



ACCESS TO JUSTICE REGIONAL CONFERENCES APRIL/MAY 2015

Theme: “Legal Aid; *An integral part of Access to Justice in Uganda*”

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction and Background:

Justice Centres Uganda (JCU) is a government of Uganda programme under the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) providing free legal services to the poor, vulnerable and marginalised persons in Uganda, through; legal representation, alternative dispute resolution, referrals, community awareness creation and outreach, advocacy, as well as psycho social support.

JCU organized the first ever access to justice regional conferences in Uganda in November /December 2014 under the theme “unlocking the the bottlenecks to access to justice in Uganda”. The conferences among other things helped participants to demystify the concept of access to justice which was understood to encompass a number of tennets including legal aid and counseling.

Legal aid and counseling:

The law and the legal profession is highly technical, elitist, complicated, and intimidating to say the least even to people who are highly educated. It requires one to have the correct information, knowledge and expertise to initiate and pursue justice and meander through the legal processes and procedures in the quest for justice. Legal services, compared to other services are prohibitively expensive, leaving them out of the reach for the majority of people.

Unfortunately, with very low literacy levels in Uganda especially among the rural poor, the majority of people including non-legal professionals find the law, justice agencies and the most basic legal procedures very complex. It would therefore be asking the impossible to expect lay persons or any one not exposed to legal processes to argue complex cases in courts of law, tribunals and other justice agencies¹.

This therefore underscores the fact that good legal representation at all levels is an integral part of access to justice. There is thus a dire need for the provision of affordable and / or free legal services to those who are most disadvantaged. The role of Legal Aid Service Providers (LASPs) hence becomes very crucial in filling in this gap. Providing free legal services to the very disadvantaged individuals / groups is the only hope to the majority of Ugandans who need basic legal services like legal advice and awareness, mediation, counselling, drafting legal and court documents, representation before courts of law and related services. To this end, the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) has developed a Legal Aid Policy which is currently before the Cabinet and will hopefully be approved soon.

¹ Hon. Lady Justice Dr. Winifred Nabisinde; Resident Judge Lira High Court circuit

Conference Theme:

“Legal Aid; *An integral part of Access to Justice in Uganda*”

Conference objectives:

1. Overall objective;

The aim of the conferences is to contribute towards efforts to improve access to justice by every person in Uganda and particularly the poor.

2. Specific objectives;

- a) To bring together Legal aid service providers and stakeholders to share ideas on how to improve access to justice through quality legal aid.
- b) To underscore the importance of legal aid in the realization of access to justice for all.
- c) To publicize and generate support for the Legal Aid policy and bill

Venues:

The conferences will be held in the four regions of Uganda, namely; Northern, Eastern, Western and Central. They will be held in the districts that host the Justice Centres in each of the regions;

1. Northern Uganda-**Lira**
2. Eastern Uganda-**Tororo**
3. Western Uganda-**Hoima**
4. Central Uganda-**Kampala**

Dates:

Lira- **Monday 20th April 2015**

Tororo- **Wednesday 22nd April 2015**

Hoima-**Tuesday 28th April 2015**

Kampala-**Thursday 30 April 2015**

Expected participants:

- Judicial officers
- Legislators
- Police officers
- Prisons officers
- State attorneys
- Legal Aid service providers
- Private legal practitioners
- Development partners
- Local Government representatives
- Central Government representatives
- Cultural leaders