had some exposure to what school is like

AM: I love the Question Nicole, the school was not bad even though we could attend the school one day as we are full of 30 students and the next day we could come

around here? How similar or different was school for you?

only 10 students, not because they want to be absent but because of the poverty, they couldn't attend their school.

According to UNESCO reports, over one-fifth of children between the ages of 6 and 11 are out of school in my country, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of 12 and 14, and almost 60% of youth between the ages of 15 and 17 are not in school. They are used for mineral exploitation and are recruited by militant groups and armies. This situation has led to almost 1/3 of my classmates dropping out of school due to poor conditions caused by various factors such as family poverty, lack of access to basic needs, insufficient government funding, teacher shortages, poor infrastructure, and violence. As a result, those who have some means to afford education abroad could send their children to study abroad, as we couldn't have access to quality education locally.

Nicole, it is difficult to ensure quality education when facing weak leadership and insecurity issues. Kidnapping children on their way to school and lack access to food and healthcare as basic needs that could be addressed to improve the education system.

NMS: What language did you speak when you were growing up?

AM: I am fluent in multiple languages, Nicole. In my childhood, I spoke Swahili, French, Lingala, Kinya, and Kiru, as the primary languages I used daily with my community. My country is home to 250 ethnic groups, each with its language. I also learned to speak other languages at school and when visiting friends from different ethnic groups. I picked Kirundi, Kibembe, Gifurero, Kicongo, and Amashi from schools. After leaving the country, I went to Brazil, where I improved

the Portuguese language, I learned from neighboring Angola. Then, I traveled to Uganda, where I learned Kigande and Kinyankore. In Kenya and Tanzania, I picked up Kikuyu and Swahili sanifu. When I went to Spain, I learned Spanish. At the same time, I got a chance to visit Germany, I spent 6 months there, I learned German and some other European languages. In total I do speak 18 languages.

NMS: WOW. It could be that not everyone is aware of how French is also prevalent in Congo. Can you talk about that? What role does the French language play in Congo?

French is the official language of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has been maintained since the country gained independence. This is due to its widespread usage in the capital and its ability to facilitate communication between the various ethnic groups in the country, as well as with other French-speaking nations. French is a common language in the DRC, allowing people who speak different languages to communicate. While there are 242 recognized officially as languages spoken in the country. Also, French is essential for trade, in exchange of goods and services. It's used in diplomacy. When you send diplomats to my country, you should make sure that they speak at least French because the rest of the languages would be hard to learn. Also, cultural exchange both within and internationally. So French is a basic element for communication. Proficiency in French is highly valued in the job market and can improve career opportunities.

NMS: Thank you for sharing that. I don't know that this is widespread knowledge around here. So, I really

Yes. After high school, I received a scholarship to study at the National University of Rwanda, where I graduated my Bachelors level in Political Science, in 2010. My parents encouraged me to pursue a master's degree in

appreciate you giving us that additional information.

After you finished high school, you went to the university.

development studies at Kampala International University in Uganda. Following that, I received a second scholarship to pursue an MBA specializing in Project Management at the University of Bradford in West Yorkshire, England, in 2013. That one was hard because I was supposed to do that one in English. Subsequently, in 2014, I was awarded a scholarship for a Doctorate from the Jomo Kenyatta University of Technology and Agriculture in Kenya, where I studied Development Studies with a specialization in Economic Development. I was there for almost 6 years. Those were part of my academic journey.

NMS: One thing I found while I was looking online about the National University of Rwanda, was I discovered an interesting connection. That university was actually established by an order of Dominicans from Quebec.

AM: Exactly, Nicole. The National University of Rwanda (NUR) was established in 1963 through a partnership between the Rwandan government and the Congregation of the Dominicans from the Province of Quebec, Canada. It initially consisted of three academic units: the Faculty of Medicine, Social Sciences, and the Teacher Training College (ENS).

NMS: I thought that was interesting. You went to study in England. Was it difficult to go to another country? Did you find it a big transition?

AM: Yes, it was. French was the primary language for my elementary and high school studies and the first two years of my bachelor's degree. At that time, it took me four years to complete a bachelor's degree at the University. However, during this period, Rwanda's education system transitioned from French to English. I started taking courses in English. Despite the challenges, I managed to navigate the new system and completed my bachelor's degree in that new system. When I moved to Uganda for my master's degree, I encountered another challenge as the education system involved mixing

English and Luganda. It took much effort to learn Luganda alongside English. Upon moving to England, I faced a new environment challenge, where English was the sole language of instruction. Despite the differences, this experience greatly benefited me and allowed me to improve my English skills and self-confidence. I had no choice but to embrace studying in English if I wanted to continue my academic pursuits. It was a challenging journey, but it positively impacted my academic journey.

NMS: Once you finished with your Master's degree, what did you do after that?

AM: I started teaching. I remember when I first started teaching at the National University of Rwanda. I had never taught there before, so I found it challenging. Based on the experiences of others, I had perceived teaching to be easy, but it turned out to be different from what I had expected. As an assistant lecturer, I assisted the course instructor and guided the students. I quickly realized that standing before the students and effectively conveying the course material was more complicated than I had initially thought.

I went back and shared the experience with my father. My father said, "Hey, this is how you must do this. You have to go this way. You have to stand this way." I keep learning from my father's experience, and it helps me. Also, the challenge was that after the end of the year, I could be evaluated by the same students. Not only by the university but also by the same students. That is what was in my mind. I said, "Oh. At the end, I will be evaluated." I could start thinking about that. This pushes me to say, "I need to improve and change the methodology I should use for these teaching activities."

The same year, I got a scholarship for my Ph.D. I specialized myself in Economics Development, at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, JKUAT Nairobi, Kenya, a public university. I went there and attended for almost six years. Because it was for a PhD, I could come back and teach.

I left my teaching career and transitioned into politics, leveraging my academic skills. I pursued a PhD scholarship while working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which enabled me to combine my academic pursuits with diplomatic duties. As I delved into diplomacy, I found it fascinating to engage with individuals in formal attire, adopt a diplomatic protocol, and experience official convoys. These experiences, along with my various roles as a Diplomat, national and international expert, and consultant for international organizations, evoked memories of my father's diplomatic positions within the African Union. This connection made me feel like I was following a similar path to my Father. These reflections transpired following the completion of my master's degree.

NMS: When you were a diplomat, is there one thing that you accomplished in particular that really stands out as one of your experiences?

AM: I think Yes Nicole. Diplomacy involves understanding how countries advocate for their national interests through foreign policy. First, it is characterized by the excellent relationship between two countries: "Bilateral Cooperation," three and more countries under an Umbrella "Multilateral Cooperation" and B. The second point, it is about having a good relationship between two countries A and B focusing on the long-term outcomes. When discussing the outcomes, we

refer to how the beneficiaries gain from the negotiations and diplomatic activities that took place. I considered this when evaluating myself, and as the achievement to bring on table when assessing myself. So, number one, in terms of the relationship between countries, I made a lot because I was among a team of few experts who worked technically. Regarding the relationship between different countries and my country that I was representing, I played a significant role as part of a team in initiating the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement. This agreement was established in 2018 by the African Union. It has 43 parties with an additional 11 signatories, making it the largest free-trade area among member states after the World Trade Organization. It is also the largest in population and geographic size, encompassing 1.3 billion people across the world's second-largest continent. I was one of the few technicians involved in drafting the policies and strategies for this initiative.

Today, the African Union implements policies and strategies to connect all member countries and align their policies. One key initiative is promoting free movement within Africa, allowing people to travel freely between countries. I have been actively involved in overseeing the implementation of these policies and strategies, and I take pride in the progress we have achieved.

The second achievement was about diaspora, which refers to a nation community living abroad. In real terms, it signifies the dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland. I am speaking specifically about

Rwandan Country. In my diplomatic role, I was among a few people who initiated the diaspora policy. A few years ago, only 62 Rwandan diaspora organizations located in various countries across Europe, Americas, Africa, and Asia were initiated and started to back the country, invest and participate in different country initiatives because of the strong negotiation I was involved in. These Organizations began providing their contributions back home and started implementing social economic and development initiatives. Some of these initiatives were under my leadership and management, resulting in the diaspora community's construction of housing in Kigali, Rwanda. One such initiative was the One Dollar Campaign, where diaspora members voluntarily contributed one dollar each. The funds raised from this campaign helped build a large housing facility that provided a home for genocide survivors.

Another initiative I led was to provide cows to low-income families, known as the One Cow per Family program. When I left, nearly three out of five Rwandan citizens owned their cows, almost two percent being gifted by the diaspora. I also spearheaded the introduction of health insurance, which was supported and implemented by the diaspora and today almost two out of ten receive each year Health insurance given by this Diaspora organization that I was initiator and negotiator again to connect them vis a vis to the home country. Additionally, I initiated small livestock programs for those who don't have enough land for cows, offering them goats, pigs, chickens, and rabbits.

These initiatives aimed to help people become self-sufficient and break free from poverty. These are some of the outcomes and impacts of my diplomatic efforts, which I am proud of today.

NMS: That's pretty amazing. Definitely something to feel proud of in terms of making a real difference for people.

AM: Yeah. I think so. Making a real difference means positively impacting someone's life in a tangible way. This leads to a genuine sense of accomplishment and pride for yourself and the person you are helping, as it signifies that your actions are making a meaningful change in their lives.

NMS: What was your journey after that?

AM: I had the same dream about returning to academics. (laughter) I also realized that there were certain aspects I could not agree with politicians, which discouraged me from pursuing a career in that field. I saw academia as a space where I could freely provide what is needed about reality and academic theories. This perspective could also help me reflect on myself and avoid being too judgmental. I could say, "Politicians make promises to their people, but they often fail to fulfill them." I would not like that. If I say, "I should do something," I will do my best.

When I got my current job, one of the questions they asked me during the interview was, "What is your weakness?" I replied, "My weakness is that I cannot leave work unfinished." They were surprised and asked for clarification. I explained, "I cannot rest until I complete the tasks assigned to me. I cannot go home and leave things unfinished; I feel restless until I have completed my work." This attitude was shaped by previous experiences, such as when some of my

colleagues in a previous campaign did not follow through on their promises to the community. Witnessing this behavior affected me profoundly and still motivates me always to fulfill my commitments.

After deciding not to pursue a previous endeavor, I returned to the academic field. Later, I went to Kenya to continue teaching at JKUAT University and JIMA University in Ethiopia and then got a consultation job in African Union, Headquarter, Ethiopia, where I was appointed as the supervisor of the eastern region. This region included South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, and my role was to ensure the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement policies and strategies, particularly the Africa Continental Free Trade. I spent nearly two years in this position, simultaneously keeping teaching at JIMA University where I was promoted from Senior Lecturer to Assistant Professor as Academic Rank.

NMS: Continuing on with your story, what happened after that?

AM: Once I was promoted from a senior Lecturer to an Assistant Professor, I moved to a high level of teaching Doctorate students as part of post-graduate, at JIMA University, Ethiopia. Later, I had the chance to establish partnerships with some colleges in Canada and also got an overtime position teaching online at Ontario College for Development Training, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada during the COVID period 2020-to end of 2021 when I left everything and became a normal person. Due to the restrictions during that time, I was unable to travel. Of course, COVID-19 made everything complicated and unpredictable.

I have been teaching online for quite some time, and during this period, people truly understood and appreciated the importance of technology. Technology played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic. I could be in Africa and still teach students in Canada. Previously, traveling would have taken up the entire day, leaving little time for teaching. This continued until I relocated to the USA for personal reasons. Upon settling here, I initially considered moving to another state, but ultimately, I decided to move to Maine due to its numerous opportunities.

NMS: How did you even think about Maine?

AM: My father was familiar with Maine. While studying at Université Laval in Quebec, Canada, he learned about the state when he visited Harvard University, College in Cambridge, Massachusetts which is not far from Maine. He dreamt of teaching at Harvard University and often told us about it. He would say, "If you want to go to the USA, Maine is a good place." It was not because it was already developed but because it was a place to initiate any ideas related to socio-economic development and achieve it. These thoughts have stayed with me, even after decades.

What has happened since I arrived here? The same ideals and vision for the future of Maine have inspired me. All of this has motivated me to consider my role. I recall the last book I wrote some time ago; it was about how the host community appreciates the contributions of new arrivals. When I began writing that brief article, I saw myself as a positive case study. I know where to make a difference, but I want to do something that should be

recognized as a valuable component. No one wants to stay in their comfort zone. People believe that technology will replace our traditional ways in different things but not real, it will not replace anything; it will be complementary.

Nicole, throughout my life, I have taken numerous mathematics courses at school, and I am good enough at mathematics, but I can't make accurate calculations compared to a computer. A computer made to perform hundreds of calculations within a second, far more than I can. So, why do I still want to manually perform calculations, while technologies are designed to do that in a second. Our role which computers and technologies can not do, will not make, is to think, reason, create, initiate, or innovate and make decisions and even based on emotions and experiences. Still, technologies can only perform tasks based on the instructions given to them, which Human beings must guide. Technology exists to assist us in realizing our ideas, our projects, and our initiatives.

The key to achieving what our seniors in Maine have accomplished is positive socio economic development, including economic growth, population growth, and strong labor market thinking. Although the state is facing challenges, we are committed to making a significant positive impact, and I am prepared and capable of continuing the great work initiated by our seniors. We can keep using technology to achieve this, but we must always keep our goals in mind. By staying focused on

our goals, we can reach great heights. That is my principal, Nicole.

NMS: Now I understand a little bit about how you even knew that Maine existed, tell me about your first experiences in Biddeford?

AM: I had a good experience in Biddeford and Maine in general. My first new experience was encountering snow, outdoor activities, cultural attractions, food, forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, and streams. Many people love Maine because of the four seasons, like most countries outside the USA, especially my original country. They also have four seasons, but the main difference is snow. Dealing with snow was a challenge for me. When it started snowing, I tried to feel it and jumped on it. I didn't expect it to be so cold, but I thought I'd try it, and it was a good experience

A second experience from Maine: The people here are excellent and kind. They are eager to learn and gain new experiences, which really touched me. I realized that I have the chance to help others who are also looking to grow and move forward. By combining our talents, we can create a good model and theory to help all of us in Biddeford, Maine achieve our goals.

When I discovered my passion, I dedicated my time. When I met former Mayor Alan Casavant, who introduced me to the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center, he suggested I join the community organization. That's when I became a member of the BCHC board. From there, I began making my small contributions. So, my experience in Biddeford was perfect.

NMS: Is there anything that you feel comfortable talking about, maybe without getting into any sensitive topics or anything real specific, help us to understand what you had to go through to be able to come to the United States. What is that process like?

AM: Yes, Nicole, my country has faced numerous challenges in recent decades, resulting in the displacement of millions of people from their homes due to armed conflict, hate speeches from politicians telling other communities to hate and kill my community, violence against my community, flooding, epidemics, food insecurity, and infrastructure issues. And that had experienced me a lot as even those who decided to kill others, even the victims, all of them found themselves refugees.

From 1995, it was marked by conflicts, hate, and discrimination against Rwandophone by other Congolese communities, which was promoted by the genocidal militia FDLR who made Genocide in 1994 perpetuated against Tutsi in Rwanda, with the support of the Congolese leadership and security apparatus. Additionally, the Tutsi minority in the DRC faced historical discrimination due to their ethnic connection to Rwanda's Tutsi community. Furthermore, there has been impunity for perpetrators of hate speech and other crimes against Congolese Tutsi communities as the DRC government has not held them accountable. These issues led to the assassination of our fellow Congolese.

Remind the international community that no Rwandophone/Tutsi Congolese communities migrated to the DRC Congo. Colonies were established during the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, which was part of the "Scramble for Africa" and annexed different parts of African lands to create the current DRC Congo. The land

of the Rwandophene/ Tutsi Congolese communities was included in this annexation.

The most fundamental human values are creating peace, security, and respect among people. They are essential for building solid relationships in societies. Thank you to the city of Biddeford, the State of Maine, and the US federal government for standing with us and our families, bringing hope to our lives, and integrating us without discrimination into various social, economic, and development activities.

NMS: Talking about time, how long did it take you from when you made a decision that you wanted to come to the United States to be able to actually get here?

It took me one month to finally come to the United States. The situation in my home country was deteriorating rapidly, and I had to consider many factors before making such a life-changing decision. I weighed the risks and potential benefits of leaving my home behind, and ultimately, the need for safety and security compelled me to take action.

NMS: I'm guessing that you probably can't go back.

AM: If the reasons that led me to flee the country still exist, it's hard, Nicole, as long as those reasons persist, I cannot go back because I could face issues such as persecution and life-threatening situations.

NMS: Tell me about some of the things that you are doing now for work.

AM: Wow, Interesting question, I currently work as a General Assistance Specialist for the State of Maine in South Portland. My job involves assisting residents who require government or state aid. I aim to help them improve their lives. Government or state assistance is only sought after all other options have been exhausted. Sometimes, people have done their best and followed all

the correct procedures but reach a point where they need additional support. That's when the government or state steps in to help when necessary.

Apart from my work, I am also an academician. I try to help my colleagues and the new generation. I'm teaching some courses here. I started as a volunteer at Bowdoin College in Brunswick. Then I moved from there. I am teaching at Capella University which is located far from here and the University of Southern Maine, as a part-time employee. Briefly, that's what I'm doing currently. Still, as I mentioned, my dream is to do something to contribute to what Maine and Biddeford communities are doing that will be positive as opposed to staying in my comfort zone.

NMS: Can you think of something in particular that you wish people would realize in terms of like some of the cases that you are dealing with, helping out the State of Maine? What do you wish people would realize, an example of something you wish people would realize about the kinds of things that people have to deal with.

AM: I advise people to focus on several key areas, including strengthening communities through various social and economic development programs and initiatives; supporting citizen-driven service initiatives aimed at addressing local needs, fostering community engagement, and promoting volunteerism; developing effective managers of volunteers through training, mentorship, and resources to enhance their skills in leading and organizing volunteer programs; and coordinating emergency response efforts to ensure effective and efficient support during times of crisis and disaster.

The key to addressing any concerns you have is to create a plan. Another critical factor is to think big. In the past, our issue was that we limited ourselves to a small scope. For instance, I only considered myself a citizen of

Biddeford. However, exploring opportunities in Portland could open new possibilities. By pursuing more opportunities, we can contribute to the growth of Biddeford.

To improve the social economy of our Mainers, we need to change our mindset. Instead of just identifying problems, and think to contact the government for support. Doing more than that is essential, such as investing in yourself and giving your best, and you will succeed. Don't get discouraged. Mistakes can happen, but remember, you can overcome challenges. Stay persistent and consider timing because sometimes people do the right thing at the wrong time. Reflect on when to act and choose the right moment.

If you approach things that way, you will achieve what you hope for in your lifelong dream. I used to discourage people who lacked vision; those serious about making a change have a clear vision. So, get a vision. Once you have a vision, it will be easier to devise a plan. You can't establish a principle if you don't have a purpose. You must first figure out what you want to become in five years. Sometimes, Nicole, the challenge is that when you don't know where you come from, you can't even determine where you are. It isn't easy. When you don't know where you are, figuring out where you want to go will also be challenging. It's essential to understand these three elements.

I think the audience listening to this is the only advice that has been helping me and others like them, like us, and improving our socio-economic life. If I'm OK, the

city will be OK. The neighbors will be OK. The environment will be OK. The State will be OK. Even the federal will be OK. We ended up having the great America that the politicians and others discussed. That's the point, Nicole.

NMS: I've asked you a lot of questions. Was there anything else that you had wanted to share that maybe hasn't come up because of the questions I was asking?

AM: Sure, Nicole. Based on my experiences, I advise people to remain positive and holistic, focus on creating a developmentally appropriate approach that should help society improve their activities related to social economic and development. The only investment that will always go up is to invest in yourself. Anyone who stops learning is considered old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young;

Be the change you wish to see in the world, don't expect what you don't do;

Set a big goal that you can only achieve once you grow into someone who can;

Never walk away from failure. On the contrary, study it carefully and imaginatively for its hidden assets;

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving;

Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow;

Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning, If you can't fly, then run; if you can't run, then walk; if you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward

NMS: I appreciate the fact that and I hope that the people who listen to this will understand that there are a lot of things in the background as well but are very, very sensitive issues and understandably it's very difficult to talk about it.

NMS: I appreciate that you were able to share what you did. I usually end these interviews by asking is there anything in particular that you want people to take away from hearing your story?

NMS: Ok. Very good then. Well, again, thank you for taking some of your precious time on your day off from work. Thank you for taking time off from work to be able to do this interview. Thank you for making a contribution to our community.

AM: Yeah

AM: The audience will be interested as they take away valuable lessons learned, a deeper understanding of my perspective, inspiration to overcome challenges that I have faced myself, a sense of connection and empathy, and potentially actionable insights that can be applied to their lives through motivation and resilience, empathy and perspective, practical knowledge, and personal growth. That's what I wish. Also, I want to tell them that it would be good to achieve their own story because each of us, we have our story.

AM: Thank you so much as well, Nicole, for inviting me to share my experiences with the audience today.