

## JUSTICE CENTRES UGANDA – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### **BACKGROUND OF JCU**

Justice Centres Uganda (JCU) is a Government Project of the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) hosted and supervised by the Judiciary. JCU was born out of the need to extend legal services to individuals and communities who are in dire need of them but could not afford paid legal services. As a result, JCU seeks to bridge the gap between the supply and demand sides of justice, by providing free legal services. At the same time JCU is empowering individuals and communities to claim their rights and demand for policy and social change with the set activities. It's important to note that JCU was established to provide lessons to support the development of a National Legal Aid Policy and Law, as well as the establishment of a comprehensive National Institution on Legal Aid.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

Based on the given background four strategic objectives have been defined in order to guide all operations:

- **To enhance awareness of legal and human rights and empower communities to realise their rights.** JCU strives to remove barriers to access to justice and build communities' confidence in the justice system by providing knowledge on legal rights and the procedures to claim them.
- **To enable vulnerable individuals and communities to effectively resolve disputes using both litigation and mediation.** JCU's core functions of delivering legal aid services range from providing legal advice to mediation and litigation.
- **To undertake evidence-based advocacy for reform of Laws, Policies and Practices that facilitate access to justice for the poor.** The primary focus of this objective lies in removing bottlenecks to access to justice for the poor, both within the official justice system and on a societal level and includes reform of policies, laws and practices.
- **To strengthen JCU's Institutional capacity to deliver legal aid on behalf of the State.** JCU aims to improve her institutional capacity through advocacy on JCU's institutional home, Business development, Human Resource Management and Results-Based Monitoring.

### **LOCATIONS:**

At its inception in 2009, JCU started out with two (2) Centres at Tororo and Lira Districts that were established as a pilot legal aid model. Due to the exceptional performance of the two Centres during the pilot phase, JCU services were scaled up. Currently, there are 12 Justice Centres nationwide, with the National Coordination Office which is housed at the High Court in Kampala. The 12 Justice Centres are located in the Districts of Kampala, Fort Portal, Hoima, Jinja, Masaka, Mubende, Mukono, Mbale, Tororo, Lira, Bundibugyo and Kasese.

## **CORE COMPETENCY OF JCU**

The local Justice Centres provide a wide range of free legal services which include:

- **Legal awareness and sensitization:** Sensitisation is undertaken through conducting outreaches and barazas to various communities. Some of these communities include; women, children, persons in detention (Police, Prison, Remand Homes), and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). In addition, JCU carries out public awareness campaigns through radio spot messages and TV and radio talk shows on relevant legal issues affecting communities.

During the period 2016 to 2020, JCU conducted; 2,043 mobile legal aid clinics, 18,379 barazas, 8,540 outreaches to Persons With Disabilities (PWDS), 3,502 outreaches to women and girls, 1,723 outreaches to men, 747 community outreaches using megaphones, 500 outreaches to groups facing multiple forms of discrimination, 139,131 outreaches in schools, 101,628 outreaches in prisons, 92,248 outreaches in communities, 64,115 outreaches at police stations, 37,373 outreaches to women and distributed Information, Education and Communication (IECs) material amounting to 142,533.

- **Free legal advice:** This advice goes a long way in ensuring that persons know their legal rights and access guidance on how to handle the legal issues they might be dealing with. For the period 2016 to 2020, JCU offered legal advice to 74,044 persons who walked into our offices and via our toll-free lines.
- **Support with self-representation:** In such instances, where JCU cannot provide an advocate, we provide support to such people so that they are able to represent themselves in court. In the last two years, the number of people asking JCU to support their self-advocacy has increased significantly. As a total JCU provided support to 293 self-representation cases between the period 2016 and 2020.
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution through Mediation:** Mediation is very key because it reduces the court case back log and the number of unrepresented litigants going to court. A total of 4,048 cases have been completed successfully from 2016 to 2020.
- **Legal Representation (Litigation):** JCU has in-house advocates that represent litigants in both civil and criminal cases. During the years from 2016-2020, a total number of 3,165 cases were resolved through litigation and 2,151 were successfully concluded through the Judiciary's state brief scheme.

Through mediation and litigation, JCU has been able to recover UGX 114,670,447 for its clients.

- **Evidence-based advocacy:** JCU interacts with key ministries to update them on the arising access to justice issues and social issues identified during implementation and seeks for ways to have those issues addressed through policy making to change structures, systems and practices. For more information about JCU's evidence-based advocacy efforts please refer to the document: **'JUSTICE CENTRES UGANDA – EVIDENCE BASED ADVOCACY'.**

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