

1. General Developments during the reporting period:

The year has been filled with many developments in the Justice, Law and Order Sector especially toward building consensus on the national legal aid policy and law for Uganda. There were several opportunities of participatory and collaborative efforts in which various non-state actors worked with the State actors in the legal aid policymaking process. On the other hand, member organisations have expressed need to see more programmes from LASPNET that can strengthen existing institutional synergies and improve resource capacities in legal aid service provision. Several funding proposals have been developed by the Secretariat to ensure that these concerns are adequately responded to.

Major developments across the sector included the national validation workshop for the draft legal aid policy held on 16th February 2012, the launch of the Justice for Children Programme (J4C) in Mbale that took place on 2nd March 2012, the 3rd Annual JLOS Open Day that was celebrated at the Railway Ground in Kampala on 19th March 2012, the 6th National JLOS Annual Forum held at the Commonwealth Resort in Munyonyo from the 20th to 21st March 2012, as well as the trip to Nairobi by members of the Uganda National Working Group to attend the 6th Regional Advisory Group (RAG) meeting under the SAJEA programme in partnership with the Uganda Law Society and the Canadian Bar Association. The LASPNET Secretariat also took part in National Legal Aid Taskforce meetings, Steering Committee meetings of Justice Centres Uganda, and several partnership building efforts with War Child Canada (WCC), African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV), as well as the Human Rights Peace Centre (HURIPEC).

2. Activities carried out against the planned activities:

The activity implementation plan has been successfully implemented in developing a more functional network of legal aid service providers for better service delivery as well as establishing a set of management structures to steer strategic direction. Some achievements have also been made in ensuring an effective system for information/knowledge management through web-based tools but there is need for mobilising more financial resources to create a customised system that is both electronic and integrated to enable non-physical access by users to a variety of useful case data/service delivery tools. Occasionally, LASPNET has also made progress tracking on the legal aid policy adoption/implementation process in consultation with the JLOS Secretariat although the on-going developments have been unclear and slower than had been anticipated.

On the other hand, LASPNET has guided a number of its members towards improving their organisational systems and programmes to meet the eligibility requirements by the Uganda Law Council for legal aid service provision. More organisations that provide legal aid services in Uganda applied for membership to the Network and additional prospects for strategic and development partnership are increasingly becoming achievable. Generally, there has been very good partnership building with development partners such as DGF, World Vision Uganda, Plan Uganda, and TROCAIRE. Some project proposals were written to the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) and the European Commission to support collective legal aid programmes among member organisations. LASPNET also nominated two persons from the member organisations to apply for the Irish Aid Fellowship Training for the year 2012, an opportunity which was given by the Irish Embassy in contribution to the capacity building initiatives of the Network. Similarly, the Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC) initiated a partnership with the Network to provide and support internship programmes for students of Law at Makerere University within the LASPNET member organisations. A number of internal policy manuals have also been developed for the Network.

Unfortunately, the Network had planned to enter into partnership with field persons of World Vision Uganda in providing legal aid services across their different Area development Programmes but this prospect has not yet taken off due to some unanticipated setbacks within the partner organisation.

3. Outcome/impact:

LASPNET was established **to address key issues around collaboration and national voice** of Legal Aid Service Providers (LASPs). As such its core mission is to enhance coordination among the members/LASPs; to provide strategic linkages and a collaboration framework for LASPs in Uganda as well as to establish a common front to interface with the Justice, Law, and Order Sector.

The various activities implemented during the period have mostly enabled the Network to make substantial strides in partnership building and sector-wide collaboration with the Justice, Law, and Order Sector (JLOS) towards exploration of new ways to engage on policy and work together in some programme activities. The JLOS SIPIII provides for establishment of effective participation structures for Non-state Actors across the sector, the division of labour, and clarity of roles. LASPNET has continually lobbied for the development of clear guidelines and innovative pilots by JLOS so as to increase opportunities of working with Non State Actors following SIPIII process shifts. Success has also been attained in establishment of an independent secretariat with staffing; drafting and discussion of key policy and institutional documents; membership has increased to over 37 and LASPNET's engagement with state/non-state actors has been increased on influencing the development of the National Legal Aid Policy and enhancing child rights in the justice system.

4. Risks to your work and mitigation strategies taken:

The Network still has to document and broadly disseminate its management policies, systems and structures in order to stimulate internal action particularly at the Secretariat. The existing membership charter and related documentation are not adequately published and therefore broadening member participation becomes difficult without clear guidance from such information/knowledge.

The activity implementation plan of the Network does not include sufficient interventions for reinforcing institutional efficiency and accountability as well as paying due attention to human and institutional capacity development such as affirmative action to promote growing member organisations, network-building skills for Secretariat staff, and periodic field visits for monitoring performance of members. These factors may affect the extent to which impact-oriented results can be enforced.

While gender plays a key role in legal aid provision in Uganda with women and children more adversely affected by dysfunctional justice systems there has been little focus placed by LASPNET on mainstreaming gender across all programming. It has been advised that LASPNET should adequately capacitate its members and the Secretariat staff in key issues such as patriarchy and power relations/structures that exacerbate women's inequality in society.

The programme on human and institutional capacity building/development has not been adequately implemented, or even funded, to improve aspects such as internal policy frameworks, participatory evaluation mechanisms, and on-going skills training among the legal aid service providers. This may eventually lead to a network of many organisations but lacking adequate capacity to offer quality services. Other programme areas such as sector-wide collaboration, information management and publicity for legal aid have been given attention but still require a more elaborate implementation plan and rigorous fundraising strategy. However, significant success has been achieved in collective advocacy especially for the legal aid policy but there is need to also strengthen mechanisms for collaborative research. The visibility for the Network is steadily improving but there is still need for more capacity building, quality monitoring, and information management.

Several challenges have posed significant risk to the Network and major mitigating measures taken to address this situation include review of the existing strategic plan, development of an information and communication strategy, as well as integrating key recommendations of the midterm review into the current work plan.

5. Critical success factors:

- Quality and capacity: Initiating debate on how services provided by member organisations and all the supportive mechanisms in place can meet the required standards.
- Programme development: Establishing innovative ways to increase the impact of existing and future project initiatives which involve member organisations in implementation.
- Intellectual capital: Ascertaining/adopting best practices to improve information and knowledge known about the provision legal aid services by non-state actors.
- Strategic relationships: Devising new forms of engagement that can improve sector-wide collaboration with members, partners, and stakeholders.

6. Key challenges:

- The overheads are increasing due to several utility costs, e.g. water, electricity, garbage collection, post office charges, etc.
- The new location for the LASPNET Secretariat is not yet known by many people and signposts have to be erected soon.
- The adoption of the legal aid policy is taking longer than was earlier anticipated and the current process is not yet unclear.
- A number of member organisations have not been able to report on cases they handled due to lack of adequate capacity.
- Some programme partnerships that were planned to start during the period encountered unavoidable external setbacks.
- The need to support some member organisations in meeting regulatory requirements after inspection by the Uganda Law Council
- The limited capacity of the Secretariat to meet expectations of members, development partners, and key stakeholders.

7. Major limitations

- Lack of accurate information on the geographical distribution of legal aid service providers;
- Poor guidelines to streamline differing practices and standards in provision of legal aid service;
- Inadequate human and institutional capacity for co-ordination of the legal aid service providers;
- Proliferation of a variety of systemic and specific factors affecting the delivery of justice services;
- Gaps in tracking performance and monitoring the quality of legal aid services delivered; as well as
- The lack of a national policy, legal, and institutional framework for guiding provision of legal aid.

8. Lessons learnt:

The key lesson learnt from the implementation of this project is the importance of associating budget control systems across the organisation to activity programming mechanisms in a manner that avoids unnecessary variation between planned and actual expenditure.

Another lesson learnt from the implementation of this project is the need to align programme interventions to organisational strategy, sector priorities, and national development plans in ways that can create sustainable outputs for tangible impact in realisation of set objectives/expected results.

9. A success story:

The Network underwent its first ever mid-term review which provided recommendations on the key areas of needed improvement in ensuring achievement of expected tangible results. During the General Assembly that sat on 29th June 2012 the members of LASPNET discussed the key issues raised in the review report and made further suggestions to improve the Network. As a way forward, the members agreed that there is need for LASPNET to revisit its Strategic Plan in order to address three critical aspects of its coordination role as recommended. That is, a collective role bringing together LASPs for solidarity in strategizing, sharing lessons and experiences so as to minimise duplication; capacitating LASPs through collaborative research, and analysis; providing strategic guidance and linking international/regional developments and best practice on legal aid to national interventions; and Voice and visibility by documenting, providing feedback, and amplifying the voice of members on key legal aid issues at national level. A new Steering Committee was elected and tasked to oversee execution of the proposed actions, including other key issues/concerns among members and stakeholders, in the work plan for the year 2012/13.

10. Amount received and utilized:

During the period 1st July 2011 to 30th June 2012, LASPNET received a total amount of **UGX 228,739,000** from the Democratic Governance Facility towards coordination of legal aid service providers.