

The Network

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A Voice for the indigent persons in Uganda



LASPNET Board Chairperson, Mr. Samuel Herbert Nsubuga and LASPNET Executive Director, Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa at a Press Conference on Election related concerns at the Secretariat on 29th February 2016.

ELECTORAL VICTIMS RECEIVE RAPID LEGAL RESPONSE

MORE

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- Debate on Marriage and Divorce

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I welcome you to yet another edition of the Network newsletter where we share the highlights for the period January to March 2016.

Uganda has recently undergone presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. LASPNET has been actively involved, especially in observing the process under the CEON-U coalition, through

provision of a rapid legal response brief and joining the CSOs coalition to file the Amicus curie in the presidential petition that ensued. We are happy to note that as a nation we emerged out of this process largely peaceful save for a cross section of our society like Kasese where there were violent eruptions. It is our hope that the sources of conflicts will be ironed out by the leadership both cultural and political. We congratulate those who emerged victors and look forward to a fruitful leadership in the mandated period.

That aside, as LASPNET, we continued to deliver on our mandate through several capacity building interventions which have been provided to the membership during this quarter. Notably is the integrated information system training that was aimed at improving utilization of the system as well as fast tracking enrollment of LASPs and addressing existing gaps in its functionality as well as skilling our lawyers in trial advocacy .

I am pleased to report that we launched a manual on child friendly practices, a tool that will be helpful for all those dealing with childrens' rights and their implementation. The development of this document was supported by Anna Du Vent, a legal intern with the Canadian Bar Association

under the SAJCEA program. She has since returned to Canada having spent six months with us at LASPNET. As a child rights advocate, this development is exciting because I know many of our lawyers will use this manual to improve their service delivery skills and approach to handling children in contact with the law.

We have continued with efforts to advocate for the Legal Aid policy and Bill. Members validated the Cost Benefit Analysis research for the National Legal aid policy on 21st January 2016 and recently on 6th May 2016, the findings were launched by the Hon. Deputy Attorney General Mwesigwa Rukutana. We believe that the findings will provide the justification needed by Cabinet to fast track the enactment of the policy into law.

We continue with our advocacy in other areas especially in finding more cost effective ways to deliver legal aid as well as improved legal and policy framework for legal aid. Find out more about our visit to Lwengo District and the Divorce Law Symposium, among other activities that transpired during the quarter.

We thank you our members, stakeholders and development partners for the unrelenting interest in seeing the network get rooted and spread its branches. Your overwhelming support has brought us this far, kept us on our toes and ignites us to serve the network to the best of our abilities. Your comments play a great role in enabling us improve on future editions so kindly share them via secretariat@laspnet.org

I wish you good reading!!

Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa

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Publication Team

Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa
Jamidah Namuyanja

Contributors:

Anna Du Vent
Jamidah Namuyanja

Compiled by:

Jamidah Namuyanja,
ICDO LASPNET



Members of the Citizen Election Observation Network of Uganda (CEON-U) with Eng. Badru Kigunddu (in blue checkered shirt), the Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission after a meeting to express their concerns regarding the conduct of the general elections on 18th /02/16.

ELECTORAL VICTIMS RECEIVE RAPID LEGAL RESPONSE



Uganda went to the polls on 18th February 2016 to elect presidential and parliamentary representatives for the country for the next five years.

Given the tumultuous events in some parts of the country preceding these polls, LASPNET, aided with the belief that the development of an accountable society and the rule of law are crucial for the long term peace and security of Uganda, embarked on an exercise to provide rapid legal assistance/ support to victims of election related violence during and after the general elections.

The network deployed 23 legal aid advocates drawn from its 47 members to provide support and ensure that Ugandans exercise their right to vote in an environment free from violence, intimidation, coercion and abuse of due process.

At a press conference convened on 29th February 2016 at the Secretariat in Mengo, the Board Chairperson, Mr. Samuel Nsubuga, revealed that the advocates had reported over 260 cases of election related arrests with 15 people released on police bond. The charges related to the arrests included among others: unlawful assembly, voter bribery, rigging, failure to comply with police orders and assault.

LASPNET cautioned security agents against committing excesses which ranged from arbitrary arrests, use of excessive force and continued abuse of due process.

The Network recommended that all concerned institutions; respect the Constitution, desist

from indiscriminate arrests and respect the dignity of the people, exercise impartiality and expeditiously handle electoral offences and provide information to ease the process among others.

Also notable was the call by Ms Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, the Executive Director LASPNET, for the military to be withdrawn from the streets to restore a semblance of normalcy among Ugandans.



LASPNET Board members and the Executive Director address a Press Conference on Election related concerns at the Secretariat on 29th February 2016.

On 12th March 2016, LASPNET joined 7 other civil society organizations under the umbrella of the Citizen Election Observers Network (CEON-U) to file an application to be admitted as friends of the court in the Presidential Election Petition No.1 of 2016 filed by the former presidential candidate Amama Mbabazi disputing the results

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of the 2016 presidential elections. Although court dismissed it, a precedent was set for similar applications to be filed in future.

Other organisations that were part of the application included; Foundation for Human Rights Initiative, Chapter Four Uganda, Association of Women Lawyers in Uganda, Centre for Constitutional Governance, Human Rights Network Uganda, Transparency International and Kituo kya Katiba Eastern Africa.

“The democratic election of a head of the state does not necessarily lead to improved human rights, if law enforcement institutions are weak or if a culture of human rights and democratic governance has not been cultivated”- LASPNET press statement, 29 February 2016.

On 21st March 2016, LASPNET supported the Association of Human Rights Organizations in Rwenzori (AHURIO) to convene a half day

regional stakeholders’ dialogue to address the situation in the Rwenzori sub-region.

The dialogue held at the offices of the Uganda Human Rights Commission in Fort Portal was aimed at strengthening the network of paralegals and legal aid service providers in assisting victims of human rights violations and abuse, sharing knowledge and experiences on adherence to constitutionalism and the rule of law, building synergies as well as strengthening referral pathways as a rapid response mechanism in light of the tension surrounding the 2016 general elections. The LASPs also wanted to engage the Human Rights Commission and security agencies on their roles and mandate regarding the protection and promotion of human rights.

Participants recommended provision of psychosocial support to victims of election related violence, use of traditional justice systems to address conflicts and also called on security agencies to allow paralegals and LASPs to access detention centers and provide rapid response to the victims. ■



R-L: Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, ED LASPNET, Ms. Irene Ovonji Odida, ED FIDA Uganda and Mr. Mohammad Ndifuna, ED HURINET leaving the Supreme Court after the filing of the Amici Curiae application.



Why did Civil Society file the *Amici Curiae* motion, and how significant was it?

Nicholas Opiio is a Ugandan Human Rights Activist, Advocate of the High Court and Executive Director of Chapter Four Uganda. He was also co-counsel for the hearing of the *Amici Curiae* (Friends of Court) motion filed by seven civil society organisations in relation to the Presidential Election petition no.1 of 2016. He talked to Jamidah Namuyanja, the LASPNET Communication and Documentation Officer, about its significance for CSOs and the country at large and the way forward in the aftermath of the 2016 general elections.



Uganda as a country has come from a difficult history to a fairly accommodative present but that is still too far short of the ideal situation we want.

Qn: Why did CSOs file the amici curiae motion?

Ans: The decision to file the amici curiae arose from the need by civil society to do something different as opposed to the usual press statements and reports. We had intense discussions on what the new thing would be and many NGO leaders disagreed on the filing of the motion. I had to convince them by citing the case of the Kenyan Civil Society who mounted a fierce campaign after the 2007 elections which led to their admission as *friends of court* in the Kenyan Supreme Court. This gave the CSOs an opportunity to present evidence they had gathered during the elections and in many ways influenced the outcome of the election petition in Kenya. We sought the same thing in Uganda but given the limited understanding of what the motion meant, only a few NGOs came together to support it.

Another reason we filed it was to take the role on NGOs to a new level by taking part in the court process of determining the outcome of the elections. Allowing only presidential candidates to participate in the electoral petition would be a misreading of our Constitution. It was ground breaking because it was the first time court was allowing views of people who were not part of the petition. It is also why court exercised caution by relying on the academia hence narrowing the scope of engagement. The academia was also rightly regarded as having more expertise than the CSOs.

Qn: How significant was it for CSOs?

Ans: The *amici curiae* application broke new ground through reinstatement of the people

and their participation in the administration of justice in this country particularly in a presidential election petition. It also opened a new era of litigation that CSOs must take advantage of because we have within this realm expertise and unique information that we can bring to bear in the pursuit of justice. We have to develop capacity and understanding of the process of filing amicus curiae as a new litigation industry because in the future they are bound to be many and CSOs must be ready to take on the challenge.

Qn: Now that the general elections have been concluded, what is the way forward for Uganda?

Ans: The response of the state through use of force and flexing of muscles was unhelpful. It might have brought a semblance of safety and security but it is short term. The state must listen to the cries of the people in this country and;

- a) Undertake a thorough and independent investigation of the violation of human rights that characterized the electoral process
- b) Accept that despite disagreements with particular groups, they have an inherent right to freedom of expression, assembly and peaceful demonstration and must therefore allow people to exercise these rights without undue interference and intimidation

Once the state commits itself to doing the above, the fear of violence and a difficult future for this country will be allayed. Uganda as a country has come from a difficult history to a fairly accommodative present but that it still too far short of the ideal situation that we want for our country. As a country, we still live way below the expected standard for equality for everybody, we are still far below the international standard of freedom of expression and more can be done. The reliance on the force to subdue the citizens can still be turned around and become a country where every single Ugandan has the same equal opportunity of life no matter where you come from or what party you support.

We are still below the ideal situation in terms of human rights. We still face massive cases of discrimination; extreme poverty; break down of social services, such as mothers dying during child birth, etc. This country can do better in observing the fundamental rights of all human beings. ■

CHILD FRIENDLY LEGAL AID MANUAL LAUNCHED



ABOVE: L-R Justice John Eudes Keitirima, Masaka High Court, Justice Susan Okalany, Mr. Samuel Herbert Nsubuga, LASPNET Board Chairperson, Ms. Jennifer Khor, Project Director CBA International Initiatives and Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, LASPNET Executive Director at the launch of the Child Friendly Legal Aid Manual on 23rd March 2016 at Serena Hotel, Lweza.

“My guideline when dealing with children is that I always compare them to my own and that makes a very big difference. When this girl child is being cross examined, I’m imagining my daughter in that dock”. These words were spoken by Justice John Eudes Keitirima of the Masaka High Court on 23rd March 2016 as he launched a child friendly legal aid manual developed by LASPNET as part of the *Supporting Access to Justice for Children in East Africa project (SAJCEA)* funded by the Canadian Bar Association.

The manual which is meant to serve the needs of stakeholders in Uganda’s child justice sector was developed through consultations with over sixty participants from a wide range of professions. The process was supported by Anna Du Vent a legal intern with the Canadian Bar Association.

Justice Keitirima called for the revision of the age of criminal responsibility for juveniles from 12 to 18 years noting that a lot of what children did was as a result of influence from adults. He also called for the revision of the law curriculum to include psychology; a subject he felt was key in preparing those that deal with children.

Justice Susan Okalany who also spoke during the launch Serena Hotel, Lweza said she believed that the advocates who would use the manual would be empowered with the requisite knowledge and their minds would be tickled further. She however noted that the document was not conclusive as it did not specify everything but was merely a guideline for child justice stakeholders.

Mr. Samuel Herbert Nsubuga, the LASPNET Board Chairperson extended the Networks’ appreciation to all stakeholders who had spared time to share their thoughts and recommendations during the process of developing the manual. In the same vein, he acknowledged the effort by Anna Du Vent for supporting the development of the manual.

The earlier we learn that we cannot completely serve these children until we have referred them to other stakeholders, the better” –Justice Susan Okalany.



ABOVE: Stakeholders who attended the Launch of the Child Friendly Legal Aid Manual at Serena Hotel, Lweza.

Achieving Child-friendly Justice Includes Listening to Children

By: Anna Du Vent

Children who are given the opportunity to be heard and who believe that their voices are important develop confidence. When children are given safe spaces to make statements such as “My experience is...” “My recommendation is that...” and “I believe that...” they develop the necessary self-awareness to become contributing members of society. Unfortunately, if children’s voices are stifled at a young age, so too is their confidence. If this occurs, such children start to lose the belief that governing systems will serve them well as adults.

Representing over 60 percent of Uganda’s population, children (those under age 18) are the most vulnerable group in Uganda. They are vulnerable and often silent, in large part, because they cannot officially speak for themselves. This means that children are at an increased risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation. While all children are vulnerable, children in the child justice system, including those in contact and in conflict with the law, face a high risk of losing their voices and their hope by being exposed to attitudes and practices that are not child-friendly.

In recognition of the fact that many stakeholders in the child justice sector do not have the skills to provide child-friendly services, the Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET), identified the need to develop a manual which would clearly explain the principles of child-friendly justice and provide strategies for working with children. LASPNET developed this manual as a member of the Uganda National Working Group of the Supporting Access to Justice for Children in East Africa project. The manual is meant as a starting point and a quick reference tool for clarifying ideas or developing strategies related

to working with children.

Unfortunately, children in the justice system face a vast range of challenges. For example, children living at Naguru Remand Home tell an overwhelming array of stories related to their personal experiences in the legal system that point to inefficiencies, corruption, and disregard for child-friendly practices. These experiences curtail their ability to access justice and, in the process, force them into silence.

Examples of experiences relayed by such children include: being interviewed without the presence of a Probation Officer or a parent or guardian; being forced to give false statements after being beaten; being detained at police stations for periods significantly longer than the legal maximum; being denied food while at police stations; being handcuffed; and being denied opportunities to speak with their parents. Each time one of these incidents occurs, the justice system fails a child and, in doing so, that child loses some belief in the systems that are meant to support him or her.

Implementing child-friendly practices in the Ugandan justice system is key to ensuring that such experiences do not occur and, therefore, that children retain their voices, their confidence, and their hope. “Child-friendly” practices encompass a wide range of strategies and skills — paramount amongst these is to consider the best interests of the child in all cases involving children. Doing so is a process that is grounded in the specific circumstances of the individual child and which is based on fully appreciating the child’s rights, while treating that child with empathy and dignity. Additional child-friendly strategies include: considering child psychology;

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ABOVE: Ms. Anna Du Vent (2nd from left) shows off her plaque of appreciation from LASPNET during her farewell dinner held on 24th March 2016 in Kampala. Looking on is Justice Susan Okalany (extreme left) Ms. Jeniffer Khor, CBA International Initiatives Director (2nd from right) and Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, LASPNET Executive Director. Anna was applauded for her work in supporting the development of a child friendly legal aid manual for child justice stakeholders in Uganda.

making oneself approachable; allowing children to be involved in how their case develops; creating child-friendly environments; and displaying patience. Simply put, many of the challenges experienced by children now living at remand homes could be alleviated if adult stakeholders consistently looked at such children as children instead of as offenders.

Providing children with the skills and opportunities to express and advocate for

themselves is a crucial part of a well-functioning justice system. With this in mind, let us remember that children are key stakeholders in the child justice system, with important contributions to provide regarding their cases as well as concerning wider trends in child justice. Further, let us remember what it feels like to be given the power to be heard and, finally, let us hope that we never experience what it is like to have this power taken away. ■

CAPACITY BUILDING INTERVENTIONS



BELOW: Members in a practical session during the IIMS training.

A training on the use of the IIMS was organized at Fairway Hotel, on 15th - 16th February, 2016. The training brought together 40 participants from 15 institutions which included; Uganda Christian lawyers fraternity (UCLF), Refugee Law project (RLP), Muslim center for justice and law (MCJL), Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Soroti Development Association and NGO's Network, Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), Justice Peace Centers (JPC), War Child Canada(WCC), National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU), Avocats Sans Frontieres (ASF), Human Rights Center (HRC), Facilitation for

Peace and Development (FAPAD),Community Legal Action and Integrated Development (COLAID), Community Justice and Anti - Corruption Forum (CJAF) and Centre for Legal Aid (CLA).

It was aimed at strengthening information management practices among LASPs, improving the technical capacity of LASPs to manage, analyze and report on information gathered from clients, cases and legal aid related programs as well as strengthening coordination between LASPNET and members through collective sharing of data and analysis of trends.



ABOVE: Participants at the Training at Fairway Hotel, Kampala.

Training on Board Management and Governance

This was delivered in form of an electronic presentation via skype and was attended by board and staff members at the LASPNET Secretariat. The presentation held on March 3, 2016 was made by Terrance S. Carter, a Managing Partner, of Carters Professional Corporation. It was entitled "A Background to Boards" and the

main focus was on board governance, director / officer liability and conducting board meetings. It was coordinated by Anna Du Vent, a legal intern with LASPNET from the Canadian Bar Association who had previously worked with the Carter Corporation.



BELOW: LASPNET Board members and staff after the Board Governance and Management training via skype.

TRIAL ADVOCACY TRAINING (TAT)

The Trial Advocacy Training (TAT) is an annual program organized by the Legal Aid Service Providers' Networkers (LASPNET) in collaboration with Justice Advocacy Africa (JAA) geared at deepening the skills of advocates to contribute to strengthening the judicial system in developing countries. In Uganda specifically, the TAT is pertinent as most people who seek the services of advocates including legal aid services are indigent, illiterate people in matters of law and human rights hence unable to make a distinction between quality service and mediocrity. The TAT is therefore an intervention to build the capacity of advocates so they can be better lawyers, give better services and build a better judicial system.

The TAT is conducted in a highly interactive, participatory manner and adopts an approach of learning by doing. Participants receive immediate feedback for each module and practical sessions are held to test their progress at every stage.

Alauterio Ntegyereize, a Legal Officer with Refugee Law Project in Mbarara commended the training saying, "it refreshed my mind and improved my conduct during court", while

Emmanuel Ochieng, an advocate with MIFUMI credited his improved opening statement during court to the training.

"It helps build confidence and appreciation of the whole court process, especially because of the pro-bono element embedded within. It allows one to practice like a private advocate while providing legal aid", said Prim Kiconco, a Legal Officer with Muslim Centre for Justice and Law.

According to Bridge Kusemererwa, a Legal Officer with Platform for Labour Action in Lira, the training improved her cross examination and how to tell her client's story better.

This year's training was conducted for five days from 11th - 15th January 2016 at Esella Country Hotel. It was attended by 32 advocates from various legal aid organizations and law firms across the country. JAA has conducted trial advocacy programs in Africa since 2003 in Botswana, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda conducting nearly 50 training programs in trial advocacy and training of trainers, for over 500 advocates.



ABOVE: Advocates who attended the Trial Advocacy Training.

TRIAL ADVOCACY FACULTY TRAINING (TAFT)

The TAFT was conducted for three days from 18th - 20th January 2016 at Piato Hotel, Kampala. It was intended to raise an internal resource pool team of trainers who would help sharpen the skills of fellow advocates through trial advocacy trainings. Uganda still has a small team of faculty members and yet the need for capacity building among trial lawyers is so big. It therefore becomes pertinent that a TAFT is conducted to raise a cadre of Trial Advocacy Faculty. Once

a substantial team of Trial Advocacy Trainers is developed, it helps to expand the outreach of the Trial Advocacy Trainings to the rest of the country. The TAFT is conducted in almost a similar way like the Trial Advocacy Training (TAT); in a highly interactive manner, a learning by doing approach, so that participants are able to walk through the exercises of coaching their fellow advocates. This program was pioneered by the National Institute of Trial Advocacy.

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At the end of the three day's training, the participants appreciated the skills that they had acquired but stated that more hands on training was required to help them graduate as faculty members. The participants acquired skills not only in trial advocacy but also coaching, role playing and communication.

The training does not qualify the participants to be awarded certificates of completion because

it is not an end but rather a continuous process of learning how to become a better trainer in trial skills.

It was attended by 18 advocates from various legal aid organizations and law firms. All of them had undergone the TAT from previous trainings. JAA has conducted Trial Advocacy Faculty Training programs alongside each TAT. This particular training was delivered by one local faculty member, Alinda Ikaza and 2 international faculty members, Steve Fury and Mark Wagner.

TRAINING ON ELECTION OBSERVATION

On the 27th and 28th January 2016, LASPNET conducted a training on election observation for selected members in anticipation of the Network's participation in the observation process for the 2016 general elections and subsequent rapid response efforts.

The training was mainly to enable members highlight key issues related to indigent persons during the elections, observe how the rights of indigent persons are potentially infringed, document the challenges that the indigent face while exercising their right to vote and understand how to potentially move forward with litigation during the post-election time period.

It was conducted with support of facilitators from CEON-U, HURINET, CEWIT, National Democratic Institute, Netherlands Democratic Institute and the Electoral Commission and participants were specifically urged to adhere to the guidelines that were provided as well as focus on their prescribed roles and responsibilities to avoid any friction with polling staff during the electoral period.

An action plan was developed at the end of the two day training to guide the activities related to the observation exercise and consequent rapid response efforts.

BELOW: Some of the participants in a practical session during the training on Election Observation. Holding papers is Paul Kavuma Central Region Representative acting in a simulation exercise as the returning officer.



EXTENDING LEGAL AID TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



ABOVE (L-R): Ms. Martha Nanjobe, DGF, Ms. Lillian Adriko, FIDA-U, Ms. Berna Bakidde, LASPNET, Mr. George Mutabaazi, LCV Lwengo and Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, ED LASPNET after the meeting at Lwengo District.

On the 26th January 2016, a team from LASPNET and FIDA Uganda met with local government leaders from Lwengo district as a first step towards establishing a partnership with the district in a bid to extend legal aid services to the local communities.

The Executive Director LASPNET, Ms.Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa addressed a large gathering of community folk who had convened to mark the district celebration of the 26th anniversary of the National Resistance Movement. She explained what legal aid was about and the desire of legal aid service providers to extend their services to those in need through partnership with the district.

Mr.George Mutabazi, the District Chairperson of Lwengo welcomed the partnership and even offered free office space at the district for use by advocates who would provide legal aid to his constituents.

Both teams agreed to a further meeting to agree on the terms of the partnership.

LASPNET intends for the partnership with Lwengo to be a pilot venture that can be extended to other districts with time and based on the results of the pilot.

STAKEHOLDERS VALIDATE COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS RESEARCH ON THE NATIONAL LEGAL AID POLICY



ABOVE: Legal Aid stakeholders who attended the CBA Validation meeting at Hotel Africana.

Legal Aid service providers, partners and stakeholders convened at Hotel Africana on 21st January 2016 to validate the findings of the cost benefit analysis for the national legal aid policy.

The research conducted by Dr. Ibrahim Kasirye of Makerere University's Economic Policy Research Centre on behalf of LASPNET was commended by Ms. Rachel Odoi Musoke, the Senior Technical Advisor of the Justice Law and Order Sector for providing a justification for the national legal aid policy. "Now that the costs have been tied to the benefits, it will be easy for government to see its worthiness", she said.

In her remarks, Ms. Martha Nanjobe, the DGF Programme Manager, Access to Justice noted that it was important that there had been an effort to quantify the economic and social benefits of the national legal aid policy. She however called on participants to think about the implications in case government passed the policy but left out funding for legal aid service providers who are non-state actors. The findings have recently been launched on 6th of May 2016, and the detailed story will be shared in our next issue.



iGA, LASPNET and FIDA-Uganda Return Debate on Marriage and Divorce

The marriage and divorce bill in Uganda has been pending legislation and adoption for over 14 years. In order to revive the discussion on the matter, the International Governance Alliance, with funding from the Ford Foundation, collaborated with LASPNET and FIDA-Uganda to hold a dialogue for the academia, civil society and legal aid sector stakeholders and deliberate on the law's evolving status.

Speaking at the dialogue held on 24th March 2016 at Protea Hotel, Ms. Sylvia Namubiru, the LASPNET Executive Director highlighted the delay in the legislation on the marriage and divorce law and called for more innovative ways and approaches to navigate the legal framework. As LASPNET, we welcome this dialogue as a platform for all stakeholders to interrogate further the context of family law, share experiences and lessons that will enable us to continue serving the most vulnerable which is the family structure", she said.

Dr. Sylvia Tamale, a law professor at Makerere University noted the urgent need to publish home-grown authoritative information on Family Law, in order to contextualize the issues

with Uganda's historical, cultural and gender perspectives. She said the dialogue should mark the beginning of such efforts.

Dr. Zahara Nampewo in her paper titled, "A Critical Analysis of the Legal Regime on Cruelty as a Ground for Divorce in Uganda", noted that while marriage was a fundamental institution necessary for the social organization and well-being of society, failing and abusive marriages are damaging to both individuals and society and infringe the human rights of parties involved in them. She therefore called on the justice system in Uganda to be cognizant of the vulnerability of women, who constitute the greater percentage of victims of spousal violence.

This position was reiterated by Muhamud Sewaya, a law lecturer at Kampala International University in his "Critical Examination of the Law Governing Muslim Marriages and Divorce in Uganda", where he noted that the current situation of Muslim family life in Uganda cries out for legislative intervention. "Parties in marriages are suffering assault and abuse at the hands of those who should care for them. Some young girls are forced into marriage and subjected to



L-R: Prof. Fredrick Jjuuko, Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, ED LASPNET and Dr. Maria Nassali, ED iGA listen to a presentation during the Dialogue.

BELOW: Members of the Academia at the Dialogue.

the devastating effects of early pregnancy by their parents or guardians”.

The activists concluded the dialogue by calling on legislators in the 10th Parliament to return the marriage and divorce bill on the floor of Parliament and fast track its enactment into law ■



PICTORIAL



LASPNET Members after the training on Financial Management held on 30th March 2016 at Piato Restaurant, Kampala



LASPNET Board and Staff at Garuga Country Hotel during the Staff Retreat held on 1st and 2nd February 2016.



Emmanuel Ochieng (in suit), an Advocate with MIFUMI hands over a gift to one of the facilitators at the Training of Trainers (TOT) held at Piato Restaurant in January 2016



Group Oath of Solidarity during the Trial Advocacy Training at Esella Country Hotel in January 2016.

UPCOMING EVENTS

In the next issue of the *Network* newsletter, look out for updates on the following activities and events;

- Monitoring and Evaluation Visits to members
- Access to Justice Campaign Week and Launch of the Cost Benefit Analysis of the National Legal Aid Policy
- Leap Partners' Meeting
- Cluster meetings
- Training on Plea Bargaining
- National Dialogue on Execution of Court Orders, and much more from the wider membership.



LEGAL AID SERVICE PROVIDERS NETWORK (LASPNET)

LASPNET Secretariat,
Plot 10, Block 75, Balintuma Road, Mengo,
P.O. Box 8488 Kampala - Uganda
Tel: +256-393-513733
Email: secretariat@laspnet.org,
Website: www.laspnet.org
Face book: Legal Aid Service Providers Network
Twitter: @LaspnetUganda

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