



Women's access to justice still limited despite progress

Justice. In the absence of access to justice, people and particularly women are unable to have their voice heard and exercise their rights.

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Access to justice is a bumpy road for most Ugandans, and even trickier for vulnerable groups like the elderly and women. As a young, happily self-employed typist, and mother of two, Beatrice [second name withheld on request] had a life most women in rural Kabarole envied.

One morning as she went about her weekend routine of gardening with her one-year-old daughter strapped on the back, disaster struck, like usually, struck from nowhere: men wielding pangas attacked them leaving her mother dead from excess bleeding.

Grace and her baby were left for dead or so the assailants thought. The grave injuries she sustained led to one of her arms being decapitated, and meant she could no longer make a living as a typist or even work properly.

The suspects in her assault case were eventually arrested, but she was too scared of anything that reminded her the fateful day they

Women attend a meeting recently. In order to advise women about accessing justice, some activists prefer to meet women in such meetings.

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center legal aid to bridge the gap between the supply and demand sides of justice—that her case got a lease of life.

Officials at Justice Centers told *Daily Monitor* they revisited the case, made sure that the suspected attackers were prosecuted and likewise initiated mediation sessions with both Grace and her former husband who had abandoned them.

They also supported her in acquiring letters of administration of the disputed land.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to justice expert, access to justice today requires that every organisation puts in place a programme for people access justice and these should indicate how gender aware they are.

she was about to give up on everything when she got wind of information about a legal aid clinic—Justice Centers, established by the judiciary in 2010 as a one stop

But that was not upsetting has the search for justice.

Her case oscillated between police stations for three years and now too poor to afford a lawyer;

were assailed: more so her mother's wailing to death.

The reason they were attacked was ostensibly over land, which she was now on the verge on losing.

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Access to justice still a challenge

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While she was lucky to get lease of life, not so are most women. The limited capacity of the courts to deliver gender-sensitive justice still blights Uganda's judiciary, as access to justice for vulnerable groups like women is considered a critical component of delivery of justice globally.

Justice Centers Uganda says generally, women and girls in Uganda still suffer a lot of human rights violations and hindrances to access to justice including; sexual and gender based violence, early and forced marriages.

Others include discriminatory cultural norms and practices such as widow inheritance, female genital mutilation, property grabbing by in-laws, social and cultural norms that do not recognize the criminal nature and the devastating effects of violence against women.

"For many women, especially those living in rural areas, empowerment can be established



A number of women still suffer from human rights violations.

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by ensuring that they are protected under the law with regard to their basic legal rights. This can be achieved if such vulnerable and marginalised women are able to access relevant legal and human rights

information pertinent to their justice needs," said Justice Centers' advocacy and communications officer, Ms Angela Mwanje.

According to Ms Christine Birabwa, an access to justice

expert, access to justice today requires that every organisation puts in place a programme for people access justice and these should indicate how gender aware they are.

"In the past when we did our work, we found that only 26 per cent of the people who accessed our services were women from justice centres out of 100 per cent," she says.

Ms Birabwa adds: "What we did to target women specifically, is we had to find out where they are during working hours. We realised that in the morning they are in the garden so they cannot come to our outreaches to hear about domestic violence, how to write wills, to hear about property rights of women under the different ideal marriages."

Ms Birabwa, who previously served as head of Justice Centers Uganda, added that they decided to devise packages where they reach out to women very specifically.

"We realized that they get

sometime in the afternoon when they find time to go to their income generating groups (circles) or saving groups among other groups; We have decided to go to those groups and find them where they are," she added.

The executive director for Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET), Vivian Namubiru Mukasa says that as providers of legal aid they try to coordinate members who do legal aid, do research and lobby to provide women with free legal representation.

In May 2011, the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) adopted by government to provide a wide sector approach to justice conducted an audit which revealed that although a number of training sessions on gender justice have been conducted for judicial officers, some of the court procedures and judgments clearly demonstrate their inability to translate the gender training into concrete benefits for women.