Empowering Vulnerable Communities

Maria Nantale, a Community Paralegal serving the LGBT community in the Eastern region of Uganda

Plus

Making a difference in greater Masaka

Empowering sex workers through knowledge and passion in Kasese

Making a difference in Arua

Things are getting better for LGBT youth in Mukono

...and More
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HRAPF is grateful to the selected Community Paralegals who have participated in the development of this fourth issue of ‘I am a Community Paralegal’. Many of the contributors are based outside of Kampala and serve particular communities in the various regions of the country. Thank you for sharing your work, life and challenges with us. It is encouraging to see Community Paralegals actively changing lives of the marginalised communities in different parts of the country - especially in rural areas where the need is great yet often go unnoticed and unannounced.

A big thank you goes to Dora Musinguzi, the Executive Director of the Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV and AIDS (UGANET) for writing an op-ed for this issue of the magazine. Your continued support of HRAPF’s advocacy work for marginalised and Most At Risk Populations and acknowledgement of the contribution of our Community Paralegals goes a long way.

HRAPF acknowledges the financial and technical support from our donors which make the Community Paralegal Training Programme a reality. These donors include American Jewish World Service (AJWS); AIDS Fonds; the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and ViIV Healthcare Positive Action for MSM and Transgender People. We are grateful to our development partners for their continued faith in the impact of HRAPF-trained Community Paralegals on the communities which they serve.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Dr. Adrian Jjuuko - Editor

Flavia Zalwango - Reviewer

Linette du Toit - Researcher

Juliet Nankanja - Research Assistant
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I am proud to introduce the fourth issue of HRAPF’s annual ‘I AM A COMMUNITY PARALEGAL’ magazine. HRAPF has invested greatly in the training of Community Paralegals in order to extend our reach and be available and ensure access to justice on the ground within communities in ways that are not always possible for our legal team. This magazine publicises profiles of selected HRAPF-trained Community Paralegals and celebrates their achievements, impact and professional as well as personal growth after completing the training programme. Our target audience is the body of Community Paralegals as well as potential future trainers, minority rights lawyers and activists across the country.

HRAPF’s Community Paralegal Training Programme has been running since 2010 and it is an intrinsic part of our access to justice service provision machinery within communities. A total of 197 Community Paralegals have been trained under this programme. Out of these trained Paralegals, 76 were trained from the LGBTI community, 58 from the sex workers community, 20 from communities facing land-justice issues; and 21 from the community of women and girls living with HIV/AIDS. The first intake of PWUID Community Paralegals completed their training in 2019 and this community is now supported by 15 Community Paralegals. Seven HRAPF staff members who do not have a legal background have so far completed the training throughout the years in order to develop an in-depth understanding of HRAPF’s work and to enable them to provide support to HRAPF’s legal team. In 2019, the first group of Community Paralegals to serve victims of gender-based violence in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement commenced their training.

This magazine is the fourth in an ongoing series dedicated to publicise the work of HRAPF-trained Community Paralegals. The ‘Pioneer Edition’ of the magazine was published in 2017 and it featured articles written by the very first batch of Paralegals that were trained by HRAPF. The first issue of the magazine also featured articles and interviews with a number of the HRAPF-trained Paralegals who are considered to be pioneers in the field of improving access to justice to sexual minorities in Uganda.
...197 Community Paralegals have been trained, 76 (from LGBTI community); 58 (sex workers); 20 (land justice issues); and 21 (women and girls living with HIV/AIDS).

The second issue of the magazine, published in 2018, focused on the work and achievements of Community Paralegals who completed their training in 2012 and included a section featuring HRAPF-trained Paralegals who had started their own organisations. The third issue of the magazine, published in 2019, contained articles or profiles of the Community Paralegals who completed their training with HRAPF in 2013. The third issue also included stories on the Community Paralegals who head HRAPF’s various legal aid centres. This fourth issue of the magazine features the Paralegals who completed their training in 2014 as well as selected Community Paralegals who are working to enhance access to justice in various areas beyond Kampala.

The laws of Uganda envision a particular defined role for ‘paralegals', which differs from the role of ‘Community Paralegals'.

‘Community Paralegals' is a term used by HRAPF to refer to persons belonging to a specific community that have received basic training in law and procedure and therefore possess the basic skills and motivation required to aid their fellow community members in handling legal disputes, and linking them to lawyers when the need arises. Community Paralegals respond to cases that may not necessarily require a lawyer and provide first legal aid services to the communities. The Community Paralegal Training Programme was born out of increased cases of violence and violations against LGBT persons experienced after the introduction of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Parliament in 2009. HRAPF’s newly established legal aid clinic simply could not keep up with the great demand for legal aid services by all who experienced human rights violations yet there very few private lawyers who were willing to handle these cases. HRAPF decided to train members from within the LGBT community so that they can take on the cases concerning their fellow community members as they arose. The Programme was extended to also train Community Paralegals to serve sex workers since they were also facing similar challenges. In 2019, the first group of Community Paralegals providing legal aid to People Who Use and Inject Drugs completed their training.

New trainees are able to join the Community Paralegal Training Programme after successfully progressing through various stages of a stringent recruitment process. HRAPF admits a selected number of trainees to the programme who are vetted and recommended by partner organisations. Upon admission to the Programme, trainees undertake to serve the communities from where they had been recommended. Community Paralegals create human rights awareness through community outreach sessions, provide legal aid and mobilise the community for any community activities. They are also supported by HRAPF through continuous learning and share their work through quarterly sharing sessions.

There are three modules in the Community Paralegal Training Programme, each of which is covered during a separate, intensive week-long residential training. These three trainings are purposefully scheduled over a period of nine months, in order to provide time for the trainees to gradually put their new skills into practice and to digest the large amounts of theory covered during the contact sessions. During the first training module, trainees are introduced to the legal system in Uganda in a broad sense. In the second module, they are introduced to criminal law and procedure while in the third module, they focus on civil law and human rights. The training has a considerable practical component which involves a week-long placement at HRAPF’s offices and visits to law enforcement agencies such as magistrates courts, Police stations, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Uganda Registration Services Bureau during the course of the training and during the placement. Successful completion of the training is recognised with the awarding of a certificate at an official ceremony and celebration.

This issue of ‘I am a Community Paralegal’ features the fourth batch of Community Paralegals to complete the training as well as a number of gamechangers who are bringing justice to marginalised communities in areas beyond Kampala.

HRAPF is immensely proud of the Community Paralegals featured in this magazine and commends them for their tenacity, passion and tireless work for justice.

Dr. Adrian Jjuuko
Executive Director, HRAPF
Community Paralegals are the crucial link between grass root communities and justice service points

By Dora K. Musinguzi: Executive Director, Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS

Dora K. Musinguzi is a human rights activist and the Executive Director at Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET). She is a team leader to a great team of social justice lawyers and activists who believe in shaping our society to achieve health and gender rights. UGANET’s mandate is to promote social justice on the foundation that the law, legal policies and human rights are critical enablers in influencing the success of health, gender equality and HIV interventions intended to prevent further spread and also mitigate the adverse social impact and suffering caused by gender inequality, HIV and other health conditions.

Human rights for marginalised and most at risk populations (MARPs) must be realised if the fight against the spread of HIV is to be won. We are at a point where the world recognises that no-one should be left behind in the struggle and what this means is that everyone counts and every life matters. The marginalised and MARPs are critical in the struggle to prevent further spread of HIV. Usually, they are keen to protect the confidentiality of their HIV status because upon disclosure they become more vulnerable to stigma in all spheres of their lives. The struggle we have currently is to ensure that stigma and discrimination of all forms in all places, be it domestic or in public, is wiped out. It is a vicious cycle of events: when MARPs are faced with stigma they go underground, shun medication and continue to contribute to the spread of HIV. If vulnerable groups fear testing for HIV, they are left out of the treatment arena. We need to create an enabling environment which encourages testing and treatment and inclusion and which discourages stigma and exclusion on the basis of grounds such as social status or beliefs.

Our Constitution guarantees human rights to all citizens irrespective of their status and particular vulnerability. The actual practice and realisation of these rights especially for marginalised groups is, however, hindered by many barriers both structural and perceived. The law notwithstanding therefore, access to justice remains limited for MARPs and other vulnerable groups for various reasons. For instance, most of the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) services remain in the urban centres with limited local presences save for Police and now the newly established Local Defense Units. Only 18.2% of people in rural areas are able to access a Magistrate Court within a distance of less than 5km compared to an overwhelming 56% in urban areas.¹

There are challenges of raising resources for transportation to the relevant institutions. Furthermore, the highly charged and adversarial system of justice combined with a strong focus on procedures and rules can be distressing and disempowering, especially for the disenfranchised. This creates a physical barrier to timely access to justice that may result in victims or users relinquishing their rights. Other barriers include requirements to pay various user fees for legal

¹ Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LAPSNET) Access to justice for the poor, marginalized and vulnerable people in Uganda (2015) 82.
processes, technical, language, attitudinal barriers and corruption, which all compound the difficulty for the ordinary person to access justice in Uganda.

Although there has been an increase of chief magisterial areas to 82, 80% of the 2600 lawyers in the country are serving a population of 40 million Ugandans.2 The resultant impact of the above challenges are increasing levels of case backlog, violation of rights and congestion in prisons. The lack of legal representation for the poor and vulnerable remain key with only 20% Ugandans being in position to engage a private lawyer.

Legal aid services remain limited in terms of geographical coverage due to resource constraints. For a long time LASPs have proposed to government to create a law that would enable streamlining of legal aid services into government services and hence close the gap of access to a lawyer which in turn ensures the right to a fair hearing. We are only hopeful that these policies will be put in place to ensure equal access to justice for all persons.

That said, our government also needs to work towards repealing all laws that are punitive and discriminatory in nature especially those geared towards further marginalising People Living with HIV (PLHIVs), MARPS and other key populations from our law books. Take for instance the HIV Prevention and Control Act 2014, and the Penal Code Act sections that create unconstitutional offences or create gaps for MARPS to be unfairly charged.

The persons who are recruited to be trained as Community Paralegals by human rights organisations such as UGANET and HRAPF are community leaders who are held in high regard; they exhibit a spirit of volunteerism and are viewed as strong and grounded personalities. A Community Paralegal is thus a person of outstanding character, integrity and knowledge who is respected in their community and trained and equipped with basic legal knowledge to provide free services to the community where they live.

A Community Paralegal ought to be a role model, an initiator of good practices, a trend setter and a good problem solver. Being a Community Paralegal means that such an individual then becomes the link between their community and duty bearers, leaders and the justice system. Once that gap is bridged, justice at the grass root level is ensured. A good Community Paralegal should thus be able to effectively play the role of bridging the gap between his community and the justice service points.

I endorse HRAPF’s Community Paralegal training programme as it aims at supporting special categories and key groups through identifying and training grass root soldiers to help MARPS in accessing not only justice but also health services and to stand out and advocate for their rights.

Community Paralegals work best if they form a support network to strengthen their interventions. They can also be introduced to formal justice systems in some areas and trained as court annexed mediators depending on their qualifications.

Community Paralegals are barefoot lawyers whose establishment is aimed at ensuring that they reach communities where access to justice is unheard of or far from reach. It is imperative on them to be that strong bridge and link between their communities and duty bearers, to speak for the voiceless, advocate for positive change on issues affecting their communities and to always make appropriate and complete referrals to duty bearers.

A Community Paralegal ought to be a role model, an initiator of good practices, a trend setter and a good problem solver.

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PART I

HRAPF Community Paralegal TRAINING: THE FOURTH INTAKE

HRAPF launched its Community Paralegal Training Programme in 2011, in which year five LGBTI persons, one sex worker and two HRAPF staff members completed the training. In 2012, two sex workers and five LGBTI persons also completed the training. The third batch of Community Paralegals, who completed their training in 2013, included four sex workers and a further seven paralegals from the LGBTI community.

2014 is the year of focus for this edition of the Paralegal Magazine. Six persons completed the training in this year. Four of these: Joseph Kaweesi from Come Out Post Test Club (COPTEC); Alexander Human from Blessed Rwenzori Uganda in Kasese; Bob Bwana from Icebreakers Uganda and Shafiq Murungi from Queer Youth Uganda in Hoima were from LGBTI organisations while two, Justine Kunihira, from Kaana Foundation in Fort Portal and Stella Nalumansi from WONE IHA in Mjjeera were from sex worker organisations.

In the first module, the participants were introduced to the legal system in Uganda and equipped with a foundational understanding of the law enforcement system in Uganda. The first module also considered the role, guiding principles and skills of Community Paralegals and enabled trainees to grasp the responsibility which will rest on their shoulders after completing their training. The second module provided an in-depth training on Criminal Law and Procedure and the third module focused on civil court processes as well as human rights. Practical skills such as drafting, communication and presentation skills were focused on. The training also encompassed field trips to the sites where Community Paralegals are most likely to carry out their work: namely Police stations and magistrates courts. The field visits were intended to demystify these often intimidating law enforcement institutions. The trainings were facilitated by various members of the HRAPF team including Dr. Adrian Jjuuko, Patricia Kimera, Edward Mwebaza, Faridah Ikyiimaana and Rashidah Nakkasaga.

The ultimate goal of the Community Paralegal Training Programme is to equip and prepare Community Paralegals to work independently and to successfully handle cases within their communities, and the class of 2014 has lived up to this. The group has made the most of what they have been taught and are serving their communities with admirable innovation and dedication.

A group photo taken at the end of the second module of the training of the 2014 intake of Community Paralegal trainees.
MEET THE FOURTH GROUP OF COMMUNITY PARALEGALS TRAINED BY HRAPF

"CLASS OF 2014"

Justine Kunihiira

Justine is an independent paralegal who supports mainly sex workers in the Fort Portal area. In this article she shares about her work and the impact that she has made in her community since being trained as a Community Paralegal in 2014.

I was based at Kaana Foundation in Fort Portal when I was trained as a Community Paralegal. I am no longer with that organisation and work independently. I work with the sex workers' community in Fort Portal. Sometimes I also take on cases of LGBT persons and People Who Use Drugs. I have also assisted in organising workshops for Most At Risk Populations and providing referrals in terms of healthcare.

I started and finished my training in 2014. At the time I was working as an assistant administrator in Kaana Foundation but I was also facing issues in my personal life, I decided to come out to fight stigma for the voiceless people. I am an activist. I wanted to know more, attain more skills on laws and learn how to communicate effectively. I also wanted to come out and defend my fellow voiceless people, the minorities, sex workers and those who are ignorant about the laws passed by the government. I also wanted to get a vision in my life.

I learnt very many things during the training that I did not know about the Constitution of Uganda and our civil and criminal law procedures. I also made many new friends whom I did not know before. I enjoyed the places where we toured and the people of different tribes and languages that I met.

Personally and professionally, I gained so many skills. I also found out about many different organisations providing services to which I can refer my clients. It was very good for me to get the contact details of lawyers who I can contact if I run into problems. I learnt how to deal with Police officers and how to talk with people in court. They even gave us books to read more. We were taken to different types of courts such as the High Court, Magistrates Courts and the Supreme Court and they taught us how to speak when you appear in court. I learned effective communication skills.

In the past, sex workers were harassed by the Police and leaders in the community. There was much stigma when they went to hospital to get treatment. Since I was trained, I have been involved in sensitisation of sex workers on their rights and there is now a relationship between the Police and the sex worker community. Many of the sex workers formed NGOs. I now know the laws that have been passed in Uganda. I have learned how to defend rights.

Challenges we face as paralegals sometimes is when you need help and you find that you cannot reach the HRAPF lawyers to support you. I also face challenges in not having enough money to carry out the work. We also suffer abuse and harassment from Police officers and face stigma and discrimination. I find that sometimes the money refunded back to us from HRAPF is not enough to cover our costs. I deal with these challenges by using my personal money to help clients where I can.

The work of paralegals in my areas would be made easier if we sensitise health workers about the rights of minorities. Workshops ought to be conducted in Fort Portal. We need ICT materials to teach the community in Fort Portal about the laws which affect them.

I am grateful to HRAPF for training me. I came to learn very many things. I am also glad that in cases which I cannot handle myself I can call upon them for support.
by my childhood friends because of the gender roles they always expected me to play and the gender roles I really felt like playing. This back and forth resulted into loneliness and I just could not figure out why God made me that way. I prayed and fasted over it, but nothing happened.

As I continued to grow, I came to realise that it was not just me, there were many folks like me, so I made it a mission to find them. One by one, I came to know them, many young boys and girls used to open up to me expecting some answers, yet myself, I had no idea. All I knew was that God will punish us by sending our souls to hell when we die. That is what they knew too...

Today am so proud to lead a sexual minority community in Western Uganda. My activism did not just start 8 years ago, it all started when I was still a teenager (15). My desire to help speak up for people like me, those who are not in position to speak for themselves was all I did. It was easy for me because I have never lived in the closet. I just hid it from my mum, though she was supportive of my gender.

Meeting other activists that do the same work helped me a great deal. It helped me get some of the answers I did not have then. It is therefore my wish to extend the knowledge to the people in my community, for them to get closure about sex orientation and gender identity.

HRAPF has played a great part in terms of enhancing my skills. They were the first organisation to notice my work in 2012 and trained me as a Community Paralegal in 2014. This course helped me and my community in terms of access to justice for sexual minorities in Western Uganda. The course also helped me understand more about the law and human rights which was crucial for the kind of work that I was doing.

Today I am continuing to do my work just as I pictured it. Every day, I am grateful for an opportunity given to me to serve another community member as it is an opportunity for me to meet another activist doing the same work as me. Thank you.
Stellah Nalumansi

Stellah Nalumansi works with Mildmay and MARPI (Most At Risk Population Initiative) Mulago as counsellor and mobiliser. Before she became a HRAPF paralegal, she was working with Women’s Health Support Initiative (WHSI) as secretary. It was during her time at WHSI that she enrolled to be trained as a Community Paralegal. She works with adolescent girls and HIV patients in Mityana, Nakasongola district at St. Francis Hospital. She is stationed at the drop-in Centre of the hospital where services such as counselling, HIV screening, testing, treatment of HIV and HIV prevention services such as condoms are provided. Stella enjoys hitting targets in terms of mobilisation and getting the required number of participants to participate in the different activities organised by the organisations she works with. She enjoys counseling her patients and also likes it when they give feedback about how she helped them. She finds it easier to handle cases because of the trainings. As she handles cases of her clients successfully she keeps gaining their respect and trust. Most of her cases deal with the assault of sex workers, which is all too common. Another memorable case she worked on was an abortion case in which she managed to secure for the clients a milder punishment of 6 months community service at a hospital.

During the Community Paralegal training, she learnt about the law in Uganda and how to apply it in order to help her clients, she also learnt how to approach and handle matters with the Police. After completing the training she is no longer afraid to deal with the Police or to go to court on behalf of a client. Her favorite topics during the training were those that dealt with the judicial systems in Uganda, criminal law as well as civil law. She enjoys sharing sessions where, as paralegals, they have the opportunity to share experiences and receive follow-up training.

The challenges she has met as a paralegal include having a hard time in her community about her choice to work with sex workers. However, the HRAPF trainings done in the area have helped some community members such as Local Council leaders to understand her line of work and its importance. She is also approached more often with cases as they know what her work is about. Money is another hurdle she faces while working as a paralegal, sometimes she has to transport herself to where the clients are and at times even transport the clients to court. At times she is required to include medical forms to her reports which require money.

She loves her job as a paralegal and says the HRAPF lawyers are always helpful and the paralegal WhatsApp group helps them keep up with each other.

Bob Bwana

Bob Bwana works with Icebreakers Uganda (IBU) as the Director of Operations.

Icebreakers Uganda (IBU) has worked with LGBTI people since 2010, responding to security, legal and social concerns. The organisation documents cases of violations against LGBTI people and follows up on cases of those in conflict with the law. We also refer a number of cases to HRAPF for further legal management and rights enforcement. I got to learn about the training opportunity with HRAPF through a human rights training and later got the details during interactions with the Executive Directors of HRAPF and Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG)
when they met to discuss the case of the late David Kato. I also regularly visit HRAPF’s social media page on Facebook for updates. I have always found the Facebook page and also the HRAPF website very informative. I had learnt a little bit from reading some of HRAPF’s work and also their social media updates, but it had helped me to understand how much more I needed to learn. This consciousness of my own knowledge gap about the law motivated me to engage in the paralegal training to help out members of the LGBTI community that are marginalized. The thirst for knowledge of the law was the key factor for me. I was eager to learn more, to learn what I needed to know in order to effectively assist my colleagues to link them to legal services.

My experience during the training in 2014 was new, interesting and exciting, and it drove me to query why law enforcement officers act contrary to the law, such as carrying out unlawful arrests and physically harassing the people they arrest. I admit that I had never really bothered to ask if the way Police officers treated community members in detention was right. I just always accepted it as part of the day-to-day life of an LGBTI person. After the training, I became more knowledgeable and confident in dealing with the Police and the courts. This training was an eye opener. I learnt so much from there. I had never really considered learning to write well, or that I needed to take actual lessons in oral communication. This training not only showed me that need, but it also filled the need. My life has become better through networking.

Since the training, I have worked on very many cases and have been touched by many of them. The most outstanding case that I have worked on was that of a trans-woman living with HIV. She was violently evicted from her house after the neighbours became suspicious about her gender identity. When the case first came to my attention, the client was physically injured, homeless and had nothing to eat. She had no access to the most basic human necessities. I asked her to move in at IBU safe space in the meantime to enable her to take care of herself while we at Icebreakers and our partners handled the issue. I tried to mediate the matter with the landlord, who refused to refund the client’s rent even though he owed her advance rent for three months. I had to refer the case to the HRAPF lawyers, who in the end made a deal with another tenant who wanted the house to refund the client’s money. That tenant only refunded rent for a month, and the client was unable to go back to demand for the balance because the last time she went there with a HRAPF lawyer, they were chased away with stones. This incident upset me so much because there was so little I could do for the client, yet our client had suffered great violation. It reinforced my commitment to fight for my community.

Life as a paralegal is however not altogether rosy. I face some serious challenges such as non-recognition of paralegals at Police, inadequate facilitation of paralegal work, and lack of information about the role of paralegals in society in bridging the gap of access to justice among the communities with whom we work. People will insist on seeing a lawyer for the simplest issue that I can solve in no time at all, but they only have confidence in lawyers so they waste a lot of time waiting for lawyers because they do not understand our work and our competence. I, however, acknowledge the vital contribution HRAPF has made, through the paralegal trainings, towards enabling marginalised groups to access justice. This training empowered me so much. It is an opportunity I would recommend for every LGBTI person. Knowledge is the highest form of power anyone can achieve, and the paralegal trainings have covered a big knowledge gap in the community.

At IBU, we now have a therapist to support community members. HRAPF would also do well to make therapy available to Community Paralegals who have been traumatised or greatly affected by the cases that they handle. I am grateful to HRAPF for the opportunity and what it has enabled me to do for my community in the struggle for access to justice for LGBT persons in Uganda.

After the training, I became more knowledgeable and confident in dealing with the police and the courts.
Joseph Kawesi

Joseph Kawesi is the founder and Executive Director of Come Out Post Test Club (COPTEC), an organisation for transgender persons living with HIV and AIDS.

Our organisation works with transgender persons who have HIV and AIDS. We visit the sick, provide nutritional support, offer counselling and support our clients with housing. We also engage in advocacy.

I am passionate about helping others living with HIV and AIDS like me and watching them become stronger so they also speak out about themselves confidently and inspire others. This passion came about after my friend Abel died of HIV and AIDS after refusing treatment.

I was trained as a Community Paralegal in 2014. I was motivated to join the Community Paralegal Programme to enable me to better support the community. Even before being trained, I worked with other activists in order to provide legal aid to community members who had been arrested. We also worked with HRAPF lawyers and received support from HRAPF. There was a particular case that we worked on of a community member who was arrested for being idle and disorderly; that case is what inspired me to become a trained Community Paralegal.

During the training, I learned much about the law that I did not know before. I learnt that arresting someone for being idle and disorderly would often be unlawful. I also learned the legal processes of land acquisition in Uganda and what to do when the purchase goes wrong or when someone threatens to take another’s land.

Since completing my training, I have gained respect within the LGBTI community, they call me ‘lawyer’ even though I explain that I am a paralegal. I no longer fear the Police, we have a relationship and work together. I am glad to be able to defend myself and others. The training has also helped me to expand my organisation.

As a paralegal, when transgender persons or MSM are arrested I intervene. I have handled cases where community members have been arrested for being idle and disorderly and impersonation. I have also handled cases where the community members were accused of drug-related crimes.

I face some challenges as a Community Paralegal: transport costs are high, at times the Police do not want to cooperate with us without lawyers also being present. It is also challenging when false accusations are brought against community members. I try to deal with these challenges by mediating conflicts between parties, counselling them and carrying out my own investigations. I also contact HRAPF lawyers for assistance when necessary.

Overall, it has been a good experience to work with HRAPF and to act as a Community Paralegal with their support.
The Paralegals Who Are Bringing Legal Aid to Every Region of Uganda

One of the main reasons why HRAPF initiated the Community Paralegal Training Programme was to bring access to legal aid services closer to our target groups in every district of the country. HRAPF’s access to justice team, based at the Secretariat in Kampala, has limited resources and capacity, and therefore also has limited impact in areas beyond Kampala. Over the years, HRAPF has deliberately recruited paralegal trainees from areas beyond Kampala in order to ensure that locally based community members in various districts in the country are available to take on cases. HRAPF is also aware of the fact that the majority of awareness raising efforts concerning vulnerable groups such as sex workers, LGBTI persons and PWUIDs have been concentrated in Kampala. There are higher levels of prejudice against these minority groups in smaller towns and rural areas than in the big cities.

Community Paralegals who fight for the rights of vulnerable groups in areas beyond Kampala are indispensable. These Community Paralegals not only intervene in individual cases where marginalised persons face rights violations, they also work to raise awareness, educate the community, mediate disputes at a community-level and empower members of minority groups with skills and knowledge in order to stand up for their own rights.

From the beginning of 2018, HRAPF started establishing regional legal aid centres that are led by Community Paralegals. While these centres perform an important role in realisation of rights in the Northern, Eastern, Central and Western regions of the country. Two more Centres were also set up this year in Kampala specifically targeting Lesbians, Bisexual and Queer Women (LBQ) for the first one and Transgender persons for the second one. The population of vulnerable persons spread across Uganda cannot be served effectively by these few centres only. A vibrant body of Community Paralegals, spread across all districts of the country, is essential if human rights will truly be taken to all.

This section of the magazine features interviews and articles to reflect the work of a selected few Community Paralegals serving their communities beyond Kampala. We are grateful to be partnering with these fighters for justice and intend on continually strengthening our relationship with Community Paralegals in all corners of the country.

Living my passion for advocating for positive change in my community

By Real Raymond

Real Raymond was trained to work as a Community Paralegal among LGBT persons in the Western region. He started and finished his training in 2018 under Mbarara Rise Foundation where he is the Executive Director.

I am gay, a rights activist and the Executive Director of Mbarara Rise Foundation (MRF). I work with the LGBTQ and sex workers communities in western parts of Uganda. At Mbarara Rise Foundation we have an employment skills training program including a cake baking project which has equipped 149 rural LGBTQ people with baking skills. We also have a human rights awareness program; HIV/AIDS testing and counseling outreach programs; a peer program and a research and documentation program.
Real taking part in the cake baking programme

I am passionate about social change work. My passion for social change began in April 2009 when the Ugandan Parliament passed a resolution allowing MP David Bahati to submit a private member’s bill to strengthen laws against homosexuality. Bahati proposed the bill on 13th October 2009. Uganda is a country where the human rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBTQ) community have been stripped away by the anti-gay legislation already on the books. The country’s LGBTQ community has a history of being harassed and silenced by the government and the Ugandan Police. The proposal of the bill, therefore, offered me an opportunity to fight for not only the repeal of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, but also the abolishing of existing anti-gay laws that have seen an escalation of violent attacks against and harassment of LGBTQ people in Uganda.

Learning to be yourself and dealing with other people’s perception of you can be hard for anyone. This process can be especially stressful or tough for rural people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. In fact, they can face unique issues when it comes to mental health. LGBTQ rural communities face pressure from their family or community which put them at greater risk for emotional health struggles like depression, anxiety, substance abuse and even suicide. This motivated me to join the HRAPF paralegal programme to acquire knowledge and skills on how to carry out public education to increase awareness on these challenges. I started and finished my training as a Community Paralegal in 2018. More than anything else, I gained exceptional communication skills that have supported me to interact with people on a daily basis: interviewing clients, conducting meetings, and working with the support staff within a firm. I learnt to communicate well and be precise to avoid misunderstandings or confusion.

Some of the services I am able to offer to the community after the training are: to advise clients on the legal process and options for pursuing remedies; to assist clients to navigate authorities and institutions; to mediate disputes; to organise collective action, advocacy as well as fact finding, investigations, and monitoring. Being a Community Paralegal has given me the opportunity to help others, many of them when they are suffering through one of the most difficult experiences of their lives. It is very rewarding that I am helping them through a difficult process and see the benefit they receive from my services. I have also been able to advance community initiatives through their work in supporting advocacy projects. For instance, the Mbarara Rise Foundation Equal Justice Centre project in Southwestern Uganda represents rural LGBTQ people who are exploited in the workplace and in their community. The Centre also selects Community Paralegals to create outreach strategies, assist lawyers with discovery and investigations, and to interact with communities to build relationships with disadvantaged or LGBTQ populations. I am often at the frontlines of advocacy efforts, and play an important part in legal social justice efforts.

The main challenge that I face as a paralegal is intimidation and harassment from bad actors trying to compel me to drop some of the LGBTQ cases. We have also had threats of violence from armed men appearing at our office doorsteps. Physical and verbal harassment from Police have also hampered my work. I constantly take steps to engage the Police and build relationship with them.

I am getting to live my passion of advocating for positive change in communities. It is hard work: I put in around 72 hours a week. I know I have made a difference to the rural LGBTQ community serving as a role model for them to pursue their own passions one day.

I learnt to communicate well and be precise to avoid misunderstandings or confusion.
Eric Ssali started his training as a Community Paralegal in 2018 and completed the final module in 2019. He was part of Masaka KP HIV Prevention and Support Organization at the time of his training and was trained to serve the LGBT community in the Central region.

My name is Ssali Eric Abudallah. I am the Director of Programs at Masaka KP HIV Prevention and Support Organization (MAHIPSO). I am passionate about serving the LGBTIQ and sex worker community and advocating for their rights.

MAHIPSO covers 12 areas within greater Masaka, namely Masaka, Gomba, Mpigi, Kalungu, Bukomansibi, Kwotera, Sembabule, Kalsizo, Nyendo, Kyabakaza, Lyantonde and Kyazanga. MAHIPSO’s focus areas include: advocating for the health and human rights of LGBTIQ persons, PWUIDs and sex workers in the greater Masaka region; building capacity, solidarity and skills for trans and female sex workers, MSM and LBQ women; developing and maintaining links between health service providers and enabling referrals of LGBTIQ persons, PWUIDs and sex workers to free and friendly health services; conducting outreach programs to provide HIV Testing Services, distribute condoms and lubricants and sharing legal information and evaluating our target communities’ access to health and legal services.

I started my training as a Community Paralegal in September 2018 and completed the final module in March 2019. I was motivated to join the Community Paralegal Training Programme because of the need to increase access to justice for LGBTIQ persons and sex workers in the greater Masaka region. During the training, I was introduced to the legal system and procedures in Uganda. The practical sessions stood out the most for me as well as the experience of visiting a magistrates’ court. I gained knowledge and skills that built my capacity in order to provide legal services to the community. I was glad to learn how to conduct mediations; improve my communication skills; document and report on violations committed against community members and handle cases to completion even without the assistance of a lawyer. The training has equipped me with legal knowledge that I have passed on to the community through legal aid camps, sensitisation trainings and HTS outreaches. The training has also enabled me to connect and build rapport with Police stations in the various districts where we carry out our work.

Since completing my training as a Community Paralegal, I have handled various cases including cases of defamation and theft. The main challenge that I face as a Community Paralegal is the fact that I serve within 12 districts and that is too much ground to try and cover efficiently with few hands on board. There is need to train more Community Paralegals to share in the task of providing quality legal aid in the 12 districts within the greater Masaka region. The community also expects paralegals to assist them with their financial needs, even though we explain to them that our role ends at providing free legal services, which can present challenges. Overall, our community would benefit from a regional legal aid clinic.

Working with HRAPF has been a great experience as they have been committed to helping the community in every part of the country. HRAPF is always present when needed to ensure justice. I cannot thank HRAPF enough for their devoted service.

I was motivated to join because of the need to increase access to justice for LGBTIQ persons and sex workers in the greater Masaka region.
Living my dream of being a lawyer

By Lydia Mukisa Stephans

Lydia Mukisa Stephans was trained to work with the LGBT community in the Central Region. She completed the Community Paralegal Training Programme in 2016 and was part of Kampus Liberty Uganda when she was trained.

While at Out and Proud, the Executive Director Jonah Ssemwogerere identified me and forwarded my name to HRAPF to be trained as a Community Paralegal. The Paralegal Training Programme at HRAPF drastically changed my life. It gave me confidence to approach state institutions such as Police and courts of law, exposed me to knowledge of the law, and availed me with the opportunity to interact with prominent persons such as the District Police Commanders, Officers in Charge of Police Stations and various lawyers and court workers. Such opportunities made me change my dress code, my conduct and the way I live such that I can serve the community when it has confidence in me. This has given me tremendous self-confidence and personal satisfaction. I now look and feel like I have achieved my childhood dream of being a lawyer. I feel accomplished and satisfied when I receive calls from people seeking my legal advice in respect of their problems. My passion for law is fulfilled when I advise or help people who have been arrested and detained at Police and even in court. I like receiving the facilitation from HRAPF for handling cases as a paralegal. It is like earning a living from practicing law. I am also able to take control of my life and even to bail myself out of Police in the event that I find myself in conflict with the law. I can now sense danger since I have the knowledge of the law acquired from this program.

I have handled several cases in the Wakiso District but the most outstanding one is the case of a male client who had been charged with aggravated defilement. I intervened in the case and managed to secure for him a court bail. Handling this case exposed me to various big Police officers and court clerks, who are now my great friends. They even call me to solve the cases whenever they arise, because they know that I am a trained paralegal. Wherever there is an opportunity to any person to train as a Community Paralegal, I wholeheartedly advise you to take up that opportunity with both hands. Law is interesting. Law is part of life. Once you know the law, you can avoid so many problems and most importantly, your rights will never be violated by anyone. I am now knowledgeable and aware of my rights and they can never be violated at any point without me seeking a remedy. I know where to go and I know what to do when my rights are violated. Knowledge is power and I am sure and confident that I am knowledgeable of my rights and I have the power to fight for my rights and the rights of others.

I would like to give credit to Out and Proud, my current Executive Director Babu Ramadhan and to all community organisations. A bigger credit to the HRAPF team for the support in terms of knowledge and finances to follow up on cases.
Making a difference in Arua through legal aid service provision and sensitisation

An interview with Innocent Acidri

I Innocent Acidri was trained as a Community Paralegal in order to serve the LGBT and sex worker community in the Northern region. He completed his training in 2018 and was part of the West Nile Rainbow Initiative at the time.

IACPM: What are you passionate about?

INNOCENT: I am passionate about equality and justice for all.

IACPM: What is the name of your organisation and where are you based?

INNOCENT: I am the Coordinator of West Nile Rainbow Initiative (WERAIN), we work in Arua area.

IACPM: Could you tell me a bit more about WERAIN’s work and focus areas?

INNOCENT: WERAIN is a community-based grass root initiative that works with young people, sex workers and handles matters of sexual orientation and gender identity focusing on sexual health and rights, HIV/AIDS and related infectious diseases awareness and prevention among marginalised groups and individuals. The organisation bolsters practical, entrepreneurial and leadership skills, it also engages in research and advocacy through strategic partnerships in order to eradicate stigma and discrimination.

IACPM: What motivated you to join the HRAPF’s Community Paralegal Training Programme?

INNOCENT: Every time I would go to Kampala people would think I am already a Community Paralegal. I did not even know what paralegals do. When I was invited I was excited, I knew it would be good for us all and for the community itself; I decided I should just go and do it, come back and help my community back home. Indeed it was worth the try, and the results so far are satisfying.

IACPM: What have you gained from the Community Paralegal Training Programme, both professionally and personally?

INNOCENT: The training has helped me to connect well with the community and the justice service providers like the Police. It has helped me to build my personal skills when it comes to communications and handling of cases. All these skills were packaged in our very first module of the training that was premised on the concept of the paralegal and the legal system in Uganda.

IACPM: What knowledge did you gain during the training that is particularly valuable to you?

INNOCENT: I used to think that legal knowledge was only necessary for lawyers, since it is their trade. After the trainings I realised that it was a misconception, that in fact it was more useful for us who did not possess the knowledge. I am now able to understand legal terminology and conceptualise the notion of human rights. I also gained connection with other Community Paralegals who share knowledge with us. We have a Whatsapp group in which we interact, share legal problems and get legal solutions and counsel from even our seniors, the lawyers at HRAPF that are part of the group.
IACPM: Do you have any memories about the training which you would like to share?

INNOCENT: When I first went for the training I thought the course was going to be very hard. Given the fact that the facilitators were all friendly, it made it so easy for me to learn and understand the concepts that was used there. West Nilers do not speak Luganda, sometimes all the conversation will be in Luganda. The facilitators will also get back to me and make sure I understand. Every facilitator introduced themselves and I realised they were mostly lawyers and I could work with them. We also met paralegals from previous trainings who came to share their experiences with us.

IACPM: How has the training influenced your ability to make a difference in the community in Arua where you are working?

INNOCENT: I have been doing some awareness sessions that have helped the community members to understand the basics of the law. I also participate in radio talk shows in the region, where I share information about the law. They know some of the things that has to do with the law and the criminal law procedure. They know to come to me for support and guidance. It really has impacted me and the community.

IACPM: Which kind of cases have you handled since you were trained as a paralegal?

INNOCENT: I have handled a number of cases, some at the Police and some just at community level. I handled a case at the Police where my colleague was attacked by a friend and I advised him to open a case against the friend. He got some compensation and the guy was released. There was also a case with sex workers being arrested for being rogue and vagabond. We talked to the OC Station and the girls were released. Cases that remain at community level are the usual conflict and misunderstandings between community members. I harmonise the conflicts and create awareness.

IACPM: Which challenges do you face as a paralegal?

INNOCENT: One thing is that the clients do not open up fully to you and this affects the quality of assistance given to them. Most community members think paralegals have a lot of money. At first, when I completed my paralegal course, they were asking for money (laughs). Every time you try to engage the community members they want money and they don’t understand that it is voluntary work that you are just trying to do for the community. When we hear about Police arrests of sex workers. You try to intervene and they simply deny that there has been an arrest. That makes it challenging to continue.

IACPM: How do you deal with these challenges?

INNOCENT: We deal with these challenges through sensitisation of the community to enable them to understand the basics of the law and human rights. Sometimes I encourage them to familiarise themselves with the Police and community members to mitigate the challenges that we face.

IACPM: How do you experience working with HRAPF?

INNOCENT: My experience with HRAPF is that it is a very, very good organisation that helps everyone in Uganda. My experience working with them is that most of the staff are so friendly. Even before I have always found them to be friendly and approachable which makes communication easier.

IACPM: How could the work of paralegals and the quality of legal aid and other support services offered in your region be improved?

INNOCENT: I thank HRAPF for expanding its wings and training Community Paralegals in every region. As a paralegal in Arua, we only have one regional centre in Lira that serves the whole Northern region. Before that I was the only paralegal in the Northern region. My other colleagues have now been trained too. If we could have more trainings for more paralegals that will be helpful - also more training of Police and more awareness sessions for the community members.

I also participate in radio talk shows in the region, where I share information about the law.
Empowering sex workers through knowledge and passion in Kasese

An Interview with Rose Kahunde

Rose Kahunde was trained as a Community Paralegal in 2013 in order to serve sex workers in the Western region.

IACPM: Can you tell us a little about yourself?

ROSE: I am the Executive Director of Women Health Support Initiative. This NGO operates in Kasese District. We handle issues of health rights for women and girls living with HIV and women who engage in the sex trade. I am myself a sex worker and have earned my living this way for 18 years. I was trained as a paralegal in 2013.

IACPM: How did you come to train as a paralegal?

ROSE: I had heard about this organisation called HRAPF that works with LGBTI people. I did not really know about it at all but, around 2013, I was contacted by some people from HRAPF who informed me that the then-ED of WONETHA had nominated me as a trainee to take part in the Community Paralegal Program. They told me more about HRAPF and I picked interest in the programme.

IACPM: What made you accept that invitation?

ROSE: I had started my organisation by this time and had a serious challenge because even though I was one of the few people who knew something about interfacing with the Police in Kasese at the time, I was not so good at it. I also had some fears and was therefore not that effective. This seemed like a great opportunity for me to learn more about legal protection for myself and the sex workers I worked with. I really wanted to learn and be able to use that knowledge to help my fellow women.

IACPM: Please tell us about your experience as a paralegal trainee.

ROSE: I remember being really confused at the beginning of the first module. But as the training went on and the facilitators engaged us more, I began to like the training better. People were asking questions, and the facilitators were slower and used more understandable language. Then it became really fun and informative.

IACPM: So what changed after the training? What is new in your life?

ROSE: I tell you my life completely changed after that training. You know how they teach us to write proposals in that training? I had never written a proposal in my life before. We used to pay people to do it for us. But after the training I wrote a proposal and in 2014 I received the grant. It was amazing. Now actually AJWS also funds my organisation because I write good proposals. The training really improved my capacity as an Executive Director.

IACPM: Have you handled any cases since then? Which case has been the most outstanding for you personally?

ROSE: I handled a case once of a sex worker who was attacked by a client. He had paid but then he attacked her and stole her laptop. I remember she was a student at some university and used to pay her tuition from sex work. When that man attacked her, he beat her so badly and she was hospitalised for a long time. As soon as I heard of the case I went and filed a Police report for her and got the Police forms for the medical exam. The Police arrested the man and he negotiated with the client for the return of her laptop and the payment of all hospital bills and compensation for the time she had to stay in hospital not working. She did not even have to give up a single coin to the Police as a bribe. I was very proud of this achievement because really she was a hardworking girl and she was trying to better her life through school. I could not allow that man to destroy her dreams.

IACPM: Thank you very much for sharing with us. Do you have any last words? Like advice to HRAPF, or to other paralegals or the communities you serve?

ROSE: All I can say is that HRAPF’s training has really modeled my life and my organisation’s work. This magazine is a really good innovation. I hope that they will do this for all the years to come. Train more Community Paralegals and also write more magazines. I am very excited, I cannot wait to read it.
Things are getting better for LGBT youth in Mukono

An interview with Ishmael Luggya

Ishmael completed his training as a Community Paralegal in 2015. At the time, he was working with Kyetume Youth Health Programme.

IACPM: What is the name of your organisation and where are you based?

ISHMAEL: I work for Naguru Teenage Centre, previously Kyetume Youth Health Programme. We are based in Mukono, Nakisunga subcounty.

IACPM: In which areas do you work and which particular communities or groups do you work with?

ISHMAEL: We work in Mukono Central with the Bukasa Community, the Kyetume Community and the Namayiba Community. Our focus is on youth – including LGBTI youth as well as sex workers.

IACPM: Could you tell me more about the specific programmes and services which your organisation provides to its targets groups?

ISHMAEL: We promote and advocate for Sexual and Reproductive Health Services. We desire LGBT people to be able to access services that they need. We provide emergency contraceptives and family planning services to sex workers. We take the services where they are. To LGBTI persons we distribute free lubricants and free condoms. We also run trainings on a number of life skills and rights issues and encourage our members to save. We also offer free STI treatment.

IACPM: What motivated you to join the HRAPF Paralegal Training Programme?

ISHMAEL: I wanted the skill of a paralegal. I was among the LGBTI people myself. By that time I was already associated with the LGBTI community. I had a passion to help and to stand for those who could not stand for themselves.

IACPM: When did you start and finish your training as a Community Paralegal?

ISHMAEL: I completed the programme in 2015.

IACPM: What have you gained from the Community Paralegal Training Programme, both professionally and personally?

ISHMAEL: The last session was very practical. We went to the court and I gained an understanding of how these processes work. It opened my mind on the issues concerning the law. I gained knowledge and it made me better than before. I also orientate some of the other people I am working with and share the knowledge I have gained.

IACPM: Which memories do you have of the training that you may want to share with us?

ISHMAEL: The trainings were good because we had good facilitators like Joanine Nanyange and Patricia Kimera. Patricia is the one who encouraged me to go for this training. She saw something in me and thought I would be good. I met some good people and new friends who I never thought I would meet. I got to understand how other organisations are doing and we could compare notes. I remember that we learned about various Acts such as the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the HIV Prevention and Control Act. They taught us about our roles, the basics of how to handle the Police, and how we are to behave in the community. I gained a bit of knowledge about the law.

IACPM: How has the training influenced your ability to make a difference in the community in Mukono where you are working?

ISHMAEL: I do not handle cases on a regular basis. We do sensitise people so now when they
are knowledgeable they can avoid arrest. We do community dialogues with sex workers, with LGBTI people we sensitise and talk to them and explain how unnecessary arrests can be avoided. There has been a definite improvement in our community and minimal cases. The cases that do come up end at Police.

**IACP: Which challenges do you face as a paralegal?**

**ISHMAEL:** The challenges we face is that we do not have identification cards that show us to be Community Paralegals trained by HRAPF. The other problem is that Police want a bribe in order to release people on bond. Stigma and discrimination is no longer as bad as it used to be. In the villages where we work we have focal people equipped with lubricants and condoms and provide them to LGBTI persons free of charge. Service delivery to LGBT people has really improved.

**IACP: How do you experience working with HRAPF?**

**ISHMAEL:** I thank HRAPF for the opportunity and for the work they are doing. HRAPF is welcoming. I have found no challenge - they have been there for us. If there are follow-up trainings available they should let us know and we should be trained on changes in the law.

**IACP: How could the work of paralegals and the quality of legal aid and other support services offered in your region be improved?**

**ISHMAEL:** By giving more opportunities for training of organisations, more and more people are coming out and more trainings should be offered to more staff members.

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We do sensitise people so now when they are knowledgeable they can avoid arrest.

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**Knowledge truly is power for vulnerable communities in the Eastern region**

By Maria Nantale

Maria Nantale was trained as a Community Paralegal to serve the LGBTI community in the Eastern region. She started and completed her training in 2018 and was the Executive Director of Eastern Region Women’s Empowerment Organization (ERWEO) at the time.

My name is Maria Nantale. I am the Executive Director of Eastern Region Women's Empowerment Organization (ERWEO). I am passionate about serving my fellow LGBTI community members through the work I do which includes different kinds of advocacy to enable provision of quality, friendly services and equality for all in the rural and semi-urban areas of Eastern Uganda.

Our organisation works with all Key Populations especially the LBQI persons and sex workers in the geographical areas of Mbale, Tororo and Teso region with offices based in Mbale town and a branch in Katakwi District. ERWEO’s focus areas include: creation of awareness on HIV and AIDS; pre-exposure prophylaxis; sexual and reproductive health services; sexual and gender-based violence and intimate partner violence; economic empowerment; personal growth and advocacy. We conduct community outreaches to promote, distribute and demonstrate proper use of both male and female condoms, pads and lubricants and to offer HIV Counselling and Testing services in our key population hotspots. We also link and refer clients to the friendly health facilities through the peer-to-peer mechanism with the help of our different health service providing partners and our drop-in centers. We have created healthy working relationships with different partners and allies during the years of our existence which have enabled a reduction of stigma and discrimination and increased access to quality services in our region including educating our members on human rights within the context of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE). We also organise and facilitate workshops and training sessions on health and human rights and cater for the wellbeing of the LBT and sex worker communities in the Eastern Region.
I started the Community Paralegal Training in December 2017 and finished over the course of 2018. I was motivated to participate in the training by the high rate of violence and arrests of our community members occurring in Eastern Uganda and in Mbaale in particular. Blackmail was also very common at the time – I was a victim of this myself and almost took my life. Being trained as a Community Paralegal presented a great opportunity for me to learn and understand the basics of the law in order to serve my community better. As a leader, such training presented an opportunity for me to learn how to protect myself in different circumstances.

The topic of criminal law, covered in the second module of the training, stood out for me. Criminal law has such a big effect on LGBTI persons in Uganda and learning about the rights of a suspect and arrested person was new to me. The training made me realise that the rights of LGBTI persons are being abused simply because we do not know what they are – knowledge is power.

I have personally gained from the training in that I have learned how to protect myself from the different kinds of violence that I encounter on a daily basis including blackmail and extortion. Professionally, the training has helped me to stand my ground and defend a member without allowing the case to progress and become complicated. It has also enabled me to train our members on their rights and to avoid arrests, which has reduced our number of cases. The training has influenced my ability to make a difference in the community through the training of members, gatekeepers and service providers on their rights.

Since completing my training, I have handled different cases which mostly concern violence and evictions. A challenge that I have faced in intervening in cases is the fact that I do not have any official identification to prove to the Police that I am a Community Paralegal. Another challenge is the fact that not all LGBT persons trust the legal aid services that we offer; it takes time to build up that trust and in the meantime they just suffer violations in silence.

My experience working with HRAPF has been great, it has opened doors and has improved my understanding on the different legal topics and matters. On behalf of ERWEO, as a leader, rural LGBTI activist, feminist, Community Paralegal and GBV champion in the Eastern region I thank and appreciate HRAPF for the great work and commitment extended to our community, I am truly grateful to HRAPF for believing in us and standing by us always!!!
Access to justice reaching all corners of Uganda

An interview with Zlatan Morris

Zlatan was trained as a Community Paralegal in 2017. At the time, he was working with Queer Youth Uganda. Zlatan was trained to provide paralegal services to the LGBT community in the Western region.

I am a regional coordinator at Queer Youth Uganda (QYU). I am in charge of nine districts in the Western region, including Bundibugyo, Kamwenge and Kyenjojo and provide services to Community Based Organisations. I am passionate about fighting for justice for LGBTI community members, that is why I work day and night to provide services to the members as a paralegal. Most of my work is community awareness about health matters and human rights and sometimes economic empowerment of the community.

I completed my training as a Community Paralegal in 2017. I was glad to be trained by HRAPF and knew the training would be an opportunity to help the community with legal aid. I still remember clearly the sessions where we were taught how to apply for bond and bail as a matter of right and how to follow up on cases at the Police. I was glad to learn that one has a right to legal representation.

The training has taught me how to help community members who have had conflict with the law and I have also shared my knowledge with community members to enable them to fight for their own rights. I have handled cases which require Police intervention as well as the mediation of family disputes.

Some of the challenges I face as a Community Paralegal are Police intimidation; resistance from the Police to give Police bond to community members; finances to handle cases in time and confusion with community members changing their names on a regular basis. I attempt to save on travel costs by asking Paralegals who live near to the victims to intervene where possible.

I have been inspired by HRAPF and I am working hard to obtain an LLB degree at present. I have much confidence to interact with Police officers since I now know my rights and which treatment is not acceptable from law enforcers. The training was also a great opportunity to network and I have built up many connections.

It would be to the benefit of all if HRAPF was to run more legal workshops for Police officers and community members.
Community Paralegals are confident defenders of human rights

By Mercy Patricia Alum

My first interaction with a HRAPF-trained Community Paralegal was in April 2018 while I was pursuing my clerkship at HRAPF. I had been assigned two cases to follow up: one at the Chief Magistrates Court of Makindye and the other at Katwe Police Station. I started off with the court case which took several hours, so by the time I arrived at the Police station it was already 3.30pm. I vividly recall arriving at the Police station full of worry, thinking that my client would perhaps have to spend another night in Police cells because it was getting late, but a Community Paralegal had already intervened. He flashed me a reassuring smile and said: ‘Counsel, thank you for coming but you may go and do other assignments because our client has been released with a caution.’ Needless to say, I was extremely impressed but also relieved that the Community Paralegal had been able to offer legal assistance to the client while I was engaged with the other case, rather than having the client wait for legal intervention all day. That is when I appreciated the fundamental role that Community Paralegals play in aiding lawyers to respond to cases, which enables justice to be served more expeditiously. It was at that point that I developed interest in becoming part of the Community Paralegal Training Programme. In the last quarter of 2018, I was invited to facilitate at my first Community Paralegal Training and this marked the beginning of a very interesting and fulfilling journey as a trainer of Community Paralegals. In September 2019, I fully took on the role of being the officer in charge of organising and coordinating HRAPF paralegal trainings, which role I continue to execute up to date.

The Community Paralegal Training Programme is an intensive and interesting course, which is highly sought-after by community members. Over the course of three paralegal training modules, the trainees are nurtured by a team of carefully selected skilled and experienced personnel with the aim of harnessing their potential and equipping them with basic legal knowledge, skills and the right attitude to enable them to handle simple cases involving members of their respective communities. We ensure to afford the Community Paralegals in training the opportunity to interact with Police officers and court officials, as well as to visit the Police station and a court for deeper appreciation of the practice in the law enforcement institutions. The trainers are required to adopt participatory learner-centered methods to encourage active participation and effective learning.

By the end of each training, I am always amazed and proud to note how the course has transformed the Community Paralegals into confident defenders of human rights and active agents of justice who are no longer coy or fearful of the Police and courts of law.
Community Paralegals should strive to rise above the challenges

By Saidah Nakilima

It is only after I joined HRAPF that I realised how vital Community Paralegals are in assisting marginalised persons and key populations in accessing justice amidst Uganda’s harsh legal environment. I have had an opportunity to coordinate and facilitate at Community Paralegal trainings for sex workers, PWUIDs, Men who have Sex with Men and transgender persons.

Through my interactions with the paralegal trainees, I realised that they are so passionate about helping their community members to seek remedies in instances of human rights violations. They are eager to learn how to effectively demand for and defend their rights and the rights of their community members and they have the desire to acquire knowledge about how they can help their peers to access justice. They are well-aware of the arbitrary arrests which Police always direct towards them for purposes of extorting money and also forcing them to denounce their sexual orientation and stopping them from engaging in sex work.

I realised that some of the trainees had actually started doing Community Paralegal work before they were trained. They had, however, been frustrated by law enforcement officers especially the Police and Local Council leaders who did not want to accept their interventions. This has remained a challenge even for Community Paralegals who are already passed out and active in the field, and it is mainly due to the fact that most of the Local Council leaders and Police officers are biased towards key populations and they do whatever they can to frustrate them from helping their peers from seeking justice.

Some paralegals also have very low self-esteem for fear of law enforcement officers. They cannot boldly approach them to seek justice for their peers as they at times think that they may also be arrested for who they are or what they do. During the trainings, I always try to identify those with low self-esteem and request them to give a word of appreciation to the facilitator after the training session: this helps them to improve their public speaking skills and put into practice the communication skills they learnt during the first module.

While I cannot deny that law enforcement officers are often prejudiced towards key populations and this is mainly due to the generally homophobic environment in Uganda, I encourage paralegals to persist with our main goal of ensuring that we protect, defend and also advocate for the rights of marginalised persons and key populations. The fight has moved a long way: let us not cease fire and strive to rise above the challenges. In instances when Community Paralegals are unable to find solutions like Police bond for the client, it should not be a reason for them to give up but rather to persist until they are able to get a solution for the client. In cases where they feel more assistance may be needed they should always seek assistance from the legal officers from the HRAPF legal aid clinic.
Since the publication of the previous issue of 'I am a Community Paralegal', two of the HRAPF-trained Community Paralegals had tragically passed on. This section is dedicated to pay tribute to Brian Wasswa and Ronald Wonder and to honour them for the good work that they had done within their communities.

Ronald Wonder (1986 - 2019)

Ronald Wonder was a writer, social change activist and founding member of SCARLET-Uganda. He completed his training as a Community Paralegal in 2016. He passed away early in 2019 after a period of illness. Ronald will be remembered for his passion for justice for vulnerable communities, including the poor, elderly and sexual minorities.


Brian Wasswa was a peer educator and LGBTQ activist working in Jinja. He completed his training as a Community Paralegal in 2018. Brian was tragically murdered in his home on 5th October 2019. Brian was social and well-loved. He will be remembered for his passion for equal rights and for his work to promote awareness about HIV and AIDS and the importance of adherence to treatment.
PART V
MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dr. Adrian Jjuuko, Executive Director, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum

The publication of the Paralegal Magazine is an annual moment of celebration for the HRAPF team. As we engage with the brave work and successes of our Community Paralegals, we are encouraged to keep fighting the good fight.

Community Paralegals have been integral to HRAPF’s work from our earliest days of existence. Community Paralegals play a pivotal role in furthering HRAPF’s work and take it upon themselves to raise awareness on human rights, to defend the rights of marginalised communities and to advocate for increased access to services for these groups.

We believe that the Community Paralegal Training Programme is an unprecedented tool for empowering members of marginalised communities. The Programme is designed to awaken trainees to their own authority, capacity and power. It also sets out to demystify the law, the Police and the courts and to enable trainees to view themselves as equal citizens who are deserving of the protection of the law and the realisation of their fundamental rights. Time and again, we have seen shy Community Paralegal trainees transform into powerful human rights activists who ably serve their communities.

At HRAPF, we are aware of the fact that unpopular, stigmatised communities face severe challenges particularly if they live in areas beyond Kampala. People in the city tend to be more open-minded and accepting of people who differ from the norm than people in smaller town and rural communities tend to be. City populations are more easily reached with interventions such as awareness- raising campaigns and messaging designed to interrogate and transform negative attitudes toward people on the margins. The busyness of city-life also offers a cloak of invisibility to members of our target groups which is not available in smaller communities where neighbours pay more attention to one another. People who are LGBT, sex workers and PWUIDs face severe difficulties in their everyday lives in the smaller towns and rural areas of Uganda.

At present, HRAPF’s arms are simply too short to reach into all corners of the country, even though we run a specialised legal aid clinic for sexual minorities in the country. If one of our clients has a crisis in Kitgum or Kabale, it would take one of our team members at least a day simply to reach the town from Kampala. It is not feasible to attempt to provide essential legal aid services to marginalised groups from all over the country with a single legal aid office in Kampala and a few regional legal aid centres as a basis. Our clients often need immediate intervention in order to minimise the harm they suffer when facing violations from the Police or the general community. It is for this reason that HRAPF places such value on the work of Community Paralegals operating from within communities in all four regions of the country. Had it not been for the tireless work of Community Paralegals based in rural areas, towns and smaller cities all across Uganda, members of sexual minority populations would find themselves at a loss when seeking redress for human rights violations.

Community Paralegals are awake to the realities on the ground and in touch with the communities they serve in ways which HRAPF lawyers are not able to be. Community Paralegals play an essential part in ensuring that justice is done in ways which are most fitting to the particular situation of the community members involved. They are able to guide the lawyers while at the same time ensuring that community members take ownership of the process of seeking justice and truly grasp every step of the process to which they consent.

By the end of 2019, HRAPF had trained a total of 197 Community Paralegals who passionately serve their respective communities. Our first batch of Community Paralegals from the PWUIDs community completed their training. We see our trained Paralegals go from strength to strength as they engage in awareness raising and advocacy work, provide legal aid and community capacity enhancement and training.

We are immensely proud of our Community Paralegals and count on them as partners to enable us to bring human rights to all.

Dr. Adrian Jjuuko
ABOUT HRAPF

Background
Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum is a voluntary, not for profit, and non-partisan Non-Governmental Organisation. HRAPF works for the promotion, realisation, protection and enforcement of human rights through human rights awareness, research, advocacy and legal aid service provision, with a particular focus on minorities and disadvantaged groups. It was established in 2008 with a vision of improving the observance of human rights of marginalised persons in Uganda.

Legal Status
HRAPF is registered under the laws of Uganda as a non-Government Organisation.

Vision
A society where the human rights of all persons including marginalised persons and Most at Risk Populations are valued, respected and protected.

Mission
To promote respect and protection of human rights of marginalised persons and Most at Risk Populations through enhanced access to justice, research and advocacy, legal and human rights awareness, capacity enhancement and strategic partnerships.

HRAPF’s Objectives
1. To create awareness on the national, regional and international human rights regime.
2. To promote access to justice for marginalised persons and Most at Risk Population groups.
3. To undertake research and legal advocacy for the rights of marginalised persons and Most at Risk Population groups.
4. To network and collaborate with key strategic partners, government, communities and individuals at national, regional and international level.
5. To enhance the capacity of marginalised groups, Most at Risk Populations and key stakeholders to participate effectively in the promotion and respect of the rights of marginalised persons.
6. To maintain a strong and vibrant human rights organisation.

Our target constituencies
1. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons
2. Intersex Persons
3. Sex Workers
4. Women, girls and service providers in conflict with abortion laws
5. People who use drugs
6. People Living with HIV and TB (PLHIV/TB)
7. Poor women, children and the elderly with land justice issues
8. Refugees

HRAPF Values
- Equality, Justice and Non-Discrimination
- Transparency, Integrity and Accountability
- Learning and Reflection
- Quality and Excellence
- Teamwork and Oneness
- Passion and Drive
- Networking and Collaboration

Slogan
Taking Human Rights to all
Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF)

Plot 390 Professor Apollo Nsibambi Road
P.O. Box 25603 Kampala

Tel: +256 414 530 683 and +256 312 530 683
Toll free line: 0800 130 683

Email: info@hrapf.org
Website: www.hrapf.org
Facebook: Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum - HRAPF - Uganda
Twitter: @hrapf_uganda