



The Network

A Voice for the indigent persons in Uganda

LASPNET GETS NEW BOARD



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Credits

Editorial Team

Chief Editor:

Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa

Managing Editor:

Jamidah Namuyanja

Sub-Editors:

Badru Walusansa

Viola Ajok

Contributors:

Badru Walusansa

Daphine Achen

Jackie Katuramu

Jamidah Namuyanja

Compiled by:

Jamidah Namuyanja



LEGAL AID SERVICE PROVIDERS NETWORK

Plot 10, Block 75,

Balintuma Road, Mengo

P.O. Box 8488, Kampala

Tel: +256(0)393513733

Email: secretariat@laspnet.org

Website: www.laspnet.org

Twitter: @LaspnetUganda

Facebook: Legal Aid Service Providers Network

For comments, questions or contributions to this newsletter, send an email to ncpo@laspnet.org

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa



In this issue of our newsletter we present you with highlights of a number of activities and events that Network has undertaken between October 2016 to April 2017. We have a new board in place, were recognized for our networking and partnership efforts in the sector, which have we have continuously expanded, and have supported capacity building for members in various areas to enhance legal aid service provision. Research and advocacy has also remained at the fore front of our interventions.

Access to Justice remains a myth for many Ugandans. Human rights defenders continue to experience barriers in many aspects in our pursuit for Justice for all. We have increasingly come under attack in various forms through threats, intimidation, office break-ins not to mention the gagging of free expression, kidnapping and incarceration. The justice sector as a whole continues to grapple with new challenges ranging from allegations of corruption, case backlog limited resources both human, financial and structural; deteriorating observance of human rights standards such as increasing cases of torture amongst some security actors. This situation may seem daunting but for an advocacy institution like LASPNET, we continue to engage and remain hopeful that all actors will play their role to ensure justice for all.

We therefore invite you to turn the pages and get acquainted with the details of our work during the period but also share your perspective on how we can jointly improve legal aid accessibility and access to justice in general, for the most deserving. Your unwavering support, engagement and contributions are the fuel that the LASPNET needs to keep growing and moving forward so never tire to provide it. As we continue to pursue our vision of a free and just society we remember the word of Martin Luther King that *"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"*. And because our work is only just beginning, we choose to see the glass as half full!

TAPPING INTO PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE



Mr. Ojuko Cox Joel - EOC and Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa - ED LASPNET shake hands after signing the MOU on 25th April 2017.

The LASPNET Strategic Plan 2015-2020 lays down a number of interventions for the network to become a strong, competitive and a well-placed organization with adequate linkages for collaboration and networking at all levels. Among these is strengthening collaboration and partnerships with government and other stakeholders to facilitate, improved legal aid service delivery.

As such, LASPNET began talks with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA) and the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) to, among other things jointly work together to enhance access to justice through activities like conducting joint awareness raising and sensitization of LASPS and their communities, creating awareness for public-private partnership to improve access to justice in local governments and conduct joint legal aid clinics and referrals respectively.

Speaking during the October

2016 inception meeting between LASPs and representatives from the EOC, Ms. Sylvia Muwebwa Ntambi the EOC Chairperson noted that the Commission's mandate is wide which requires them to work with partners like LASPNET in its fulfillment. She further shared that many people are in need of legal aid services yet Government has a number of pressing priorities hence justifying the quest for building partnerships.

During an inception meeting between ULGA, LASPNET and the DGF team held in October 2016 at the ULGA offices, the ULGA Secretary General Ms. Gertrude Rose Gamwera welcomed the proposed partnership highlighting the great need for collaboration on legal support to district councils given their legislative function that involves making by-laws. She noted that although the Local Government structure had a position of a Legal Officer, most if not all treat it as optional. The Network has already signed, Memoranda of Understanding with the EOC and NSSF ●

COALITION IN SUPPORT OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY LAUNCHED



H.W Paul Gadenya displays the signed MOU as Coalition Members look on.



Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa signs on behalf of LASPNET as Mr. Francis Gimara look on.

The Uganda Law Society launched the Coalition in Support of the Independence of the Judiciary on 26th April 2017 in Kampala. The coalition is made up of 7 members who include; Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), Legal Aid Service Provider's Network (LASPNET), Center for Public Interest Law (CEPIL), Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU), Chapter Four Uganda and the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Uganda). Coalition members who were represented by their respective Executive Directors signed the MOU at Sheraton Hotel, witnessed by the H.W Paul Gadenya, Chief Registrar-Courts of Judicature.

Speaking during the launch, H.W Gadenya welcomed the initiative noting that one way of strengthening good governance and democracy in Uganda was by having a strong and independent



Judiciary. He remarked that the Judiciary had been in-ward looking for long and it was time to build a people centered institution that is respected by all. "We cannot reform by talking to ourselves but by listening to external opinions and embracing criticisms and useful ideas from the outside", he went on to say.

He urged the Coalition to develop a score card for the Judiciary since what they provide is a public good and therefore they should be rated and guided on better performance in the future. Mr. Gadenya added that the Judiciary can only be successful if operated as a business so as to meet the changing needs of society. He finally called for support from all Coalition members and requested them to use their platforms to help the Judiciary ensure the protection of basic fundamental rights and freedoms.

According to Mr. Francis Gimara, the President - Uganda Law Society, the coalition will among other things do the following:

- Watch the appointment process of the Judiciary through regular engagement with the Judicial Service Commission to highlighted the need to discipline errant Judicial Officers.
- Ensure Judicial Accountability.
- Combating Judicial Corruption.
- Advocate and advise on the necessary policy and legal reforms in the Judiciary.
- Lobby for increased resourcing of the Judiciary as a third arm of government ●



WE SHOULD FIGHT JUDICIAL CORRUPTION TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Badru Walusansa,
Project Asst. M&E

Access to Justice is a hallmark of democracy and therefore societies should fundamentally promote it. Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasizes that states should commit to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. However, the glaring corruption incidences in Uganda continue to undermine access to justice. Important to note is that the surge in judicial corruption still impedes the poor from accessing justice.

According to a study carried out in Gulu and Lira districts by the Institute for Human Security at Tufts University, in the US, with assistance from Ugandan researchers, respondents revealed that ordinary people engage in corruption (in form of giving and taking bribes) as a means of accessing the courts to pursue justice or to manipulate it for private gain.

Since corruption has in itself become a norm in the judicial system, the poor, vulnerable and marginalized are often locked outside the systems because they cannot afford paying bribes to court officers to facilitate their pending cases in court. Several studies have shown that court officers solicit bribes from litigants in order to have their cases cause listed and to influence the outcome of case judgments. This therefore implies that because of such

systematic corruption in the justice sector, access to justice is for sale where the highest bidder takes it all.

Although Uganda has a strong legal regime in fighting corruption, implementation of the anti-corruption laws is deliberately insufficient. The 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda recognizes under Article 126(2) (a), the need for the Judiciary to administer justice to all, irrespective of social or economic status. The framers of this article attempted to bar, among others, undue social and economic technicalities that could potentially thwart dispensation of justice.

However, reports of corruption in the Judiciary are getting louder and its manifestations changing according to prevailing circumstances. Evidenced by the Inspectorate of Government report 2015, the Judiciary was ranked the second most corrupt institution after Police. More still, the East African Bribery Index 2014, revealed that corruption in the Judiciary soared from 27.9% in 2013 to 39.8% that year. Additionally, the Afro-Barometer report (2016), re-affirmed that perceptions of corruption in the judiciary increased.

The media should be applauded for its supportive role of investigating



corruption in public institutions like the judiciary. However, we still need to train investigative journalists on how to track and expose more corruption scandals in the judicial system that act tend to obstruct access justice. We should also commend the efforts undertaken by other key actors in the judicial corruption fight. The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) although still under-funded has been critical in ensuring sanity in the judicial system. Imperative to note is that collaborations between JSC and the like-minded Civil Society Organizations still need to be strengthened in order to harness synergies.

With support from the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), the Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET) is undertaking a corruption monitoring project in the justice sector. In addition to its previous efforts of promoting access to justice for the poor and marginalized, LASPNET's intervention is aimed at supporting the implementation of the Justice Law & Order Sector (JLOS) Anti-Corruption Strategy. The rationale of the strategy is to detect, investigate and adjudicate corruption within the 18 JLOS institutions, including the judiciary. Under this project, LASPNET will train and deploy monitors and whistleblowers to track corruption and also document best practices in the justice system.

By and large, we need to further engage the public in the fight against judicial corruption. More awareness civic campaigns need to be supported in order to enlighten people on how and where to report judicial corruption. Only when zero tolerance to judicial corruption is achieved will access to justice for the poor and marginalized be attained ●



TRIAL ADVOCACY SKILLS RE-AWAKEN LEGAL AID LAWYERS' PASSION FOR LITIGATION

By Jamidah Namuyanja

Willy Atono slowly but surely gets off his seat and edges towards the center of the room with his arms folded from behind. He signals his assistant not to get up as he needs no support to move around. Dressed well in a black suit, unbuttoned to reveal a mid-length black tie against a white shirt, he breaks into a brief smile before addressing the audience of over thirty legal aid lawyers.

An advocate with the National Union for Disabled Persons in Uganda (NUDIPU), stationed in Lira district in northern Uganda, Willy has defied the odds to practice litigation on behalf of the poor and vulnerable despite being visually impaired. Drawing inspiration to serve from a Local Council Chairperson whom he says solved everyone's problems in the community he grew up in, Willy is yet another testimony that disability is not inability.

"Given my disability, I've over the years endured condescending comments from fellow advocates and judges telling me to stick to small claims and clerk duties. After this training, nothing and no one can stop me from doing litigation. We can all be ambassadors of change and cause a paradigm shift in Uganda's legal practice", he says passionately. This is during an evaluation session at the end of a weeklong trial advocacy training for legal aid lawyers organized by LASPNET and Justice Advocacy Africa.

According to the Uganda Law Society, there are over 2000 practicing lawyers registered in Uganda but not all of them are doing court advocacy. Some are employed in different areas of the economy such NGOs, corporations among

others. Trial advocacy skills have been identified as a capacity gap amongst most advocates that are employed in the legal aid sector.

LASPNET's current strategic plan (2015-2020) under its third strategic objective seeks to enhance its contribution towards developing the professional standards of its members to deliver quality legal aid services to benefit all especially the vulnerable and marginalized. It was against this background that LASPNET in collaboration with Justice Advocacy Africa (JAA) with support from Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) convened the 4th Trial Advocacy Training at the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) Headquarters in Nakawa.

Held between 23rd to 27th January 2017 the training aimed at building the advocates' capacity to be better lawyers, provide better services and build a trustworthy judicial system. Through briefings, interactions and courtroom recreation, the participants were equipped to improve aspects like audibility, fact checking and other mannerisms pertinent to helping the court to reach an enlightened and just result.

Speaking at the sidelines of the training, Steve Fury the President, Justice Advocacy Africa explained that they work with local organizations in several African countries to sponsor trial advocacy trainings for lawyers by giving them the confidence to ably represent their clients. He commended the partnership with



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LASPNET in supporting legal aid lawyers improve their litigation capacities to promote access to justice. He further encouraged the advocates not to look at a trial like a battle because then they give their opponent so much power, rather they should see themselves as guides whose responsibility is to lead the court to a truthful verdict.

Helene Namisi, a faculty member as well as an advocate in Kenya with 13 years' experience shared that she had been part of the JAA faculty for over three years and would encourage all advocates to partake in the training because the skill imparted ensure better representation of clients in court. She said her satisfaction at giving this free service was derived from seeing students transformed into better litigators.

The Chief Guest, Ms. Margaret Sekaggya, the Executive Director of Human Rights Center Uganda, encouraged the advocates to follow their passion, not the money. She summed it up by saying that it pays to give one's best, before issuing certificates to those who had fully attended the training ●

Voices from other Trainees;

**Susan Achen - UGANET,
Namutumba District:**



"Many times our clients are not best served through court representation so as legal aid lawyers, we forget how to conduct ourselves in court. I have had to unlearn a number of things that would not be helpful in winning a case."

**Bruna Acham - Uganda Law Society,
Moroto District:**



"Thank you LASPNET, I'm now set for higher standards. Working in a remote region like Karamoja is challenging given the lack of senior advocates to consult even when one makes a mistake. I look forward to training my peers and sharing my new found knowledge."



Participants engage in a presentation during the training.

PROJECT PARTNERS WANT MOBILE COURT SESSIONS FOR LWENGO DISTRICT

justice for the people of Lwengo.

However not all is lost. With support from Democratic Governance Facility, a consortium of partners who include; LASPNET, FIDA-Uganda and Barefoot Law launched a pilot legal aid project in Lwengo district in September 2016. The legal aid project envisages extending legal aid to the people of Lwengo. It is implemented through a public/private partnership upon which project partners will initially provide funding and technical support for provision of legal aid services. On the other hand, the district will initiate and enlist Local Government ownership of legal aid service delivery in partnership with the people of Lwengo through initiatives like; including legal aid in the district budget votes, crowd-sourcing model from residents of the district, among others. Depending on its successful implementation, partner organizations hope to cascade this pilot project to other LGs.



Mr. Mutabaazi speaking during the meeting with Justice Keitirima.



Project partners with Justice Keitirima (in specs) after the meeting.

Limited court structures is one of the barriers to accessing justice in most rural areas in Uganda and at times existing magisterial courts are in such a sorry state discouraging the dispensers of justice from doing their work. Lwengo a new district which was curved out of Masaka is no exception to this scenario.

Recent media reports pointed to the district having the worst court structures in the country in reference to the grade one magistrate's court that was infested with bedbugs and leaks whenever it rains. These along with high numbers of case backlog and corruption tendencies have continuously curtailed access to

On Tuesday, 21st February 2017, the partners met with the Masaka Resident Judge, Justice John Eudes Keitirima and his Deputy Registrar, Her Worship Beatrice Stella Atingu in the Judge's chambers. The meeting was convened to deliberate on how to close the gaps in access to justice and as well fast track implementation of the project activities.

In her presentation to the judge on behalf of the partners, Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, the Executive Director LASPNET asked for mobile court sessions for Lwengo among other things in order to improve access to justice for the citizens. Her suggestions included the following:

- To reduce on case backlog and address the challenge of lack of transport, we suggest that the RCC/ DCC considers designating visiting Judicial officers, especially Chief Magistrate and Grade one with a State Attorney on particular days of the month to conduct hearings in Lwengo . The Lwengo Project consortium will provide lawyers.



- We request that the DCC/RCC takes particular interest in the reported corrupt officers under their docket and ensure such complaints are handled and or even take administrative measures to avert the damage.
- That the working environment of the judicial officer is improved to ease her work. The premises were reported to be infested with bedbugs and leaking whenever it rains.
- That the cases meant to be heard in Lwengo but are brought to Masaka be referred back. Some individuals rush to file cases in Masaka because they have court clerks with whom they connive to have them heard faster than those earlier reported

Justice Keitirima noted that the demand for justice is high yet access is limited and therefore interventions like the Lwengo project can help reduce case backlog and should be supported. He expressed willingness to participate in the mobile court sessions for Lwengo and committed to discuss the matter with the Chief Magistrate to make the necessary arrangements.

Mr. George Mutabaazi the District Chairperson Lwengo shared that the district had identified an acre of land for the court structure something that was made easy by the good reviews of the Lwengo project. He acknowledged the positive changes so far so since the project started, noting that there was improved trust in the judicial system. He also appealed to partners to increase sensitization and awareness creation so as to eradicate the concept that “the poor cannot win cases” and remove mistrust by the people ●

WHY LEGAL AID SERVICES ARE STILL VITAL IN UGANDA

Jackie Katuramu,
Legal Vounteer - LASPNET



In a democratic society, all citizens have a right to access justice. Justice in this regard implies a sense of equality for all regardless of gender and level of income among others. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that Heads of State and Governments adopted in 2015 at the United Nations places access to justice as a global objective. It is firmly established under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 as: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Target 16.3 under SDG 16 calls to: Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all. It therefore acknowledges that access to justice, is an essential ingredient of sustainable development.

Access to justice arises from barriers faced by individuals who have a legal right they

want to enforce and without help these people are unable to resolve barriers such as the increasing costs of legal services and the struggle to understand their legal rights. It is for these reasons, among others, that legal aid for the poor has been advanced. These individuals need the influence of legal aid and the services legal aid provides to place them on an equal footing with the rest of the population.

Regulation 4 of the Uganda Advocates (Legal Aid to Indigent Persons) Regulations, 2007 defines legal aid as, “the provision of legal advice or representation by a lawyer, an advocate or a paralegal, as the case may be, to a client at no cost or at a very minimal cost”.

Uganda has ratified the *United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966* treaty and it is incorporated into Ugandan law. The treaty provides for the “right to a fair and public hearing through legal assistance” in the “interests of justice”. Further, Uganda’s 1995 Constitution makes several proclamations regarding equal access to justice. Article 21(a) thereof states that all persons are equal before and under the law in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life and in every other respect and shall enjoy equal protection of the law. Article 28(1) states that “in the determination of civil rights and obligations or any criminal charge, a person shall be entitled to a fair, speedy and public hearing before an independent and impartial court or tribunal established by law.” Article 126(2) (a) provides that in the adjudication of civil and criminal cases, the courts shall administer justice to all “irrespective of their social and economic status.”

“ Article 28(1) states that “in the determination of civil rights and obligations or any criminal charge, a person shall be entitled to a fair, speedy and public hearing before an independent and impartial court or tribunal established by law.”





Anthony Asimwe (standing) a Legal Officer with Legal Aid Project of Uganda Law Society in Jinja addresses prisoners at Kirinya Prison during a legal rapid response visit conducted by LASPNET in November 2016.

By providing representation and individual legal advice, legal aid provides people who have an insufficient income to afford legal advice and representation. Further, it assists individuals who are intimidated by the legal system. There are also those who may be geographically isolated from proper legal advice and representation. Legal aid therefore mitigates some of the entrenched inequalities in regards to access to justice.

In Uganda, the service is provided by both the state (through the state brief system, Justice Centers Uganda, and Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC)) and non-state actors (Non-Governmental organizations and Civil Society Organizations). Under State Briefs, the Ministry of Justice sends out invitations to practicing Advocates requiring them to represent indigent criminals at a modest fee provided by the State.

Advocates engaged to work in the State Briefs System receive less pay

than the fees that are paid in private practice. This therefore means that the State Brief System relies on the willingness of Ugandan advocates to deliver their services at lower than normal rates. Unfortunately, many advocates compensate for their lower pay by providing sub-standard services. This makes the part played by non-state actors such as NGOs and Civil Society Organizations very crucial.

In line with the 2030 Agenda and in particular Goal 16, Civil Society Organizations and NGOs such as Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET) have continued to advocate for legal aid service delivery and access to justice for the most vulnerable and marginalized people. Unfortunately, most of these efforts are donor funded which limits their sustainability.

LASPNET believes that access to justice, is an essential ingredient of sustainable development. Therefore, in order to achieve goal 16, government must address the emerging matter of rampant

land grabbing where the vulnerable and poor continue to lose their land in hands of the rich and powerful resulting from gaps in the land laws. During their 7th annual general meeting held on 28th October 2016, Legal Aid Service Providers noted that the best way to ensure the interests of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized are included is through involving them in the land amendment process. The discourse on land therefore should not be left to experts alone but involve all stakeholders affected by the emerging changes.

This means that legal aid services remain key to effectively address the legal any injustices faced by the indigent to ensure that they are taken care of despite their circumstances. Government should therefore jointly work with NGOs share the responsibility of supporting the indigent to access justice and also fast track the passing of the National Legal Aid Policy and Bill to ease the work of LASPs. After all, Uganda's Equal Opportunities Commission Act 2007 sets out to ensure equal access of social services for all regardless of social and economic standing, among other rights ●

THE PLIGHT OF THE CHAWENTE COMMUNITY IN APAC DISTRICT

By Daphine Erina Achen



Ms. Jeniffer Achaloj, FGGII Focal Person, Action Aid Uganda listens to a participant during a dialogue on Land held on 12th April 2017 in Lira district.

Land grabbing is a phenomenon that has emerged to render many poor and vulnerable people in Uganda defenseless against the wealthy and powerful. During the height of the insurgency in northern Uganda in 1997, over 400 families and over 1000 people were settled on the land measuring approximately 5 square miles by local leaders of the Chawente, a community in Apac district. These families consisted of rural peasants whose source of livelihood was agriculture. The land in question had been bequeathed to Lango Cooperative Union (LCU) in 1978 by the community members, many of whom were members of the Cooperative under a user agreement mode. When the new government was ushered in 1986, Cooperative Unions were affected and a number of them became non-functional including LCU. The land in question was never put to use again as there was no livestock or activity on it.

By 1997, when the community was being settled on the said land, it was vacant and not in use. The community lived and cultivated the land without disturbance

from Lango Cooperative Union or any other person. In 2011, the community was surprised when LCU sued them for encroaching on their land and demanded they vacate the land. The community challenged the action and the matter is still pending before High Court of Lira. On the 30th of August 2016, to the shock of the community, a notice of eviction was taken to the village which gave the community two days to vacate their land. Indeed, after two days, the community was forcefully evicted by police and some area leaders. They stated that the land had been given to Micro Finance Support Center as a court judgment decree in a suit against LCU. The eviction process was violent, chaotic and a number of human rights abuses including torture, destruction of property and crops were meted out as a way of creating fear and intimidation among the local population. The residents are now scattered in different places of Lango where they have run for shelter. Some of them are renting in town or living with relatives with no food or source of livelihood.

With support from Action Aid Uganda, LASPNET under the FGGII project managed to support the victims by identifying an advocate to represent the affected community to ensure they access justice. The Fair Green Global project II aims to build community resilience to engage and hold the State, business firms and corporations accountable for their actions to ensure citizens enjoy their rights to a life of dignity. Particularly, LASPNET's interventions focus on promoting responsible corporate and state investment practices for respect, promotion and fulfillment of rights of communities (men, youth, and women) to land.

In providing legal representations to the victims in the Chawente case, LASPNET would like to see them restored back onto their land while others compensated in a manner commensurate to their loss. The next hearing date for the objector proceedings in 24th May 2017 in Lira High Court ●

LASPS VALIDATE KEY DOCUMENTS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

On the 28th February 2017, selected LASPs, JLOS representatives and development partners met at Piato Restaurant to validate a draft report and indicators to monitor the state of Access to Justice in Uganda before it is launched and disseminated to stakeholders. The aim of the validation was to create ownership of the draft indicators and monitoring tool.

Speaking to the notion of access to Justice, Ms. Lydia Namuli noted that the principle of access to justice is an old-age concept that dates back to 1948 and has been anchored in all human rights instruments and domesticated in the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. She emphasized that legal representation is an extremely important aspect in access to justice as it acts a bridge between the claimant/holder of the rights and the duty bearers as well as introducing them to the users of justice system.

Courts have pronounced themselves on the notion of access to justice in the case of *Okenyo Omwansa George & another v Attorney General & 2 others [2012] eKLR*. Therefore, for access to justice to prevail when there are laws that offer rights and entitlements, coupled with the knowledge of such rights, prevalence of access to mechanisms to enforce and protect the rights through legal and judicial services in a timely and fair manner.

The validation meeting was participatory and some of the proposals raised by the participant were incorporated by the Consultant. These included; more focus should

be on equity rather than equality in relation to access to justice, collective approach within the judiciary and LASPs, structures should be included in the parameters that measure access to justice and the report should replicate some of the works and best practices of LASPs to reflect a better picture of the status of access to justice in Uganda. These efforts apparently are a result of LASPNET's involvement and direct contribution to enhancing access to justice especially to the most vulnerable and marginalized persons in society.

Prior to that, on 23rd February 2017 at the same venue, LASPs validated the LASPNET Advocacy Strategy. The document will guide the development and implementation of campaign plans that will lead to steady reforms; bring out the voices of those affected to create a movement of people affected to cause change and strengthen LASPS and LASPNET's strategic capacities for effective advocacy.

Speaking during the validation meeting, Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa the Executive Director LASPNET acknowledged that the Network's interventions had been adhoc hence the need to make them more systematic and demand driven. She shared that LASPNET had solicited support from local governments through the Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA) and would bench mark lessons from the Lwengo pilot legal aid project. "We want to ensure that what we began 9 years ago is realized", she concluded ●

UYDEL LAUNCHES COLLECTION OF TALES FROM CHILDREN ON SURVIVING PROSTITUTION



Children are the most vulnerable in our societies and are highly at risk of labour exploitation, Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSEC) and trafficking. Although some gross violation is reported in the media, to police and other authorities, many more cases of child abuse are not reported at all due to such factors as remoteness of hard to reach areas, ignorance of the population about opportunities for redress and weak child protection structures. Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) works to empower disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalized street and slum youth with social cognitive life skills that will enable them to reach their full potential. They provide skills such as knitting, metal fabrication, hair dressing and sewing after which they are given certificates to enable them earn a living, through music, dance and drama plus sports and in some instances, they have to provide shelter.

In their quest to continuously document the plight of vulnerable youth and children, UYDEL on 16th March 2017 launched "Raw Testimonies, No More, No Less," a book containing a collection of tales from 16 children around Eastern Africa on surviving prostitution.

Mr Rogers Kasirye, the Executive Director UYDEL explained that the book presented stories and testimonies from children affected by sexual exploitation in the select East African Countries of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Madagascar.

Mr. James Kaboggoza the Assistant Commissioner for Children Affairs in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) applauded UYDEL for their contribution towards child protection and for a good working relationship with the ministry. He



noted that 57% of Uganda's population is made of children yet half of them remain vulnerable and face deprivation which is why the ministry was working on a National Child Policy under four pillars of child wellbeing which are; protection, survival, development and participation which they hoped would address the challenges.

The Commissioner also shared that the ministry had just completed a national survey covering all forms of violence against children from which a national plan of action would be developed. He emphasized Government commitment towards protecting children noting that the Children's Act.no.9 had recently been amended with the hope of providing better services for children by putting in place strong sanctions against those who abuse children.

Ms. Anna Nabulya Kavuma, the Project Coordinator applauded the French Embassy and the French Development Agency for the financial support towards realizing the project success. She shared that the book was a product of the Reperes project which started in 2015, aimed at strengthening the protection of children and victims of sexual exploitation in Kampala, Mukono and Wakiso districts. It was said that the project objective is to eradicate all forms of violence against children including physical and sexual exploitation.

Ms. Virginia Leroy from the French Development Agency (AFD) launched the book on behalf of the French Ambassador. She remarked that it was the duty of communities, families, CSOs to help keep children safe and rehabilitate those who are vulnerable, which is why AFD was supporting such projects.

She emphasized how critical it is to train health workers, law enforcers and security officers on issues on child trafficking and sexual exploitation to be able to identify cases and know how to provide support. She commended UYDEL for the effort in documenting such vices to create awareness about them in society and to support advocacy against them ●

A TRAINING OF TRAINERS MONITORING AND EVALUATION MANUAL FOR LASPS

In 2015, LASPNET conducted a Capacity Assessment for LASPs which revealed monitoring and evaluation as a major gap in providing quality legal aid services hence indicating a dire need to develop a training of trainers manual to customize monitoring and evaluation to legal aid work.

As anchored in the third objective of its strategic plan (2015-2020), LASPNET developed an M&E Training of Trainers manual aimed at building the capacity of LASPs in planning, implementation and reporting. The purpose of the manual is to pass on introductory M&E knowledge so that the trainees would extend the same to paralegals, efforts that would reduce on the costs of relying on hired Consultants to do the work.

Following its completion, LASPNET

convened a validation meeting on 24th March 2017 to enable the different LASPs own and input their feedback into the manual. The manual introduces various tools and frameworks used in planning, as well, monitoring and evaluating projects for effective delivery of results. It is embedded with both theoretical and practical approaches to allow program managers use it with much ease.

While presenting the manual to members, Mr. Fortunate Kwiringira who supported its development assured them that the language used is accommodative to all-whether novices or experts in M&E. He noted that most organizations don't prioritize M&E yet it is the driver of all project activities. He therefore advised LASPs to allocate adequate resources and budgets for M&E officers ●



LASPs who attended the Validation of the M&E manual at LASPNET.

LASPNET JOINS CHAIN OF CSOs TO SUFFER OFFICE BREAK-INS

On the morning of 2nd February 2017, the Premises of Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET), off Balintuma road in Mengo were broken into. Two laptops, one belonging to the Executive Director and four camcorders were stolen. A safe was also broken and money taken. The prime suspect, Simon Osire who was the security guard on duty abandoned the gun and his whereabouts remain unknown. This adds LASPNET to the list of over 28 CSOs broken into between 2013 and 2016.

Following the incident, LASPNET released a press statement condemning the cowardly act and calling on security agencies to thoroughly investigate the matter to its logical conclusion and apprehend the culprits.

“We hope this incident at LASPNET will not only add to numbers of break-ins but will be followed through to its logical conclusion. We therefore call on government to step up measures to ensure the safety of NGOs to ease their operations

which are supportive of government efforts in various areas. We request that reports on previous office break-ins are shared with NGOs to prevent us from falling victim to the same vices by unscrupulous individuals”, the statement read in part.

Security agencies, especially those that are privately driven were as well advised to enhance the vetting procedures and supervision of their guards on duty to minimize risks of their clients who are mainly civil society and private sector. This is because human rights organizations just like all institutions need protection and freedom to carry out their mandate and this can only be granted by security agencies.

The support from members, partners and stakeholders who stood in solidarity with the Network during that critical moment was commendable. Some of them included; DPI, HRCU, NCHRD-U, HRNJ-U, Chapter Four Uganda, HRAFP, among others ●



ABOVE: The vandalized safe.



Officials from Defenders Protection Initiative and Human Rights Center Uganda listen to the ED LASPNET explain the break in.



R-L: Ms. Viola Ajen receives her package from the Executive Director, Ms. Sylvia Namubiru as the Finance and Administration Officer, Mr. Geoffrey Lutaya looks on.

STAFF OF THE QUARTER AWARDED

As is the practice, the best staff of January-March 2017 quarter were recognized following an evaluation that was conducted on 4th April 2017. Ms. Daphine Achen, a Volunteer Lawyer emerged the best staff for the period followed by Ms. Viola Ajen and Ms. Jamidah Namuyanja respectively. The evaluation was based on key criteria that included; teamwork, innovation, time management, flexibility, positive attitude and general work performance. The Executive Director encouraged all staff to work hard and ensure to unseat the winners as a sign of improvement. The trio received basic home items packages given that the award ceremony coincided with the Easter break ●

LASPs DISCUSS LAND, ELECT NEW BOARD AT 7TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



Seated (L-R): Hon. Lady Justice Damalie Lwanga, Ms. Theodora Webale, Mr. Samuel Herbert Nsubuga, Hon. Betty Amongi, Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa and other delegates who participated in the Land Justice Conference, in a group photo.



“During my short tenure in this Ministry, I have come to realize that land is the bedrock of our economy. The elite class prefers not to bank their money but to invest it in land, even proceeds from corruption end up invested in land and property”.

Hon. Betty Amongi speaking to delegates during the Conference.

The above words formed part of the opening statement by Hon. Betty Amongi, the Minister for Lands, Housing and Urban Development, who officially opened the LASPNET Pre-AGM Conference on Land Justice for the Poor and Vulnerable. The Conference was held on 28th October 2016 at Hotel Africana prior to the Annual General Meeting held on same date at 2:00 pm.

In her speech the Minister highlighted the key principles on which the land policy is anchored such as; equitable access by all citizens; justice in access to land irrespective of gender, age, sex or disability; effective regulation of land use and development; transparency and accountability. She underscored the importance of Area Land Committees, District Land Boards and Surveyors in ensuring transparency in land governance so that the poor and

vulnerable are not let to suffer at the hands of the wealthy.

In agreement with earlier remarks by the Board Chairperson of LASPNET, Mr. Samuel Herbert Nsubuga, calling on the Minister to add her voice to have the NLAP and bill passed in order to have the poor, vulnerable and economically marginalized access justice, Hon. Amongi said that the NLAP was anchored in the core vision for the implementation of the Land Policy and therefore needed to be fast tracked.

On the proposed amendment of the law on Land acquisition, Hon. Amongi explained that the rationale was to amend Article 26 of the Constitution to add a third clause to anchor the principle that; “when government is interested in land for development purposes or public good with all compensation processes explored but some

people for whatever reason object the value stated by the Chief Government Valuer, then government will deposit the amount that the person has rejected to the Courts of law, a receipt of acknowledgment given and justice takes its course, as government proceeds with infrastructural developments”.

LASPs also noted that much as the issues surrounding land are historical, Government needed to address the emerging matters to help communities whose land was being grabbed through fraudulent means. LASPs also requested to be involved in the Amendment process to ensure that the interests of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized were not left out.

The Minister agreed to the importance and need to advocate for NLAP adding that it is a Constitutional matter to which she undertakes to discuss with the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and the Attorney General regarding fast tracking

it because of its implication on securing land rights. . She also confirmed that illegal titles would be cancelled. **“I need to deliver a public good which is why I seek the support of everyone present on how best to deliver it”**, she concluded.



Participants during the plenary.

As the Conference drew to a close, participants agreed that for the proposed amendments to be effective, they had to be all inclusive and not just in favour of the wealthy minority. They also expressed reservation on its relevancy and thought strengthening

the current legal framework like the Land Act and regulation would be more appropriate. They welcomed the Minister’s commitment to support the call for enactment of the NLAP and agreed as a network to participate in implementation of Land Policy.

Election of new Board and handover of IIMS Mini servers

On the same day, the Network also convened its 7th Annual General Meeting to discuss the annual progress report of the organization and to elect a new Board of Directors.

The progress report highlighted the increased participation of members in the Network’s events, new projects, the various capacity building opportunities for the members, lobbying and advocacy interventions, many of which had generated visibility for LASPNET, like the media campaign calling on government to fast track the enactment of the National Legal Aid Policy, key researches, Legal rapid response during the 2016 National Elections and the peer exchange visits to members, among others.



R-L: Justice Remmy Kasule, Chairperson Uganda Law Council receives an Honorary Membership Award Certificate from Mr. Samuel Herbert Nsubuga, the LASPNET Board Chairperson as Ms. Dora Kiconco, outgoing Member on Merit on the LASPNET Board cheers on.

Members appreciated the outgoing Board and the Secretariat team for a steering the Network to more accountable and visible entity and for implementing the recommendations of the previous AGM.

During the deliberations, Ms. Theodora Webale, a founding member of LASPNET and currently an advisor on access to justice in USAID proposed the use of locally trained Lawyers from within the membership during annual events like the Trial

Advocacy training so as to reduce on the cost of external facilitators.

While discussing the issue of gender representation on the Board, most members agreed that representation should be based on skills and ability to serve regardless of one’s gender.

The AGM also approved as honorary members: Justice Remmy Kasule, the Chairperson of the Uganda Law Council, Ms. Theo Webale, the Access to Justice Advisor, USAID/SAFE and



Mr. Musa Modoi, the Advisor Human Rights and Accountability at JLOS.

LASPs like Uganda Christian Lawyers' Fraternity, War Child Canada, and Foundation for Human Rights Initiative and Platform for Labour Action were awarded certificates of recognition for their outstanding contribution to the Network in areas like utilization and development of the IIMS as well as consistency in attendance, participation, timely feedback and support. 10 LASPs were approved to receive Mini servers while 20 others received backups to facilitate their utilization of IIMS.



L-R: UCLF representative receives a certificate of recognition for IIMS utilization.



Representatives from UPRF receive an IIMS server.

The AGM was crowned off with the democratic election of new Board members reflective of a more gender dynamic organ. Below is the list of new Board representatives:

SN.	NAME	POSITION	ORGANISATION REPRESENTED
1.	Samuel Herbert Nsubuga	Chairperson	ACTV - African Center for Treatment & Rehabilitation of Torture Victims
2.	Sandra Oryema	Vice Chairperson	PILAC - Public Interest Law Clinic
3.	Lydia Namuli Lubega	General Secretary	FIDA - Uganda Federation of Women Lawyers
4.	Anthony Mutimba	Treasurer	HRAPF - Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum
5.	Suzanne Aisia Musooli	Central Region Rep.	UCLF - Uganda Christian Lawyers' Fraternity
6.	Francis Odongyoo	Northern Region Rep.	HURIFO - Human Rights Focus
7.	Fred Kaahwa	Western Region Rep.	AHURIO - Association of Human Rights Organizations in Rwenzori Region
8.	Joseph Mwase	Eastern Region Rep.	KCOBPA - Kamuli Community Based Paralegals Association
9.	Paul Kavuma	Member on Merit	COLAID - Community Legal Action and Integrated Development

LASPNET RECEIVES JLOS RECOGNITION AWARD



R-L: Hon. Kahinda Otafire, Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Hon. Bart Katureebe, Chief Justice of Uganda and Ms. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, Executive Director LASPNET, after receiving the award.

The Justice, Law and Order Sector on October 27 2016 held the 2016 edition of the JLOS Recognition Awards during the 21st Annual JLOS Review conference at Speke Resort Munyonyo. The event that was presided over by the Chief Justice saw LASPNET awarded and recognized for its contribution to the sector under the “Partnership and Networking category. The Executive Director, Ms.Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa received the award on behalf of the Network. LASPNET prides in its collaboration with JLOS and extends appreciation for this recognition ●

MAKING A PLEA FOR LABOUR RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OF HRDs



Labour rights have recently come under scrutiny given a number of incidents where foreign investors as employers have taken Ugandan workers for granted thus exposing them to danger while in the line of duty. The situation has been exacerbated by some government officials taking the side

of investors in the name of protecting investment at the expense of the lives of vulnerable Ugandans, many of whom are women. A case in point is the predicament that befell 82 workers at the Royal Van Zantan Flower firm who were exposed to poisonous chemicals after they were forced to enter a greenhouse within minutes of spraying

it with chemicals. The workers there after experienced symptoms like headaches dizziness, skin and eye irritation, difficulty in breathing abdominal pain and vomiting. Many were hospitalized prompting some of them to contact FIDA- Uganda and the Uganda Horticulture Industrial Service Providers and Allied Workers Union (UHISPAWU) to come to their rescue .The support provided by the two organizations and the subsequent advocacy to get the flower farm take responsibility was however not welcomed by the Trade Minister Hon. Amelia Kyambadde who together with the NOTU Secretary General Mr. Peter Werikhe reignited verbal attacks on the FIDA-U CEO labeling her and the team of human rights defenders, saboteurs of development. The Minister referred to the matter as an isolated incident calling the intervention by HRDs a negative



campaign by self-seeking individuals to put pressure on the flower farms to get out of business.

In light of the above development, LASPNET convened a press conference on 9th November 2016 to condemn the harassment and intimidation of workers and

Human Rights Defenders. Through the media, all relevant institutions were reminded to enforce all national and international laws, as well as protect the human rights of the victimized workers.

In the same vein, the Network stood in solidarity with FIDA-U and UHISPAWU in denouncing

the negligent response from the institutions mandated to protect the interests of workers in the country by urging parliament to pass the Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill in to law ●

HRDs EQUIPPED ON PROTECTION & CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY



HRDs in a land dialogue convened by Action Aid Uganda on 12th April 2017 in Lira district.

The work of Human Rights Defenders often has them pitted against the state and its institutions because it involves protecting the vulnerable from the excesses of rights violators. HRDs are therefore seen as 'saboteurs of development' because their interventions contravene the operations of both state and private.

The United Nation's Declaration on Human Rights Defenders grants support and protection to HRDs in the execution of their work. Though not legally binding itself, the declaration contains human rights

based on other universal principles that are legally binding such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Some of the National laws that guarantee protection for HRDs include; Chapter Four of the 1995 Constitution under the Bill of Rights (articles 20-45) and the Equal Opportunities Act, 2007. Civil Society activists and HRDs have been pushing for the passing of the draft Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill 2016, to enhance protection for HRDs, however the 10th Parliament hitherto has not responded positively.

Despite the different laws, organs and

policies in place, HRDs continue to face a myriad of challenges including death threats, harassment, torture, beatings, killings, restriction on their freedom of movement and expression among others. In light of the above scenario, LASPNET under Action Aid funded the Fair Green and Global (FGG) II, organized a training for HRDs to equip them with relevant skills, knowledge on how to defend themselves, and the marginalized during violation of rights as well share regional experiences on their operating environment so as to raise solutions on how to improve Corporate accountability. The training held in November 2016 attracted HRDs from LASPs, Trade Unions, Public and

Private Institutions.

The highly interactive training highlighted the challenges and gaps in the restrictive laws that hinder an enabling environment for HRDs to operate, sharing human rights violation experiences and laying strategies on how to address them.

The concept of corporate accountability was also introduced and the ensuing dialogue exposed how little knowledge there was on the subject, with many confusing it with corporate social responsibility. The subject delved into global conditions such; Corporate capture where the state is taken control over by private companies; Deepening inequality between the poor and the rich; Impoverishment and dispossession of the already poor; Repression of the marginalized by the state; and Community manipulation by private companies that fill the gap left by government in social services provision. These and many more enlightened participants on corporate accountability but left them yearning for more given that the issues form part of HRDs daily work in supporting, protecting and standing for the vulnerable. A further training specifically focusing on the subject was recommended for LASPNET's consideration.

Other recommendations included;

- More proactive response to the plight of HRDs by the National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders-Uganda.
- Improved documentation and statistics on facts about injustices and rights violations to support advocacy.
- Awareness creation and continuous sensitization of all stakeholders regarding their roles and responsibilities to enhance corporate accountability.
- HRDs to have full knowledge on national, regional and international laws that guarantee their protection.
- Government should embark on legislative reforms based on consultations with civil society organizations to ensure that the country meets international human rights standards.

The training was facilitated by experts from Human Rights Center Uganda (HRCU) which is spearheading advocacy on the passing of the HRD Protection Bill and the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability a civil society consortium aimed at enhancing accountability by corporations, states, international finance institutions and development partners for violations or abuses of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCRs) ●

GROWING AND GIVING BACK TO MY COUNTRY THROUGH LASPNET

Daphine Erina Achen
Volunteer Lawyer, 2016-2017



Volunteering can be an incredibly transformative experience. I know this because I have recently had the rare opportunity to volunteer for Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET). It is difficult to find the words to describe just how impactful this experience has been on my personal and professional development.

I chose to leave my private-sector job in Nairobi to volunteer at a time in my life when I felt uncertain and indecisive about my future career path. After graduating from the BAR course in Nairobi, I thought I knew exactly what I wanted to do. However, I was unhappily awakened to the reality of that career choice once immersed within it. I changed directions several times and found myself in need of perspective and the skills to pave a more purposeful path for my professional roadmap. I wanted to do something tangible and impactful on the community, more so for the indigent people in Uganda. I wanted to use my skills

to make a difference in the lives of others. I did some research and zeroed in on an organization whose mission is to “provide a platform for effective networking and collaboration to enhance legal aid service delivery and access to justice for the most vulnerable and marginalized people”.

The staff of LASPNET opened their lives, experiences, and hearts to me and made me feel welcome and needed. The team's unbelievable energy, unwavering passion to serve, joyful smiles, deep sense of curiosity and great enthusiasm taught me lessons in fortitude, passion, and empathy. The team's resilience, professionalism, and determination to create better lives for the poor and marginalized people sparked in me a real curiosity for the power of social responsibility to give back to the community.

Regardless of where you are in your career, giving time, energy, and skills to help others can provide an unparalleled, transformative experience. From building new skills in emerging legal aid service provision, to practicing your leadership and management abilities, gaining perspective and direction, LASPNET can provide the momentum and opportunity needed to pursue professional and personal growth ●

PICTORIAL



Ms. Charity Ahumaza, Refugee Law Project makes a point during the Validation of the LASPNET Advocacy Strategy in February 2017.



LASPs and partners who attended the validation meeting for the access to justice indicators held on 28th February 2017.



Mr. Patrick Macho, CJAF Executive Director speaks during the meeting to validate corruption Indicators in February 2017.



LASPs provide legal advice to prisoners in Kirinya Prison Jinja in November 2016.



HRDs who participated in the training on Protection and Corporate Accountability held in November 2016.



Legal Aid advocates in a session during the Trail Advocacy Training held in January 2017.

UPCOMING EVENTS

EVENT	DATE
Training on Security Management for Human Rights Defenders	18 th May 2017 at UNAFRI in Nakawa
Training on new functionalities of the Integrated Information Management System (IIMS)	25 th and 26 th May 2017 in Kampala
Validation of the Whistleblowers manual	30 th May 2017
Training and deploying of whistle blowers under the support to anti-corruption in JLOS project	June 2017
Board Committee Meetings	19 th -23 rd June 2017
Sensitization of LASPs on mandate of Equal Opportunities Commission	22 nd June 2017 in Kampala
Validation of the Paralegal training manual	June 2017
Inaugural Legal Aid Innovations Conference organized by LASPNET and Barefoot Law with support from DGF	7 th and 8 th September 2017
Access to Justice Conference and Annual General Meeting	26 th -27 th October 2017