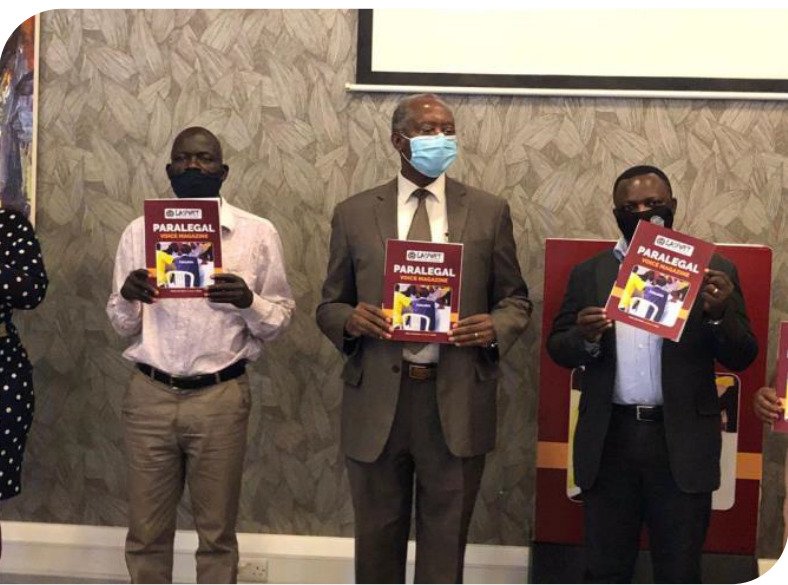




LASPNET
LEGAL AID SERVICE PROVIDERS' NETWORK

LASPNET BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

PERIOD: JULY-DECEMBER 2020



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER: DR. SYLVIA. N. MUKASA



Happy 2021 our dear esteemed Members, Stakeholders and Development partners! I am glad to present to you the LASPNET bi-annual Newsletter for the period July-December 2020.

During the reporting period, the Network undertook several interventions which contributed towards upholding Rule of Law and Access to Justice for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized persons in Uganda. These interventions were clustered under four (4) thematic areas of Research and Knowledge Management, Lobby and Advocacy, Networking and Partnership as well as Institutional Development and strengthening.

At the centre of our interventions was a myriad of innovations established to enhance Access to Justice for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized

especially amidst the COVID 19 pandemic. These included the Situation room aimed at responding to emergency social, economic and civil rights violations and the Social Web Application to provide on spot legal aid advice, counselling and referrals to clients with legal problems among others.

Despite the notable challenges encountered in 2021 specifically the COVID 19 pandemic, the Network remained afloat. While the pandemic is here to stay, I urge all Legal Aid Service Providers, to adapt to the “new normal” and embrace technology as a tool for facilitating service delivery. It cannot go without mention that the reporting period has also been characterized by grave human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions and enforced detention especially during the run up to the 2021 elections. Human Rights Defenders too fell victim to the escalating human rights violations an indication of the shrinking civic space. One prominent such arrests was that of renowned HRD Nicholas Opiyo and others who were charged with anti-money laundering. Amidst all the shrinking operating environment, it is worth noting that our Legal Rapid Response Lawyers have been very instrumental in responding to these human rights violations

and working tirelessly to ensure that victims of these violations access justice.

As a Network, we are committed to maximize all opportunities relevant to the promotion of Human Rights, Access to Justice and Rule of Law. In that regard, this year we shall continue advocating for the passing of the National Legal Aid Bill 2020 by the 11th Parliament which has already been gazetted for 1st reading. We shall also undertake the evaluation of our Strategic Plan (2015/2020) to assess our performance which will in turn inform the development of the next Strategic Plan (2021/2025).

In the preceding year specifically on 23rd October 2020, LASPNET bid farewell to the Board of Directors led by Ms. Sandra Oryema, the Legal Aid Manager of Public Interest Law Clinic (PILAC) and ushered in a new Board of Directors under the stewardship of Advocate Arthur Nsereko, the Coordinator of Network of Public Interest Lawyers (NETPIL). We are eager to learn and benefit from their leadership.

By and large, LASPNET remains heavily indebted to the Board of Directors for their oversight function, the Membership for the trust and confidence and the Secretariat team for their tireless efforts in fostering the vision and mission.

1.0 LOBBY AND ADVOCACY ENGAGEMENTS

L ASPNET under its lobby and advocacy thematic area has been able to respond to various access to justice; human rights and rule of law issues in the country through Rapid Response; Media engagements, advocating for the enactment of the Legal Aid Bill among others.

1.1 HRDS AND ADVOCATES HOLD A DIALOGUE AHEAD OF THE 2021 GENERAL ELECTIONS

On 11th September 2020, LASPNET with support from DGF convened the National Consultative Meeting on elections for Human Rights Defenders and Advocates at Hotel Africana. The dialogue was organised to provide room for a dialogue about passed experiences and how to mitigate the attacks made on HRDs and Lawyers during elections. Key dignitaries that graced the dialogue were Dr. Miria Matemba – Chairperson CCEDU and Keynote Speaker, Mr. Stephen Tashobya- Commissioner at the Electoral Commission, Mr. Robert Kirenga, the Executive Director of National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders; Dr. Adrian Jjuuko, Executive Director HRAPF, Mr. Eron Kiiza, an HRD and Advocate, Ms. Perry Aritua, Counsel Peter Magelah, LASPs representatives and moderated by Ms. Charity Ahimbisibwe.

Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, the CEO of LASPNET made a presentation taking stock of experiences of the 2016 election and explained to participants how the Legal Rapid response intervention was well coordinated to support HRDs and Activists ahead of the 2021 elections. The Key Note Speaker, Dr, Miria Matembe on the other hand was concerned about the diminishing democratization processes in Uganda and attributed the current state of affairs to the constitutional amendment of Art 102 which opened floodgates to life Presidency. She notably called upon Lawyers to remain vigilant and proactive in responding to human rights violations anticipated to arise during the 2021 general elections.

The panelists while digesting the past and current events seemed to agree with the status quo on escalating violations of rights of HRDs and called for multi-pronged strategies to ensure safety of HRDs which include working in coalitions; minding personal security and wellness. The dialogue was closed by Commissioner Stephen Tashobya who commended LASPNET for its visibility and steadfastness in promoting access to justice and human rights in Uganda. He called upon the Network to seek accreditation status from the Electoral Commission in order to participate in the election observation mission.



A group photo of the participants at the Dialogue on General Elections held on 11th September 2020

1.2 THE LEGAL AID BILL 2020: A RAY OF HOPE FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

On 24th September 2020, Hon. Lyandro Komakech Member of Parliament for Gulu Municipality was granted leave to introduce the National Legal Aid Bill (2020) for first reading on the floor of Parliament. This was a very big milestone in the process of enactment of the law that has been in the shelf for a very long time. LASPNET with support from the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) and UNDP has been pivotal in advocating for the enactment of this Legal Aid Law and advocacy journey that has spilled over 12 years.

This was preceded by a meeting between the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga, LASPNET, Greater North Parliamentary Forum and the Members of the Legal Aid National Working Technical Committee on 11th



L-R Meeting with the Hon. Speaker of Parliament while on the Right Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa (CEO LASPNET) and Mr. Aaron Besigye (Coordinator JCU) during a TV Talk show on Legal Aid.

Other advocacy efforts by LASPNET towards the enactment of the Legal Aid Law included a social media campaign and tweeter chat under the hashtag #Passthelegalaidlaw, TV and Radio talk shows with our strategic partners.

1.3 HUMAN RIGHTS, RULE OF LAW AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR THE VULNERABLE AND VOICELESS AMPLIFIED THROUGH MEDIA ADVOCACY

LASPNET has continued to leverage advocacy as a tool for reforms in the areas of access to justice; rule of law and human rights. Amidst the ever-shrinking operating environment characterized by gross human rights violations and abuses, LASPNET has remained alive to releasing of position papers; media briefs



September 2020. The team briefed the Speaker of Parliament on the on-going efforts to pass the Legal Aid Law. They also handed over the signed petitions by Ugandans across the country calling on the Government to Fastrack the enactment of the Legal Aid Bill which will increase access to Legal Services for the poor, vulnerable and Marginalised. The Speaker emphasized the need for the Legal Aid Law and instructed the mover to go ahead and present it on the floor of Parliament.



and press statements. Therefore, during the reporting period, LASPNET released a total of 4 petitions and press statements on Access to Justice; Human Rights and Rule of Law. These include the following:

- On 16th July 2020, LASPNET issued a press statement condemning the continued acts of abuse, torture and violations of human rights by law enforcement agencies following the escalating incidents of torture of victims by the LDUs in the guise of enforcing the presidential directives on COVID 19.
- On 12th November 2020, LASPNET in partnership with its members and the Public Interest Litigation Committee

members who included; HRAPF, ULS, FHRI, NETPIL and Mugisha Advocates petitioned his Excellency, The President of Uganda to appoint a substantive Chairperson for the Uganda Human Rights Commission.

- One (1) Press statement condemning human rights violations and abuses amidst the ongoing elections was developed and disseminated with the media on 20th November 2020. Still,

amidst the ongoing election violence.

- A petition calling upon key national leaders such as Presidential candidates; Heads of Mission; Religious and Cultural leaders to advocate for peace amidst the ongoing elections was developed in partnership with 18 LASPs including HRAPF; FHRI; LDC among others. The petition was read out to the media on 5th December 2020.



Press conferences in motion.

The above press statements and petitions have significantly enabled LASPNET to respond to human rights violations and abuses in the country. In other instances, the recommendations from these statements have been taken on by the duty bearers for instance the withdrawal of LDUs from the streets to undergo refresher training as well as the increased calls for peace during the 2021 elections was a result of LASPNET's advocacy efforts in form of press statements and petitions.

1.4 LASPNET ADOPTS BICYCLE LAWYERING CONCEPT DURING COVID 19 LOCK DOWN

LASPNET has continued to respond to human rights violations through the Rapid Response Lawyers. These lawyers are responsible for making grassroots follow ups on detention facilities to counsel and ensure rights of all including inmates are protected while documenting the existing human rights violations for advocacy purposes. The Lawyers were very instrumental in responding to human rights violations during the COVID-19 lockdown irrespective of the challenges they faced in accessing their clients

since all other means of transport except bicycles were brought to a standstill. In order to remedy this challenge, LASPNET with support from DGF initiated the concept of "Bicycle Lawyering" where the lawyers were facilitated with bicycles on 8th August 2020. The bicycles were intended to ease their movement and downplay the narrative that lawyers are unapproachable.

In her remarks, LASPNET General Secretary then, Ms. Sheila Muwanga stated that the rationale of providing Lawyers with bicycles was to change the society perception of lawyers and also bring Legal services nearer to the poor and the vulnerable in the society.



Ms. Shiela Muwanga (LASPNET General Secretary) hands over bicycles to the Legal Rapid Response Lawyers

1.5 LASPNET SITUATIONAL ROOM CHANGING LIVES IN COMMUNITIES DURING THE COVID19 ERA

LASPNET with support from DGF established the Situation room as an innovation to respond to Civil, Political, Social and Economic rights violations amidst the COVID19 period. Some of the beneficiaries supported by this facility include the teachers in Kasangati who had not received payment from their employers. These reached out to LASPNET for food aid. In responding to this call, the Situation Room reached out to Haba Haba Food Bank an organisation based in Najjeera for food relief on 20th September 2020. Haba Haba responded to the request and delivered an assortment of food stuffs that was distributed amongst 50 teachers in Kasangati.

The organisation has since then made periodic



The Situation Room Coordinators sorting out the food items and a client after receiving food donated by Haba Haba

food donations for the poor vulnerable and marginalised through the LASPNET situation room. With this, the situation room continues to fulfil its mandate of providing a holistic and immediate response to social, economic, political and civil rights violations.

1.6 UNDP CONTRIBUTES TO THE EXTENSION OF CALL CENTRE TO PROVIDE MOBILE LEGAL SUPPORT SERVICES TO GBV SURVIVORS

In December 2019, LASPNET with funding from DGF established a Call Centre to provide fast responder legal aid services to the poor and vulnerable. The facility has so far handled over 1,487 cases ranging from Land, Domestic Violence, criminal among others. The call center receives cases nationwide and is operated by student lawyers from Makerere University, Uganda Christian University and LDC who receive calls and refer the clients to the nearest service

providers such as Police; UHRC and LASPs. Building on the DGF Call Centre, LASPNET with funding from UN Spotlight Initiative launched a GBV Toll Free line on 4th December 2020 which is an innovative tool established as a timely and responsive mechanism to enable women and girls to report GBV cases and other legal related problems on succession and property most of which were exacerbated by the COVID 19 lockdown. This Toll-free line largely focuses on the Spotlight districts of Kampala; Arua; Amudat; Tororo; Kyegegwa among others. The facility will help to break the barriers that exist in society and as a result impede women from speaking out or reporting issues that affect them.



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Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls

2.0 NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT

2.1. PARALEGALS CONVENED TO DISCUSS THEIR ROLE IN PROMOTION OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND RULE OF LAW IN COMMUNITIES

On 28th August 2020, at Mestil Hotel Kampala, LASPNET with funding from DGF convened a National dialogue for community-based paralegals under the theme: *“Situating the Role of Community-based Paralegals in enhancing Access to Justice for the Poor, Vulnerable and Marginalized in Uganda,”* The dialogue was attended by a total of 70 delegates from National and East African region and was a hybrid event which provided for physical and virtual participation. The event provided a platform to community paralegals to share their experiences in promoting access to justice and human rights amidst the COVID 19 pandemic. LASPNET also leveraged on this dialogue to launch its Paralegal Voice Magazine which showcases paralegal stories in the various communities in line with promoting access to justice and human rights. The launch was conducted by the Chief Guest, Hon. Justice Martin Stephen Egonda Ntende.



A group photo of the participants at the Dialogue

In her opening remarks Dr Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, the CEO of LASPNET underscored the fact that the role of community paralegals remains paramount in the justice chain. On that note, she called upon the Law Council to fast track the paralegal regulations to ensure that also community paralegals are formally recognized. Mr. Anders Bastholm, the Program and learning manager DGF, similarly commended paralegals for having been handy during the lockdown when majority of the LASPs were closed. He pitched

for rolling out more capacity building initiatives for paralegals including equipping them with reference materials such as manuals in order to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

The Chief Guest, Hon. Justice Martin Stephen Egonda Ntende also the Chairperson Law Council appreciated LASPNET for recognizing paralegal work and encouraged paralegals to continue executing their duties. He however cautioned them not to compromise the standards and, on that note, called upon development partners to support capacity building trainings for community paralegals. The key note speech was delivered by Ms Aimie Ongeso, Senior Global Network Officer-Namati. It focused on *“Taking the course of nurturing the Paralegalism in Uganda; Benchmarking other jurisdictions with strong paralegal movements in Africa.”* In her elaborate speech she alluded to the fact that there is very little existing research on the factors that shape paralegal work and the way paralegals interact in political and social contexts. She therefore encouraged more documentation of paralegals stories. Finally, she noted that the major challenge faced by paralegals is financing which greatly affects their resilience hence calling upon for adoption of local financing strategies.

The dialogue also featured notable panelists who included among others Ms. Kyomugisha Evaline from MIFUMI; Ms. Elizabeth Kemigisha representative from FIDA-U, Assistant Commissioner of Police Anatoli Muleterwa and Mr. Iya Israel a community Paralegal. Key recommendations from the dialogue included; the need to establish an umbrella body to advocate for the rights of the paralegals and where all the paralegals can express their challenges as well as providing for enabling laws which out rightly detail the roles and obligations of paralegals. In his closing remarks, Mr. Felix Kyalo Country Director of IDLO Uganda pointed out that paralegals are very instrumental in delivering justice to the poor and vulnerable communities where they live because they can easily be accessed by people with legal problems. He concluded by noting that IDLO was committed to support capacity building initiatives for paralegals in Uganda.

2.2 LWENGO COST-EFFECTIVE LEGAL AID MODEL EXTENDED TO OMORO DISTRICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA

LASPNET together with its partners, Muslim Centre for Justice and Law, (MCJL) Uganda Christian Lawyers Fraternity, (UCLF) and Uganda Local Government Association, (ULGA) on 2nd September 2020 launched the Cost-Effective Legal Aid model in Omoro District. The launch was officiated by Her Worship Christine Turibamwe, the Grade One Magistrate of Gulu district with attendance by the Omoro top district leadership who included the LCV Chairperson; District Speaker and Deputy CAO.



Participants pose for a group photo at the launch of the Cost-Effective Legal Aid Model in Lwengo.

Ms. Acen Florence, the Deputy CAO of Omoro District expressed gratitude to LASPNET and its partners for choosing Omoro district to benefit from the Cost-effective Legal Aid model. She noted that Omoro is one of the districts in Northern Uganda with enormous access to justice challenges stemming from absence of Courts of Law; domestic violence cases exacerbated by ignorance of the law among the population. Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, the CEO of LASPNET in her introductory remarks explained that the initiative was intended to bring justice closer to the people of Omoro district. Making reference to the Lwengo Legal Aid model, she shared the success stories of where the district leadership was able to avail office space to FIDA Uganda to establish a Legal Aid Clinic in addition to earmarking resources for Legal Aid Service provision within the district budget. She therefore called upon the Omoro district Local Government to emulate the same.

Similarly, the partners in their remarks re-echoed that the intention of the project was to serve the people of Omoro. Mr. Umar Nyanzi, the President of MCJL in particular called upon the district leadership to offer the necessary support including office space for the Legal Aid Clinic while Apostle Osapiri John, the CEO of UCLF applauded Omoro district leadership for the receptiveness and readiness exhibited towards the project noting that legal aid is one of the tools through which communities can be socially and economically empowered.

Mr. Odongo Damasco, the District Speaker of Omoro was convinced that with the establishment of the Omoro Legal Aid Clinic, many societal evils such as domestic violence and land wrangles in Omoro district would appropriately be dealt with. He further promised to move a motion in the Council to provide office space for establishing the Legal Aid Clinic by MCJL. In her remarks, the Chief Guest, Her Worship Christine Turibamwe Magistrate Grade I appreciated LASPNET and its partners and donors for extending legal aid services closer to the people of Omoro. She shared her experience of working in Northern Uganda, where she revealed that majority of the cases from Omoro include domestic violence particularly children beating up their parents. She therefore called upon MCJL to conduct legal aid outreaches and address such unbecoming practices within the community.

The launch was closed off by Mr. Okello Douglas Peter Okao, the District Chairperson who stated that ULGA is committed to ensuring that access to justice is promoted in all Local Governments irrespective of geographical location. He appreciated LASPNET and its partners for the initiative and pledged maximum cooperation to ensure MCJL finds a smooth operation on the ground. In addition, the Chairperson assured the meeting that the District leadership will allocate some resources towards legal aid service delivery.

2.3 COMMUNITY REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON LEGAL BARRIERS TO SEXUAL GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) HELD IN TORORO



On 30th September 2020, LASPNET with support from the UNDP Spotlight initiative held a dialogue on legal barriers to SGBV at the RDC grounds in Tororo district. This was particularly intended to create awareness on SGBV as well as share the available response mechanisms in the eastern region with women, girls who are mostly at risk of the vice.

In her remarks Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, the Chief Executive Officer speaking on behalf of LASPNET underscored the escalating SGBV cases despite having robust policies and laws. She further implored the Judiciary and Police to enforce more stringent sentences, the kind that would send a signal to potential perpetrators but also to put a sense of responsibility within the community to avoid continuation of these illicit practices.

Ms. Annet Mpabulungi, the Team Leader of Rule of Law and Constitutional Democracy at UNDP thanked LASPNET for taking on the mantle to strengthen legal aid and legal literacy for the poor and vulnerable. She further noted that the dialogue and outreach were instrumental in fostering a better understanding and usage of mechanisms that connect the public to the justice system.

The dialogue was officiated by HW Ivan Sseguya, Grade 1 magistrate Tororo Chief Magistrates Court. He admitted in his remarks that SGBV

cases are very rampant in his jurisdiction citing an example of September 2020 where 50 SGBV cases were cause-listed. He appreciated all the community leaders and Police for supporting SGB survivors to access remedy.

A panel discussion was constituted which included panellists such as Mr. James Osama; Tororo District Community Development Officer who discussed briefly about SGBV and its various manifestations in the Tororo region together with Ms. Rachael Tibaruka; a Legal Officer from Justice Centres Uganda who discussed the legal mechanism and responses to SGBV.

The key issues raised at the dialogue included the need to establish a rehabilitation centre for SGBV survivors where they can also be offered skills training as a means of economic empowerment. This is in addition to supporting the Local Government to pass the Ordinance of Prohibition of Child Marriage in Tororo and the Ordinance of ending Gender Based Violence in Tororo.

2.4 COMMUNITIES FROM, MADI OKOLLO AND SOROTI DISTRICTS BENEFIT FROM THE LASPNET LEGAL AID OPEN DAY

LASPNET through working closely with its partners that is NSSF and UNDP held two (2) legal aid open days aimed at extending legal services

to the poor and vulnerable at the grassroots. The first open day with support from UNDP spotlight initiative was held, on 7th October 2020, at Rhino camp in Madi Okollo district. The open day was aimed at providing legal aid and creating awareness on access to justice and sexual gender-based violence among refugees and host communities in the area. This was officiated by the Area Resident Judge, Justice Issa Sserunkuma who alluded to the challenges faced by the Judiciary like the stretched scope of the High Court Circuit which covers 12 districts coupled with limited human and financial resource and poor investigation of cases. Other guests included the Northern Regional Board Representative, Representative from UNHCR, District Police Commander, District Councillors among others. The LASPs in the area were also well represented by FIDA-U and ULS who supported with provision of legal aid services to both refugees and host communities.

Further still, LASPNET in partnership with NSSF conducted another open day in Soroti

on 25th November 2020 under the theme “Promoting legal aid accessibility and employ rights by bringing justice closer to the people” at Soroti district. During this event, LASPNET also commemorated the 16 days of activism against Gender Based Violence under the theme “Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!” on this day. The legal aid open day was officiated by His Worship Salam Godfrey Lugolobi, the Assistant Registrar of the High Court who represented the Residential Judge Hon. Justice Musalu Musene. In his remarks, he appreciated the legal aid service providers for giving quality services to the poor and vulnerable who are unable to afford legal service. The other guests who graced the event included the Deputy Regional Police Commander of Soroti, the District Police Commander of Soroti, representatives from the Uganda Human Rights Commission and Justice Centres Uganda. On this day, community members in Soroti benefited from Legal Aid Services of the LASP and were encouraged to save with NSSF.



L-R Chief Guest. Hon. Justice Issa Sserunkuma and LASPNET CEO at the Legal Aid Outreach while on the Right, participants pose for a group photo at the Soroti Legal Aid Open day.

3.0 RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Over time, LASPNET has strengthened its research component through undertaking evidence-based research on Access to Justice; Rule of Law and Human rights. In this reporting period, the Action Research on Status of Implementation of SDG16 was conducted and later launched as we expound below

3.1 LASPNET EXAMINES STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR SDG16 IN UGANDA

On 13th November 2020, LASPNET launched yet another ground breaking research “Action Research on Status of Implementation of SDG16 in Uganda.” The event took place at Imperial Royale Hotel and was graced by Ms. Nicole Bjerler the Head of Facility at the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF). The purpose of this research was to examine the status of SDG 16 on Access to Justice.

The research which was conducted by Prof. Christopher Mbaziira and Ms. Lydia Namuli concluded that Uganda is committed to its obligations under SDGs by domesticating and incorporating them into the existing development planning frameworks. Regarding SDG 16, the

research indicated various interventions that have been undertaken in JLOS to ensure effective policies for promoting rule of law and access to justice especially for vulnerable groups like women, children and persons with disabilities.

It further revealed the persistent hinderances that ought to be addressed in light of enhancing access to justice which include among others corruption in JLOS, deficits in respect for and promotion of human rights as well as adherence to the rule of law. Other challenges include; staff gaps characterised among others by gendered deficiencies, costs of accessing justice services, geographical difficulty, stalling of the promulgation of some laws and policies and delays in delivering judgments particularly by the Constitutional Court.

In her remarks, Ms. Nicole Bjerler, the Head of Facility DGF emphasized the importance of SDG16 and recognized that peace, rule of law and inclusion are crucial for sustainable development noting that strong and accountable institutions are critical enablers in the achievement of SDG 16.



Ms. Nicole Bjerler, the DGF Head of Facility officially launching the Action Research on the Status of Implementation of SDG 16.

4.0 INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

4.1 LASPS CEOs CONVENE TO DISCUSS COVID-19 EFFECTS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE



CEOs pose for a group photo in the middle is Hon. Justice Duncan Gaswagga, the Chief Guest.

On 14th August 2020, LASPNET conducted its 6th annual CEO's Forum under the theme "Interrogating the Impact of COVID19 on Access to Justice while reflecting on the future of Legal Aid Service Provision in the Post COVID19 Era.". The meeting was attended by 45 heads of various Legal Aid Service Providers or their representatives.

Ms. Sandra Oryema, the LASPNET Board Chairperson in her opening remarks observed the constraints presented by the pandemic which in particular limited the operating context for CSOs due to the lockdown. She then emphasized the need

for cohesion, synergies and strong partnerships amongst LASPs amidst the pandemic. Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, CEO LASPNET presented the Network's annual performance and the status of implementation of the recommendations raised at the 5th CEO's meeting drawing emphasis on the Network's robust advocacy engagements towards passing the legal aid law and increased innovations such as the Situational Room; Social Media Influencers and Social Web Application which have helped to enhance access to justice for the poor and vulnerable amidst the COVID 19 pandemic.

The key note address on "building ICT resilient organizations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic" was delivered by Mr. Gerald Abila, ED Barefoot Law. He challenged LASPs to be innovative in order to remain relevant. In addition, he also implored development partners to invest more in innovations. A panel constituted of Ms. Elizabeth Kemigisha, the Programme Officer at FIDA; Mr. Aaron Besigye the National Coordinator and Ms. Martha Nanjobe, Deputy Programme and Learning Manager DGF, all agreed that its innovations that will see through LASPs during pandemics such as COVID 19.

This year's CEO's meeting also featured a training of LASPs on ICT utilization with an aim of strengthening service delivery amidst the COVID 19 pandemic.

The meeting was closed off by Hon. Justice Duncan Gaswaga

Deputy Head of the Commercial Division of the High Court and LASPNET Honorary Member. He reiterated the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on A2J for the poor and vulnerable and advised that in such dynamic and changing times,

swift adaptation and effective management is key for LASPs. He emphasized to the leaders the principles and importance of visionary leadership, branding and adaptation to the changing trends of A2J

4.2 LASPNET CONDUCTS ANNUAL PLE VISITS AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT MEETINGS TO DISCUSS COVID-19 EFFECTS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE



Participants for the Western PLE visit pose for a group photo.

LASPNET conducted the Regional Engagement Meetings and Peer Learning and Evaluation (PLE) visits for LASPs at the regional level from the 18th August to 2nd September 2020. These visits and meetings offered a platform for LASPNET to interface with LASPs and other stakeholders at regional level to share experiences on A2J during COVID-19. These were conducted by the team from the LASPNET Secretariat led by the CEO Dr Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, Vice Chairperson Board of Directors Mr. Vicent Mutonerwa and the Regional Board Representatives.

The Eastern region engagement meeting was held on the **19th August 2020 at Wash & Wills Hotel** in Mbale district attended by 22 participants crowned with an assessment visit to **Women with a Mission** in Mbale and FIDA Clinic in Kapchorwa on the 20th August 2020. The Western region engagement meeting was held on the **26th August 2020 at White Horse Inn Hotel in Kabale district**, attended by 27 participants and crowned with a visit to LAP/ULS in Kabale and FIDA Lwengo. The Northern region engagement meeting was held on the 1st September 2020 at **Days' Inn**

Hotel Lira district attended by 24 participants.

At the meetings, LASPs deliberated on A2J in the wake of COVID-19, shared experiences and innovation on how they have adjusted in the justice delivery mechanisms during COVID-19, further they raised membership and capacity building issues. In addition, members shared some of the challenges that have affected access to justice for the vulnerable and marginalised in their areas of operation which among others included case backlog, persistent corruption

within the JLOS institutions and the COVID-19 pandemic. They further alluded that the pandemic led to a rise in human rights violations, staff layoffs and closure of organisations due to diminishing funding sources. Some of the key

recommendations arising out of the PLE visits and meetings included; empowering beneficiaries with skills of self-representation as a sustainability strategy; continued thematic trainings in areas of resource mobilization,

advocacy and transitional justice; strengthening the clusters by setting up clusters at regional level and the need to improve communication among LASPs at regional level.

4.3 LASPNET USHERS IN A NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT THE 11TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



On 23rd October 2020, LASPNET convened its 11th Annual General Meeting at Hotel Africana in which a new governing Board of Directors for the year 2020-2022 was elected. The hybrid event with both physical and virtual participation was attended by a total of 77 (43 Male: 34 Female) participants who included LASPNET members and Staff of the Network attended the AGM. Additionally, the General Assembly was graced with the presence of two of the Network's Honorary members namely Hon. Justice Remmy Kasule, Justice of the Court of Appeal and Chairperson Emeritus of the Uganda Law Council as well as Mr. Musa Modoi, the JLOS Technical Advisor on Human Rights and Accountability. In her report, the outgoing Chairperson Ms. Sandra

Oryema, appreciated the Membership, her fellow Board members, Management and Staff for the rendered support during her tenure of office which began on 26th October 2018. She alluded to the achievements under her stewardship which include establishment and operationalization of the Call center; setting up a Situational room; establishment of a more vibrant Legal Rapid response program and celebrating LASPNET at 15years.

LASPNET CEO, Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa presented the Progress report for the year 2019/2020 which highlighted various milestones achieved by the Network. These included among others the launch of the Lwengo Legal Aid Model; Establishing a partnership with the International Development

Law Organization (IDLO); Convening strategic meetings on the Legal Aid Law as well as the rejuvenation of the Social Web Application among others. She concluded her presentation by taking special recognition of the vibrant Secretariat team as the foot soldiers who work tirelessly to implement the Network's mandate under her stewardship.

At the AGM two new organizations which include Legal Hub Uganda and Women with a Mission were admitted while the 3 inactive members were deregistered. These include Teso Legal Aid Project (TLAP): Defence for Children International (DCI) and Law and Governance Advocates Uganda (LAWU).

The elections presided over

by Mr. Musa Modoi ushered in Mr. Arthur Nsereko as the Chairperson; Ms. Sheila Muwanga as the Vice Chairperson, Ms. Elizabeth Kemigisha as General secretary;

Ms. Nakulira Grace as Treasurer; Ms. Grace Nasasiira as Western Regional Representative, Ms. Annet Kharuri as Eastern Regional Representative; Ms. Flavia Zalwango as the Central

Regional Representative and Mr. Vicent Mutonerwa as the Member on Merit seconded by the outgoing Board of Directors.

LASPNET elects Board of Directors at the 11th Annual General Meeting
23rd October 2020, Hotel Africana

Mr. Arthur Nsereko
He is the Head of NETPIL at PILAC and an Advocate of the High court of Uganda.
Chairperson

Ms. Sheila N Muwanga
She's currently the Deputy Executive Director of FHRI and a social worker.
Vice Chairperson

Ms. Elizabeth Kemigisha
She is the Access to Justice Programme Manager at FIDA-Uganda and a Human Rights Law
General Secretary

Ms. Grace Nakulira
She is an Accountant of Refugee Law Project and has maintained her position.
Treasurer

The Returning Officer,
Mr. Musa Modoi, Technical Advisor JLOS Human Rights and Accountability & Honorary Member, LASPNET.
Also in attendance,
Hon. Justice Remmy Kasule, Justice of Court of Appeal & Honorary Member, LASPNET

Ms. Flavia Zalwango
She is a Program Director at Human Rights Awareness Promotion Forum and an Advocate of Human Rights.
Rep. Central

Ms. Bridget Nasasiira
She is an Assistant Legal Officer (LAP) at Uganda Law Society (Mbarara Office).
Rep. Western

Ms. Annet Kharuri
She is a Legal Officer working with Muslim Center for Justice and law.
Rep. Eastern

Mr. Vicent Mutonerwa
He previously served as the Vice Chairperson and has been co-opted as a Member on Merit.
Member on Merit

LASPNET

New LASPNET Board Members and their profiles

Further in a bid to encourage the involvement of LASPNET's membership, Community Justice and Anti-Corruption Forum (CJAF) was awarded a plaque of Appreciation for their diligent participation in the LASPNET activities for the period 2019 to 2020, FIDA- U was also awarded as the most Active member in the utilization of the LASPNET Integrated Information Management System (IIMS). These awards were presented by Hon. Justice Remmy Kasule who applauded the recipients for their unwavering support to the Network.

The key recommendations arising out of the 11th AGM among others include: encouraging the Network to forge partnerships with

likeminded institutions; empowering Khadi Courts in order to ensure diversity in justice; embracing innovative approaches to ensure sustainability of the Network and its membership including convening learning from each other sessions. In addition, members were encouraged to pay their subscription as part of the sustainability plan for the Network; and to consider saving LASPNET funds on the development account into a fixed account or treasury bonds. In his closing remarks, Hon. Justice Remmy Kasule accentuated that Uganda's context is tainted with impunity and hence the need to promote various access to justice mechanisms. He urged members in their individual

capacities to make a viable contribution towards Access to Justice by standing up to violations of each other's rights in order to ensure protection of the law for all. To the incoming Board, Hon. Justice Remmy Kasule put them to task to ensure that they are alive to enhancing Access to Justice for all. Finally, he underscored the importance of focusing not only on public interest litigation but also on private litigation.



Hon. Justice Remmy Kasule, Justice of the Court of Appeal giving closing remarks at LASPNET's 11th AGM

5.0 LASPNET CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES

Under its Coordination and Institutional Development role, LASPNET conducts capacity building trainings for LASPs, strategic partners and staff on various thematic areas to strengthen their abilities to deliver standardized legal aid services to their clients. During the reporting period, a total of 5 trainings were conducted which include the media training, Trial Advocacy Training, Training on Effective Lobby and Advocacy, IIMs Training for LASPs and Paralegals and a Training for LASPs on how to handle and respond to SGBV cases.

5.1 Annual Media Training on applicability of Election guidelines

LASPNET organized a 2-day annual media training on applicability of election guidelines come the general elections in January 2021. The training was held on 18th and 19th September 2020 at Fairway Hotel and was attended by a total of 50 journalists from a variety of media houses in Uganda.



A group photo of participants at the Annual Media Training at Fairway Hotel

The objective of this training was to among others build capacity of media personnel on the new election guidelines on covering the upcoming elections campaigns and their applicability in their day today media service. It further aimed to equip media personnel with knowledge on human rights-based reporting in the awake of 2021 elections guidelines.

The Chief Executive Officer of LASPNET, Dr Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa observed that the media is very essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without media. She further stated that the, media acts as a crucial watchdog to democratic elections, safeguarding

the transparency of the process. She finalized by noting that it's important that media houses and journalists are provided with relevant information to engage in the new developments in the media industry following the new wave of scientific campaigns and elections, enable them to reflect and interrogate what is changing, how to manage expectations and the role they have to play to promote human rights, rule of law and access to justice as they provide their services to the general public during the forthcoming elections.

The training was the facilitated by Ms Shiela Muwanga, LASPNET board General Secretary and now Vice Chairperson as the lead trainer together with experts in media freedoms and elections observations who included Mr. Abubaker Kayondo of Electoral Commission who trained on *Introduction to the 2021 elections guidelines, rationale and applicability, challenges and opportunities*. Ms Charity Ahimbisibwe of CCEDU on *Guidelines on covering campaigns, protests and demonstrations by the media; What is the Role and Expectations of the Media during elections?* Ms. Catherine Anite of Freedom of Expression Hub: on *Conceptualization of Freedoms of Expression and Assembly in the election context* and Mr. Peter Magelah doing *Case studies on the shrinking space of the Media in the current election context and recommended mitigation*.

As an outcome of the training, action points were drawn and these included among others the need for journalists to create strong linkages with HRD organizations such as HRNJ, UJA and LASPNET in order to advance the rights of journalists whose rights have been violated.

The training was closed off by Ms. Mercy Lugemwa the Ag. President Uganda Journalist Association who in her remarks urged journalists to uphold professionalism in their day today work she further thanked LASPNET for convening the annual trainings and recommended that as many new journalists join the field, continuous trainings should be done so that they don't fall victims of the violations of media freedoms as they do not know how to act when in the field.

5.3 A virtual Trial Advocacy Training for LASPs Advocates

LASPNET with support from the Democratic

Governance Facility (DGF) in conjunction with Justice Advocacy Uganda and Justice Advocacy Africa convened a virtual Trial Advocacy Training from 16th September to 28th October 2021.



The training was attended by 24 advocates who included 18 legal aid service providers and 6 litigation lawyers. The LASPs represented included Uganda Christian Lawyers Fraternity (UCLF), War Child Canada (WCC), Refugee Law Project (RLP), Legal Aid Project of Uganda Law Society (LAP-ULS), Moslem Center for Justice and Law (MCJL), Civic Response on Environment and Development (CRED), and FIDA Uganda

At the opening session of the training, welcome remarks were given by Mr. James Mukasa Ssebugenyi, Board Chairperson Justice Advocacy Uganda and Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa CEO LASPNET. In his remarks, Mr. James Mukasa Ssebugenyi thanked the organizing team from

both Justice Advocacy Uganda and LASPNET for putting together the Trial Advocacy Training. He assured the participants that after the training they would be different litigators whose confidence levels are high and distinguishable. Whereas Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa informed the participants that in conducting the training, LASPNET seeks to enhance its contribution towards developing institutional capacity skills and standards of delivery of legal aid services by its members. This is through assisting them to acquire new information to boost their careers and professionalism to deliver quality legal aid services to benefit all especially the vulnerable and marginalized people in realizing justice.



L-R MR. James Mukasa Sebugenyi and Dr. Sylvia give their opening remarks

When asked about her experience in facilitating the virtual trial advocacy training, Ms. Linda Alinda Ikanza, the President Justice Advocacy Uganda had this to say;

“This has by far been the best trial advocacy training, the team was very active and always ready to learn irrespective of the virtual nature of the training. They were also lucky to interact with a number of American Advocates and Judges who would otherwise never have gotten time to travel to Uganda for the physical training.”

The closing ceremony of the training was officiated by the Uganda Law Society President, Ms. Pheonah Wall. In her remarks, she congratulated the participants upon completing the Trial Advocacy Training. She noted that a virtual training is not easy to undertake considering the challenges surrounding online communication and further commended the participants for their commitment over the 10 day’s training. She appreciated Justice Advocacy Uganda and their Partners Justice Advocacy Africa for the initiative of bettering advocates’ argument skills and pledged support from Uganda Law Society.



Participants at the closing Ceremony of the training

5.4 Thematic Training on Effective lobby and advocacy

LASPNET with funding from DGF to undertake a thematic training in lobby and advocacy. The training was conducted on 15th and 16th December, 2020 at Esella Country Hotel. It was attended by 44 participants, 23 females and 21 males who consisted of lobby and advocacy officers, communication officers, legal officers and CEOs from various LASPs. The training was facilitated by Mr. Jackson Odong as the Lead facilitator who also supported the development of the earlier mentioned survey and Ms. Christina Angela Ntulo as the Co-facilitator, the brain behind the LASPNET Advocacy Strategy (2017-2020).

The key objective of the 2-day training was to train and equip LASPs with practical knowledge and skills on how to undertake effective lobbying and advocacy in-order to influence policy and practice change in legal aid and the Access to Justice arena. Participants were taken through several modules such as; *The terrain related with advocacy for policy and legal reforms; Undertaking lobby and advocacy campaigns; Strategies on how to lead successful change management campaigns; Stakeholder analysis and management of lobby and advocacy; Developing effective lobby and advocacy strategies, Sharing experience and lessons in advocacy as well as Tear.*

The training therefore led to increased

understanding and knowledge of LASPs in lobby and advocacy. It is further believed that the LASPs will utilize the learned lobby and advocacy skills to amplify the voices of the marginalized at the local; regional and national level (s). More importantly to note is that one of the outputs of

the lobby and advocacy training was the creation of the Lobby and Advocacy WhatsApp group where members will continuously bond and engage on various issues concerned with Access to Justice; Human Rights and Rule of Law.



A group photo of participants at the Lobby and Advocacy training held on 15th and 16th December

5.5 IIMS Training for LASPs on the new paralegal database

The IIMS training was supported by IDLO and took place between 15th to 16th December 2020 at Esella Country Hotel. The training was attended by 54 (34 males, 20 female) participants including Advocates, Paralegals and M&E officers from various LASPs. This training was facilitated by ICT experts from CODE BITS.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa cited that the training was intended to introduce participants to the IIMS with focus on the upgraded Paralegal Referral Pathway that seeks to simplify inclusion of Paralegals into the IIMS and strengthen referrals and documentation. She emphasized the importance of this

timely training explaining that the future of community justice is ICT and hence the need to ensure that no one is left behind. During this training participants shared key recommendations including the need to incorporate USSD codes to cater for users with feature phones and for lawyers and paralegals to adapt to the IT trends and make the use of the IIMS a discipline.

The training was closed by LASPNET’s Chairperson Board of Directors, Mr. Nsereko Arthur who in his closing remarks acclaimed the Secretariat for closing the gap between Lawyers and Paralegals noting that Lawyers cannot achieve much in legal aid service delivery without Paralegals. Finally, to crown the training he issued out certificates of participation to the trainees.



participants pose for a photo at the IIMS training of 15th and 16th December 2020

5.6 Thematic training of LASPs on how to respond and handle cases of SGBV

LASPNET conducted a 2-day thematic training for LASPs on how to respond to and handle cases of SGBV.



Group photo of the participants, Secretariat staff and facilitators at the SGBV Training on 16th and 17th December 2020

The training took place from 16th and 17th December, 2020 at Esella Country Hotel, Wakiso and was attended by 37 participants. It was facilitated by Lady Justice Eva Luswata; a Senior Judge of the High Court currently heading the South-Eastern circuit in Jinja with 26 years of experience in International law, Gender and Human Rights supported by Dr. Kabonesa Consolata; an associate Professor and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University with over 25 years of experience in Leadership, Women and Gender Programming, teaching Human and Community Development, Gender Training and conducting Gender Responsive Research. Also making presentations were; D/OC CID Jinja North division (Buwenge), Mr. Magoola Henry and Ms. Maria Kaddu from

LASPNET Secretariat.

Topics discussed at the training included; a conceptualization of Sexual Gender Based Violence: The prevailing Situation, stereo types and factors that reinforce GBV in Uganda, Institutional Mechanisms of handling SGBV amidst COVID19, Legal and Policy frame work of SGBV, effective mechanisms for reporting, investigating and recording evidence and the operation of the LASPNET SGBV toll free number: 0800100401.

At the end of the training, participants were awarded certificates by the Board Chairperson.

5.7 Annual Staff Retreat and Board of Directors Orientation and Handover

LASPNET with support from

DGF its the annual staff retreat from 6th to 13th December 2020 and Board of Directors orientation and handover from 9th to 13th December 2020 at Bunyonyi Safaris, Kabale District. The annual staff retreat was intended to evaluate the years performance and provide a platform for staff to plan for the following year. The trainings aimed at helping staff realize their full potential by creating a brand that is valuable at the workplace were also conducted together with other social activities like nature walks through the beautiful hills of Kabala, boat rides and gift exchange.

On the other hand, the Board Members at their Board Orientation, provided a platform for the Board of Directors to understand the LASPNET Strategic Objectives, culture,

understanding of concept of corporate governance, strategic planning and management, financial management and resource mobilization, among others. It also provided opportunity for the outgoing Board to support a smooth transition and handover to the

New Board of Directors.

The Board Orientation was crowned off by the Board Handover which was presided over by H/W Kavuma Magistrate Grade 1 Kabale District who thanked the outgoing Board led by their Chairperson Ms.

Sandra Oryema and welcomed the New Board through the substantive Chairperson, Mr. Arthur Nsereko wishing them a successful term of Office. He then led the new Board in taking their oaths.



Staff and Board of Directors (Outgoing and Incoming) at the Retreat



Staff Boat Ride on Lake Bunyonyi



Outgoing and incoming Board of Directors at the Handover Ceremony with H/W Kavuma

6.0 IN OTHER LASPNET NEWS

LASPNET STAFF OF THE QUARTER AND YEAR 2020

It is LASPNET's practice to recognise the best staff of the quarter in appreciation of their hard work and efforts to uphold committed service to the organisation. In the quarter January to March, the winners were Ms. Nathanella followed by Mr. Rica Arch Byaruhanga. Mr. Byaruhanga was also voted the 1st Runner up for Staff of the year 2020 and the Winner for staff of the year 2020 was Ms. Nadhifah Muhammad.



Ms. Nadhifah Muhammad, Best staff of the year 2020



Ms. Nathanella Kigozi, Best staff 3rd Quarter



Mr. Rica Arch Byaruhanga 1st Runner up



Ms. Nadhifah Muhammad and Mr. Rica Arch Byaruhanga receive their accolades for best staff of the year 2020 and 1st runner up respectively.

NEW BORN

LASPNET congratulates its staff and members who were blessed with bundles of joy during the period July to December 2020

Name	Date	Update
Mr. Kamy David	4 th October 2020	Welcomed a bouncing baby boy
Ms. Peace Namubiru	14 th October 2020.	Welcomed a bouncing baby girl

OBITUARY

LASPNET commensurate with its staff and members who lost loved ones during the period July to December 2020

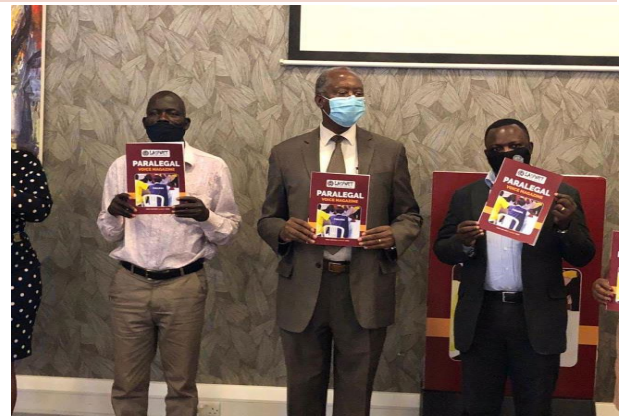
Name	Title	Update
Staff		
Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa	CEO	Lost a brother.
Mr. David Kamy,	Finance and Administration Officer	Lost his maternal aunt and Uncle.
Ms. Joy Namulinde	Accounts and Administration Assistant	Lost a brother.
Ms. Justice Nambowa	Training and Membership Officer	Lost her Maternal aunt.
Members		
Mr. Francis Odongyoo	ED Human Rights Focus	Lost his dear mother

LASPNET BI-ANNUAL PHOTO GALLERY

The period July to December was a beehive of activities, below with you, we share official and light moments as we closed the year 2020,



LASPNET Team led by the CEO together with Greater North Parliamentary Forum and the Legal Aid National Working Technical Committee meet the Speaker of Parliament Rt. Hon. Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga on the National Legal Aid Law on 11th September 2020



The Chief Guest: Hon. Justice Martin Stephen Egonda Ntende giving the opening speech and officiating the launch of the Voice Paralegal Magazine on 28th August 2020



Secretariat Team and the incoming and outgoing Board.



LASPNET Board of Directors Of Directors at the Board Handover.



Clients receive legal advice during the Soroti Legal Aid Open day and Legal Aid Outreach at Rhino Camp



LASPNET Staff at the retreat

Mr. John Jacobs leads the team in a team building game



Staff Nature walks at the Retreat



Staff receive their holiday package from Management before breaking off for the Christmas Holiday

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

It's with no doubt that much as the reporting period was largely punctuated with the COVID 19 pandemic, we were able to persevere and remain relevant to our core mandate of enhancing access to justice for the poor and vulnerable. Of course, we could not have ably executed that mandate without the invaluable support from our Development partners; Board Members; other stakeholders like Media and ultimately the Membership. We are forever grateful!

"To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity."

Nelson Mandela

EDITORIAL TEAM

1. Dr. Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa - Chief Executive Officer
2. Mr. Badru Walusansa – Director of Programs
3. Ms. Daphine Achen – Research and Knowledge Management Officer
4. Ms. Jackie Osuna – Networking, Coordination and Partnership Officer

A LASPNET Production March 2021

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