









barefootlaw

BAREFOOTLAW ANNUAL REPORT: 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Pioneering the Evolution of Legal Tech in Africa

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Get the law to protect vulnerable persons across Africa

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FIRST... ABOUT US



Fig 1: BarefootLaw team at the BFL@10 Gala

BarefootLaw is a nonprofit organization, founded by a group of young Ugandan professionals in 2013 in Uganda, with the mission of getting the Law to protect vulnerable people across Africa. Our work involves using technology and innovative approaches to bridge the gap between people and the legal system.

Present in Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi, we have empowered over one million (1,000,000) people to develop legal solutions for their justice needs. All our work is Pro-bono through a full-time team of trained attorneys, supported by Winnie, our Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) lawyer.

Our Mission

Get the law to protect vulnerable persons across Africa.

Our Vision

BarefootLaw envisions real and virtual worlds in which every person – natural, legal or electronic – readily has access to Justice and the Law, to empower themselves and their communities to thrive.

Our Values

- We are professional, always
- The Law is our passion
- We pursue improvement relentlessly
- We listen. We care. We serve

WHY THE NAME "BAREFOOTLAW"?

Written by Gerald Abila, Founder and CEO of BarefootLaw

It is often said that there's more to a name than meets the eye. Names carry symbolic connotations and vibrations that emulate the spirit behind the subject to whom the name is attributed and BarefootLaw, as a name falls as no exception. The name "BarefootLaw" stands for a law that is barefoot. It is as nude and pure as they come, marked by the dirt and all residue collected on the journey but leaps forward to the future. Movement in this case is constant, carried by hope and the possibilities that lie ahead. Men and women alike are born barefoot, a stage of utter purity with piles of hope knocking, looking to the thousands of miles that a baby is yet to take.

Likewise, when entering sacred places, it is a norm, for people to take off their shoes as a sign of respect and reverence. Therefore, the name "BarefootLaw" is representative of law that is not marred by imperfections. These imperfections are brought about by factors that include but are not limited to one's political beliefs, philosophical beliefs, type of shoes a lawyer wears or the type of car one drives.

The name epitomizes a type of law, that is in its form free from impurities which tend to distort the form and substance of the law. At BarefootLaw, when in doubt as to what type of guidance to provide, we seek solace in the law and try as much as possible to put our imperfections and impurities aside while attempting to provide an interpretation of the law as is.

The BarefootLaw logo came to me once, during a drive home to represent what was already happening, but also the philosophy of the type of law that I intended to represent and extend to people using the tools and gifts that the Lord granted me.

The foot in the logo is an African foot leaping towards the future. That foot represents a philosophy of an Africa led by Africans; an active step towards the future, a continuation amidst friction on the African soil. This idea is represented by David Bowie's quote, "if it works today, then it is outdated". This inspires the constant drive to keep innovating.

The name BarefootLaw does not represent a law for the poor as many may think. I am against classifying people based on the economic status but it cannot be helped that the biggest victims of the impurities in law are the poor. The upside of such an interpretation is that it is all encompassing and sips in the majority poor.

One of the first things BarefootLaw did was to do away with the legal aid requirement of classification of persons as "indigent" or not. When it comes to the law, we all are indigents at one time or another. So, we sought to provide the law to anyone, natural, legal or electronic that was considered, for a certain legal matter, vulnerable.

This meant our pro bono legal guidance extended from women, children, businesses and anyone else who sought first-line legal help. Our economic consideration was based on the premise that legal empowerment without economic support will lead to a cycle of decline that might put the affected person in a worse position than they initially were.

For three years now, I have been developing the BarefootLaw Box, an idea that came from BarefootLaw in a box that is designed to extend our services to rural communities. The first BarefootLaw Box is in Kole, a district with no registered lawyer. I must say that the response from the communities has been overwhelmingly positive and we are on the move.
The locals loosely translate BarefootLaw literally to mean the law for those who walk barefoot or the poor. While this is a very relatable interpretation that suffices to encompass what BarefootLaw represents, it would be erratic to perceive that the services of BFL are for the poor. I am against any social stratification and strongly hold that anybody can be found vulnerable regardless of their social standing.

The locals in Bala hold the LawBox in high reverence, in dire expectation of solutions to the problems that plague them day-in-day-out. This explains why they take their shoes off as they enter the LawBox despite pleadings to have them leave their shoes on. This is very relatable to Africans as they enter a place of worship or even the homey feeling the LawBox gives that makes them feel like they can enter it bare. This can be compared to our contemporary law firms where it is unheard of for a person. The same applies to police office premises, the locals keep their shoes on as they walk in.



Fig 2: Entrance to the BarefootLaw Box



SNEAK PEEK INTO THIS ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Last year, BarefootLaw celebrated a decade of innovating access to Justice and the Law with a series of activities, which included a team celebration with staff at the annual retreat of 2022, a tree-planting campaign- A Tree for Justice, an event in The Hague, a Legal Aid Innovation Conference and a Gala.

This report takes us on a journey acknowledging the past that has led us to the present and future. It is clustered in remembrance of the most notable seasons that marked pivotal changes in ideology and implementation.

TECH-ENABLED MEDIATION GAINS ATIM JUSTICE FOR HER PROPERTY

Note:The names used in this article have been altered to protect the privacy of those who seek our services.

When Atim Sarah's daughter got married in 2006, Atim was given five (5) goats and two (2) cows as bride price. Unfortunately, one morning, while she was at the hospital, Opio and Okello her brother and clan leader, respectively, went into her home, stole and sold the animals on the premise that women should not own property. When Atim returned home and learned what her brother and clan leader had done, she was distraught as these animals were her only income source.

After several discussions with her brother and other clan leaders, they came to a verbal agreement that they would return her animals when her two male children (who were both under ten years at that time) became adults.

Fast forward to 2021...
Atim's son Omara, who had turned twenty-two years of age and was ready to marry, needed animals to pay dowry. Atim contacted her brother and the clan leaders to remind them of their agreement, hoping she could use those animals to pay her son's dowry. To her disappointment, her brother denied ever agreeing with her and asked for written proof that they had made the “claimed” agreement.

Having successfully used BarefootLaw services before after learning about it from another community member, in May 2023, Atim came to the BarefootLaw Box (LawBox) with her brother, for legal support in resolving the matter and her getting the animals back.

Unfortunately, the mediation was unsuccessful as her brother denied ever stealing and selling the animals. She was asked to return with her brother and other clan leaders and family members at a later date.

One month later, Atim and the other parties returned to the LawBox where she was attended to by Joy, the BarefootLaw Box Operator, who set up an appointment for a virtual meeting with a lawyer based at the BarefootLaw headquarters. The lawyer dialled into the call for the appointment and listened to both sides of the story. She then asked both parties to inform her of their desired outcomes for the mediation, before going ahead to explain what the law states.

Together, the matter was successfully and amicably came to a suitable decision on the matter. Okello and Opio agreed to compensate Atim with one (1) cow and two (2) goats. The day after that mediation, Opio and Okello handed over all the agreed animals to Atim, in the presence of other clan leaders.

Throughout the ten (10) years that BarefootLaw has been utilising technology and innovative approaches to bridge the gap between people and the legal system, we have encountered many people like Atim who have suffered at the hands of their offenders because they are considered weak and unsupported. We envision a world where legal support is freely and readily available to everyone who needs it. We are harnessing the power of digital technology and innovations like Artificial Intelligence to ensure every African has access to Justice.



Fig 3: A mediation session held at the BarefootLaw in Bala.

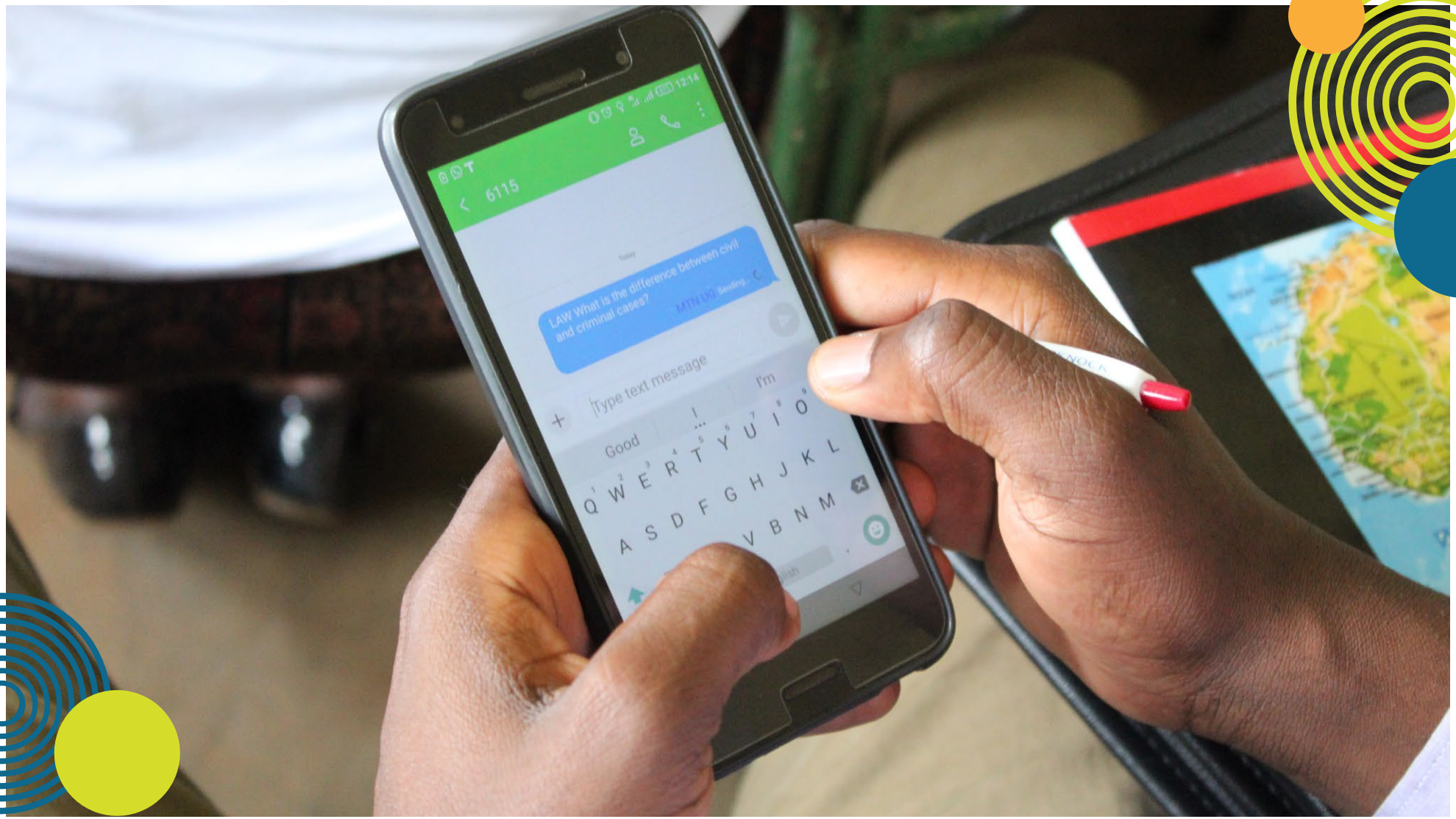


Fig 4: Accesing BarefootLaw legal services via text message.

THE INTERNET REVOLUTION

The emergence and increased adoption of social media disrupted the status quo. Uganda was no exception to the transformational nature of the social media wave. Even with an internet penetration of 5% in 2012 and mobile penetration of just over 30%, it became increasingly apparent to some young professionals that the future of their careers would be greatly influenced by the Internet, and the increasing technological connectivity.. As is the case with new opportunities, many young people were quick to adapt and explore new ways of working, including:

Solomon King of *FundiBots*, whose initiative accelerates science learning and robotics among children.

Esther Kalenzi of *40 Days over 40 Smiles*, who uses the collective power of social media for crowd-sourcing to garner educational resources for children in undeserved communities.

BarefootLaw also started out like this, as a Facebook Page in 2012, opened by Gerald Abila, a Law student, using the resources available to him to share reflections on the law taught in his classes with anyone who cared to read them.

> While at Law school, I realised there was a disconnect between the Law and society, and it was then that the seed of BarefootLaw was sowed. My turning point was when I went to a court for the first time and saw an accused man who had no idea what was happening. Of course, he was convicted. So I dedicated myself to sharing the Law with people like him and started BarefootLaw"



Fig 5: One of the people we serve learning how to contact BarefootLaw via mobile phone.

THE BAREFOOTLAW TECH-EVOLUTION

THE DARK AGE

This was termed “dark age” because of the unavailability of data on Law and Tech. Data, especially how the two interact, was core to our mission – providing tech-enabled legal support. We therefore had to rely on the data we generated from our systems.

> *"In 2008/9, while still at Law school, I started calling radios and writing articles to inform people about the Law,"* Gerald recalls. *"Then leveraged an SMS system that I had from my previous company, Virgo Media."*

NUGGET

In 2008/9, while still at Law school, I started calling radios and writing articles to inform people about the Law," Gerald recalls. "Then leveraged an SMS system that I had from my previous company, Virgo Media.

THE SMS AGE

We used a "shortcode,"- 7007- which is a fancy word for a short mobile number that people could reach us on via text.

THE SMARTPHONE AGE

Abila received a used iPhone 3gs as a gift and used that to start sharing information on social media in various groups. He continued using social media with his personal profile.

THE FACEBOOK AGE

In 2012, we turned our attention to the biggest social media platform at the time – Facebook. Abila shared lessons on the Law from his classes and the engagement continued to prove to him that there was a need for access to legal knowledge. At this point, he engaged his classmates at the time, including Timothy Kakuru, the now Director of Impact at BarefootLaw, to help him create content for the platform.

THE MULTI-CHANNEL AGE

The work then started attracting small collaborations. In 2014, we partnered with UNICEF on an interactive text project called Ureport through which we received and responded to legal questions and legal problems from thousands of people registered on the service. UNICEF Around the same time, we introduced the Talk to a Lawyer service, where people who wanted to talk to a lawyer could call in to our services and talk on Skype with a lawyer if they had a pressing need. This was usually once a week unless special requests were made. With all these consultations scattered across communications platforms, the idea of consolidation became an urgent need.

NUGGET

Although highly beneficial , the Internet left a significant part of the population (79.3%) unconnected and unable to access the Justice that BarefootLaw promoted. This made us realise there was still a large population of people unserved – the very gap we were trying to fill with legal services in the first place.

One demographic that our approach did not immediately work for, our data shows, was women. With a focus on the Internet and SMS, we realized that the greatest majority of people we were serving were men, in urban areas, and a very small group were women or outside the capital city Kampala. We immediately had to innovate and find a new way to reach more women. At this point, an opportunity to collaborate with GIZ presented itself. We applied and received funding to implement the Women Property Rights Initiative (WPRI) project to serve more women in Eastern Uganda

Enter... THE BIOS AGE

Towards the end of 2016, we were handling up to a hundred legal problems daily on busy days. We had response rotations we called caucus: we used them to distribute workload and ensure the accuracy of responses. The team had also grown by this time to include more lawyers and some administration staff, a large number of them volunteers. However, we found it hard to keep up with the workload and knew that we needed to build a tool through which the requests for legal support could be amalgamated from the different platforms into one.

With the BarefootLaw Integrated Operating System (BIOS) later developed, all questions and inquiries could be collated into one centralized point. We brought together our social channels, inquiries email and eventually SMS' to that platform, from there the lawyers could respond to everything, seamlessly consulting each other on difficult problems. BIOS enabled lawyers to respond to messages collaboratively from different locations for the first time in our history.

THE AI AGE: INTRODUCING 'WINNIE'!

"Hello, my name is Winnie. How may I help you today?"

With all the data we had gathered at this point and technological advancement available to us, an AI to help the lawyers answer questions and concerns was the obvious next step, right? Winnie uses past legal questions and answers to make suggestions of answers to questions that the people we serve ask. Winnie also gives lawyers helpful hints and clues, and therefore acts as a bionic arm for lawyers, helping them work faster and them (the lawyers) helping her become more accurate.

THE FUTURE AGE

Could Winnie get sentient? Will BIOS continue to evolve, or maybe even be entirely programmed to start on something new? Your guess is as good as ours. We can only promise to push the technology envelope as far as we can until the last person is able to access Justice

INNOVATING TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN RECEIVING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In 2016, BarefootLaw implemented a pilot project on the Women Property Rights Initiative (WPRI) in two (2) districts, Apac and Soroti, in Northern and Eastern Uganda respectively. We discovered that daily, many women face critical land and family disputes and deprivation of economic and livelihood benefits that ought rightfully to accrue from their fundamental human rights — including the right to own and/or inherit land and derive economic benefit from it.



Fig 6: One of the women attending the LEWUTi training in Bungatiira Sub-county in Gulu, 2019

These disputes often result in domestic violence and abuse. The lack of adequate legal support at the community level demands consistent and unswerving legal support and advocacy from BarefootLaw to help women address these problems.

Through WPRI, we sought to increase the availability of legal services to women, and increase the impact of legal services on the lives of the women and the communities we reach. In future projects we did this though , legal sensitisation campaigns, dissemination of legal information, training on property rights, and Will writing.

For BarefootLaw to increase coverage both geographically and in the number of legal services for empowering women beyond property rights, we put together an idea for a project we called Legal Empowerment for Women Using Technology and Innovations (LEWUTI), which was approved and we were able to execute in partnership with Advocats Sans Frontières (ASF).



Fig 7: Gerald Abila shakes hands with Her Majesty The Queen Mathilde of Belgium as the Co-winner of the African Development Prize 2016-2017.

RECOGNITION

"and the winners are... BarefootLaw"

When you hear the team tell the tale of the 'early days', you can tell that the modus operendi was survival. For an organisation where reality meant borrowing a colleague's car to drive close to six hours out of Kampala to reach women in rural and unconnected communities. Not knowing whether after the first outreach, there would be another. Whether after one answered legal query, there would be a new notification.

So imagine how far-fetched the idea of awards and recognition felt to this lot!

GLOSSARY OF BAREFOOTLAW'S ACCOLADES OVER THE YEARS



SOCIAL MEDIA AWARDS UGANDA 2013

BarefootLaw emerged winner in the Social Justice Category. These took place on 15 November 2013 at The Hub, Oasis Mall in Kampala, Uganda. These were organised by *BluFlamingo* and their objectives were to bring together individuals and organisations that are at the frontline when it comes to using social media for entertainment, change, sharing of ideas, creating communities, and talking to customers online.

YOUNG ACHIEVERS AWARDS UGANDA 2012

Gerald Abila, founder of BarefootLaw was recognised with the Leadership and Social Enterprise Award. The national competition is held annually and promotes the best practice and excellence in youth creativity. This was held in November 2013 at the Kampala Serena Hotel.



THE ACIA AWARDS 2014

These were organised by the *Uganda Communications Commission* and saw BarefootLaw take home two accolades, these were the Judges Choice Award and ICT for Development award. Since its inception in 2010, the aim has been to provide a platform to recognise outstanding innovations from local companies and individuals in the development and adoption of ICTs in Uganda.



SME EMPOWERMENT CHALLENGE WEST AND EAST AFRICA 2015

BarefootLaw took second place in this competition. This win propelled one of BarefootLaw's brainchildren, the mSME garage. The ceremony happened in the Hague, Netherlands. The challenge was organised by *The Hague Institute for Innovating Law (HiiL)* and it was geared towards finding and strengthening new initiatives innovating around the law and the provision of legal services.



SOCIAL MEDIA AWARDS AFRICA 2015

BFL emerged winner of the best Facebook page of the year in the entire Africa. The ceremony was held in Lagos Nigeria. This is an annual gathering of business leaders, social media experts and influencers, development experts, and other relevant stakeholders who are positioned to promote development in Africa through digital and social media exploration.



THE AFRICAN LEGAL AWARDS 2015

BFL was a dark horse in the Innovation award category but was able to take it home. The ceremony was held in South Africa and was hosted by Legal Week in association with the *Corporate Lawyers Association of South Africa (CLASA)*, the event was held at The Wanderers Club in Johannesburg in October 2015.



HOOPS FOR GRACE TOURNAMENT 2015

This was a charity fundraising Basketball event organised by *40days over 40 Smiles* where BarefootLaw participated and emerged winners out of 34 participating teams at the end of the day. Proceeds from this event would go to programs improve the lives of vulnerable children.



KING BAUDOUIN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT PRIZE 2017

The Prize is awarded every other year and seeks to showcase inspirational stories, challenges, and successes emerging from the African continent. It is run by the *King Baudouin Foundation*. In June 2017 BarefootLaw was co-winners with two other social change agents, Kyitabu from Kenya, and Farmerline from Ghana.



5ASIDE TOURNAMENT 2018

This was another Fundraising Charity Event organised by *40 days over 40 Smiles* that saw BFL emerged winners in a soccer competition. The aim was to raise enough funds that run literacy and livelihood projects to improve the lives of Vulnerable children.





*Fig 8: BarefootLaw Community Outreaches are aimed at **bringing** free legal information to different communities.*

TOGETHER WE REACH MORE – THE STRENGTH OF COLLABORATION

*"**Synergy /ˈsɪnədʒi/ [noun]**- the interaction or cooperation of two or more organisations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects."*

This Oxford definition of a word that our work has grown to appreciate captures the exact value of partners in our journey to reach last-mile communities with access to Justice. All the individuals and organisations we have interfaced with, from the grassroots to global entities, have played a significant role in helping us reinvent ourselves to improve our service.

As demonstrated earlier, our partnership with The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) resurrected our SMS platform, which complimented our use of social media to serve more Internet-unconnected individuals. For some communities, physical presence provides access to legal services outside the realm and reach of digital services, whereas for other communities and jurisdictions, a mix of digital and non-digital access points from BarefootLaw would best serve their legal needs. To this, support from GIZ and partnership from WOUGNET, KIC and TEWPA ushered us into the communities Apac and Soroti, which allowed us to reach more women who were previously unable to meet lawyers, with free legal guidance regarding their property rights.

1. ***Increase the number of persons who resolve their legal problems***
2. ***Increase the efficiency of delivering our impact, through digital and innovation***
3. ***Increase the footprint of barefootlaw countrywide and across Africa***
4. ***Data-driven, evidence-based, research and advocacy to influence systems change***
5. ***Capacity development***

Part of achieving Goal 3, lies in using computer technology to increase the touchpoints through which more persons and communities can learn to identify their or others' Justice needs and to engage BarefootLaw to resolve the Justice needs. One way in which this has been achieved is through virtual outreaches.



THE 5-INGREDIENT NEW LEAN AND SUSTAINABLE BAREFOOTLAW OUTREACH MODEL

Most legal services in Uganda remain in urban areas of Uganda – creating physical barriers that may result in those in need not being able to close the distance gap, hence having to relinquish their rights. A typical outreach engagement for many providers involves bringing professionals to communities to offer a service. Though impactful, they are resource-intensive approaches to service provision.

In tech lies the opportunity to rethink outreaches to reach more people by overcoming the barrier of geography.

A BarefootLaw virtual outreach is a legal engagement between a lawyer, and people gathered within a community connected by a screen. An identified community justice partner gathers a group seeking legal guidance on a common issue and connects to BarefootLaw's iNodes software through an internet-empowered gadget (such as a laptop). A projector screen is sometimes used to magnify the display should the gathering be more extensive.

In 2023, with The Integrated Efforts for Youth and Women Empowerment Uganda (IEYAWE Uganda), a community-based organisation in Kyegegwa, Western Uganda, we had impactful virtual interactions with groups such as market vendors, Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs) in Kyegegwa.

These two-hour session topics vary as they are customised to the group's needs. SACCOs and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) often seek guidance on creating legal and best practices for lending money to members and dispute resolution mechanisms. Many times the questions segment naturally veers into an opportunity for the attendees to ask questions that are closer to legal issues that themselves, their families and communities are struggling with.

Even with such innovative methods to bring the Law closer to people within their locus, there are still some structural challenges to dispensing legal information. One immediate challenge remains the telephone network. Some communities are located far from a reliable and stable phone and network service, causing calls to either drop or be unclear. To our dismay, the people ignore and endure these numerous interruptions and endure the delays and stay. Such discoveries reassure us in our approach to access to Justice.

The five ingredients, you ask? People, a Community-based organisation, an internet connection, a screen (laptop, projector) and a lawyer.







Fig 9: Collage showing the Setup for BFL consultation featuring the 5 ingredients: People, a Community-based organisation, an internet connection, a screen (laptop, projector) and a lawyer.

SAMPLE FAQS FROM OUR VIRTUAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH SESSIONS

1. *Do woman have rights under succession*
2. *If someone left their land unattended for 30 years, can they chase the squatters who settled on it?*
3. *Can you sell land if it was given as collateral for a loan in the SACCO?*
4. *What does the law say about "double inheritance" i.e a woman inheriting from her father's family, and also from the husband's family?*
5. *Is it legal for money lenders to charge 30% interest on the loans they give?*
6. *Can you report a husband who does not provide for his family?*
7. *How do you write a proper will?*
8. *Whether the law allows one to inherit one's brother's widow?*
9. *Is it legal to read a will after the day of the funeral?*
10. *When can the beneficiaries of an estate acquire their portions as given in the will?*
11. *Can my husband force me to use my property to support the children he has with his other wife?*
12. *If someone signs the wrong contract, is it binding?*

    How can I put an access road on my land?
13. *Can you make your parents give you your share of their property when they are still alive?*
14. *If a husband dies and the woman remarries, which family does the bride price go to i.e. does it go to the woman's father's family or the family of her deceased husband?*

During the rainy season, we receive more cases of land conflicts, and animals injured when they trample on one's garden.





Fig 10: Installation of the second BarefootLaw Box in Paicho Subcounty, Gulu District, unser the FATE project, supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

10 YEARS OF INNOVATING LEGAL SERVICE

We have been at the forefront of innovations in using tech to make access to Justice and the Law available to vulnerable communities for the past ten (10) years. Through this, BarefootLaw has and continues to empower people in Uganda and neighbouring countries, to develop legal solutions to their problems.

As an organisation that deals directly with people to help them develop solutions to their justice challenges, we are driven by targets to help more people. The goal is to support individuals like Baptist, a Clan Leader in Kole who visits the BarefootLaw Box to speak to lawyers on his behalf and that of his clan members. When he seeks guidance, he is empowered to make just decisions on the issues in his clan members' families and communities. The intention is linke more and more 'Baptists' will be reached by BarefootLaw's services until we reach fifty (50) million of them across Africa.

The tenets on which we measure the impact of our work include;

01 Empowering more People to resolve their legal Problems

By focusing on equipping people with the knowledge and means through which they can enforce their rights, we empower peope to take agency of their legal problems and be the leads in resolving them. Empowerment also acts as an important tool for having people who have been served by us help their friends and family with resolviing legal problems they might face, in effect, spreading the impact of our work beyond our reach.

The tech and legal teams continue to work together to improve and update our platforms through which the public can access BarefootLaw's services. The organisation invests in developing the capacity of every BarefootLaw lawyer to deliver legal services on all platforms, including remotely and/or from outposts.



Fig 11: A women's savings group attending a virtual training at the BarefootLaw Box in Bala Town Council, Kole District, 2022.

The content team drives awareness of the legal services to the public through legal content and communications messaging. The latest addition to our portfolio is TikTok, where we have witnessed a yearning for easy legal content for a wide range of viewers. Within a period of we have garnered over seventeen thousand (17,000) unique views of the content posted.

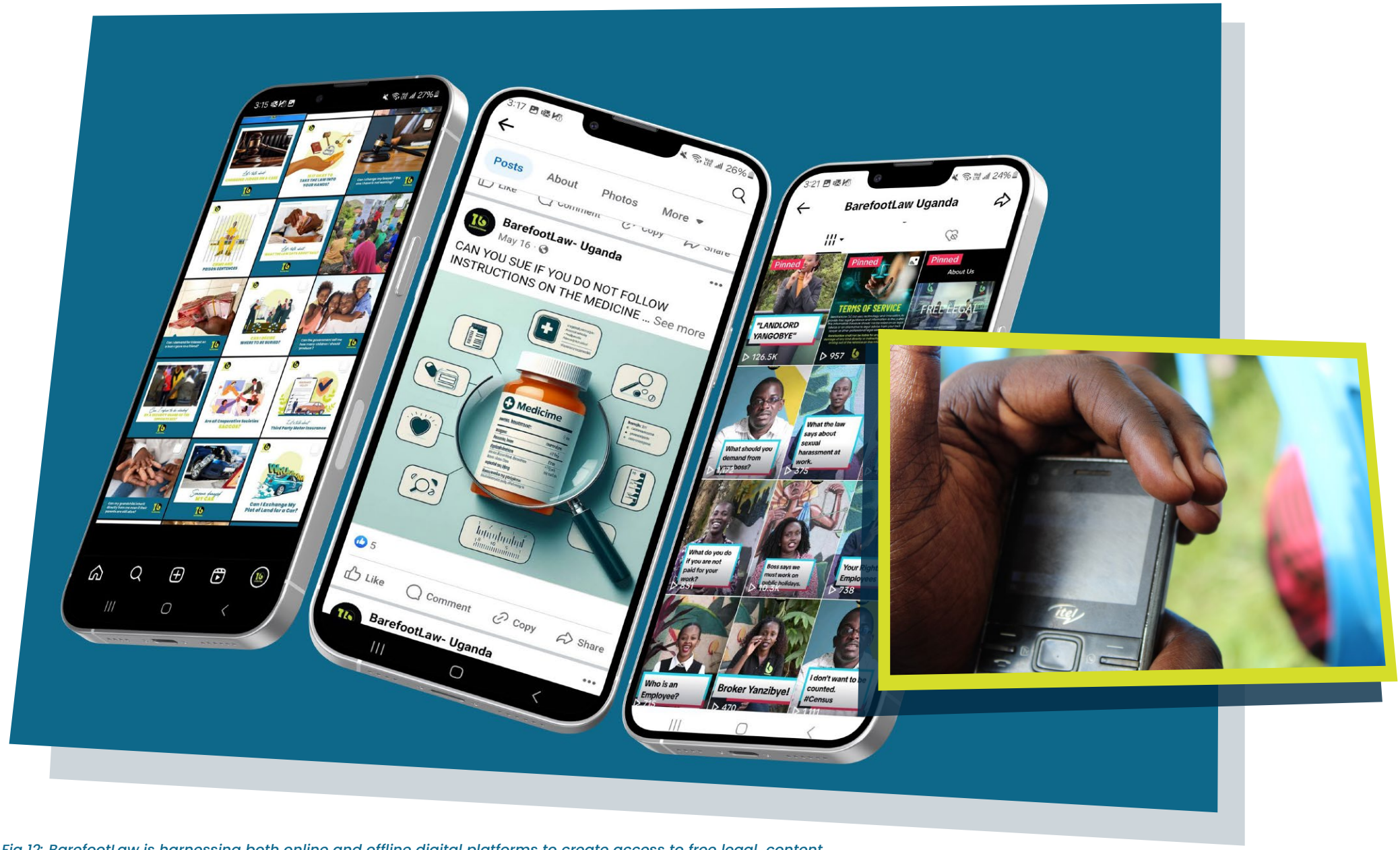


Fig 12: BarefootLaw is harnessing both online and offline digital platforms to create access to free legal content.

DATA FURTHER DISAGGREGATED:

CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF PEOPLE SERVED:
1,001,297

NOW IN OPERATING IN **FOUR COUNTRIES** ACROSS THE WORLD.

78% OF PEOPLE SERVED GOT EMPOWERED TO ACT ON THEIR LEGAL PROBLEM AFTER RECEIVING LEGAL INFORMATION FROM BAREFOOTLAW.

OUR GENERAL LEGAL CONTEXT

DOMESTIC LAW
20%

LAND LAW
17%

CRIMINAL LAW
14%

BUSINESS LAW
14%

EMPLOYMENT LAW
09%

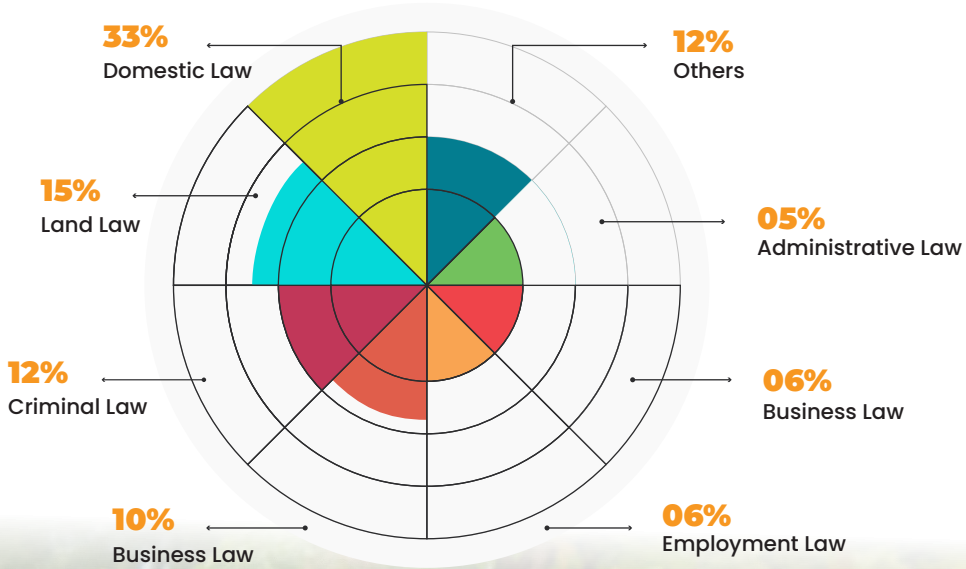
SUCCESSION
07%

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW
06%

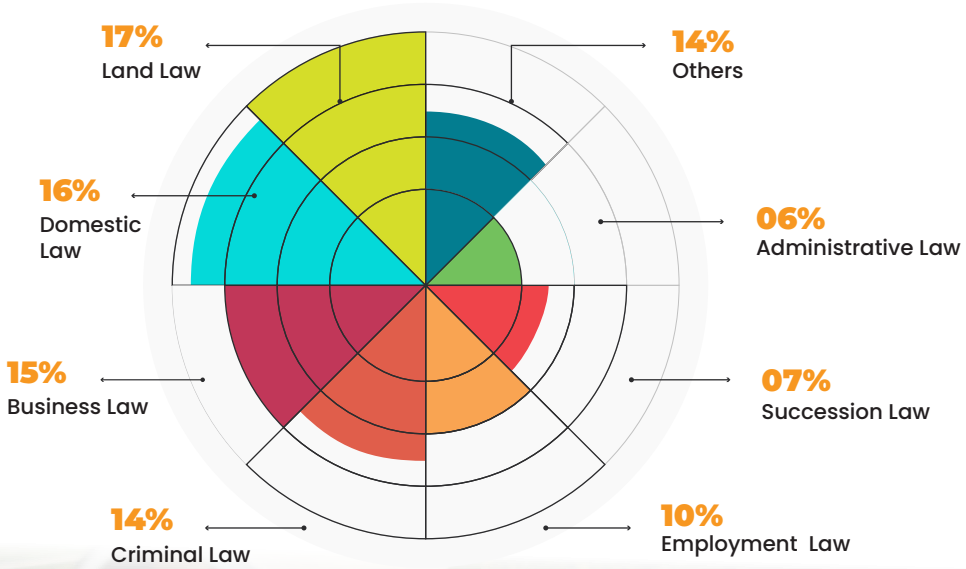
OTHERS
14%

DATA FURTHER DISAGGREGATED:

FEMALE LEGAL CATEGORIES



MALE LEGAL CATEGORIES



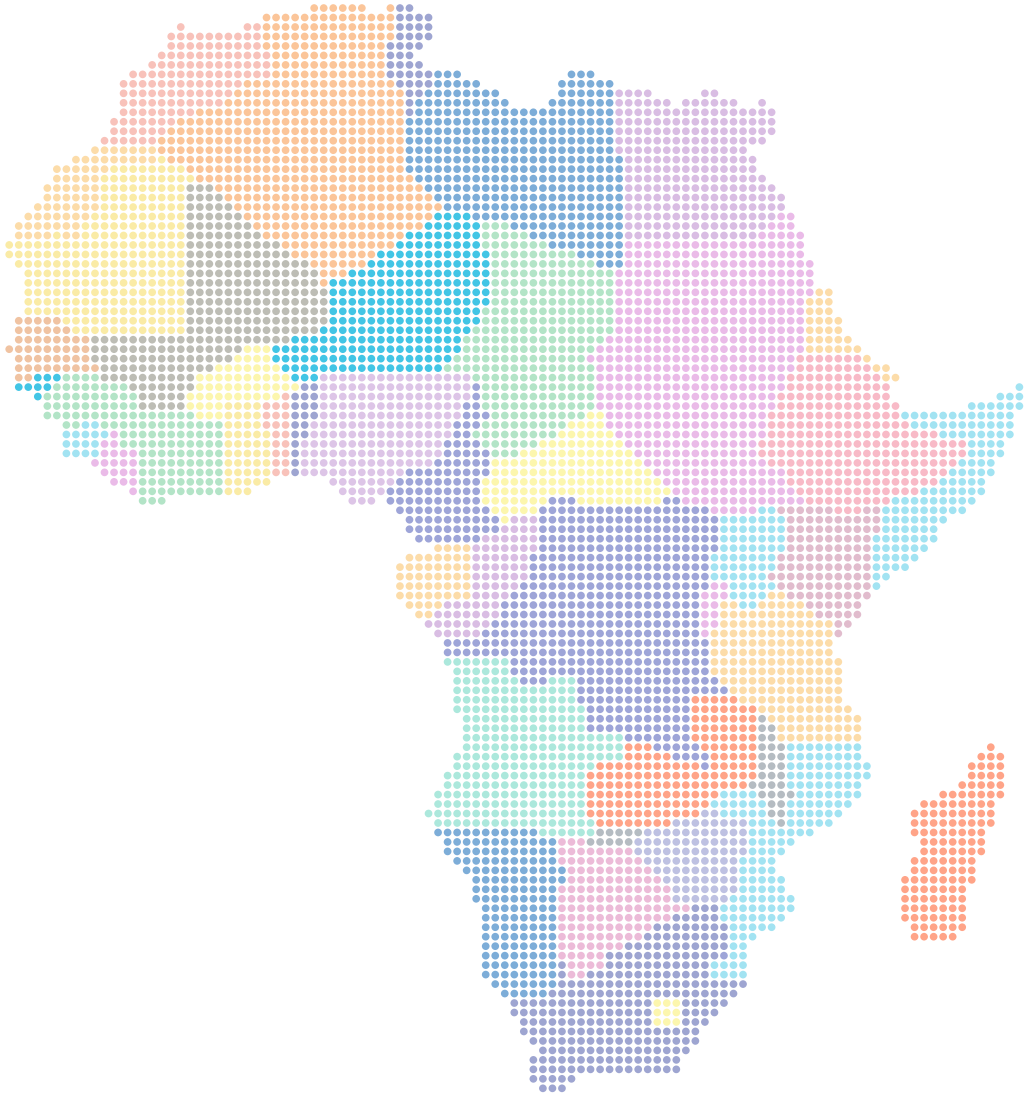


02 Improving the Efficiency of Delivering Our Impact, through Digital and Innovation

Digital technology and innovation are the most essential tools in our work to bridge the gap between people and the legal system. Therefore, the robustness and capacity of all the BarefootLaw tools including BIOS Version III and Improvement of the AI system must all maximise the digital divide of BarefootLaw's technology and innovation efforts.

03 Increase BarefootLaw's Footprint Countrywide and Across Africa

This objective is focused on scale – the various mechanisms through which more communities and people can connect to BarefootLaw to receive legal support. Building the body of knowledge on innovations around access to Justice in other African countries was identified as a first step toward achieving this.



04 Supporting Innovators like Kiarie to Accelerate Justice in Kisumu, Kenya

On the afternoon of 4 July 2023, a team from BarefootLaw and our Kenyan partners, Hakii FM and Joan Matii (a Private Lawyer), visited the sunny town of Nyando in Kisumu County, Kenya.

This visit aimed to profile Caren Kiare, a Social Worker and Founder of Nyando Social Justice Centre, who had been nominated and vetted among our final six (6) innovators for crowdsourcing. The organisation was born through a "table banking" (SACCO) system among women with various legal challenges who have all become champions of Justice in their community. The funds from the savings group support the Centre in rescuing, documenting, and referring cases.

Our discussion during the profiling exercise highlighted the Centre's challenges, frequently mentioning their rancor relationship with the neighbouring Police post. One can only imagine our dismay to learn that two weeks after our visit, on 19 July 2023, the Centre's premises were burnt down during countrywide protests.

"On 19th, we were expecting three days of demonstration called by the opposition leader where the whole country was supposed to demonstrate high cost of living... some teargas canisters were thrown in our justice center and it was burnt to ashes. We do not have a justice center," Kiarie narrated during the Justice Innovator Recognition Workshop we hosted in Nairobi on 11 August 2023.

Having successfully used BarefootLaw services before after learning about it from another community member, in May 2023, Atim came to the BarefootLaw Box (LawBox) with her brother, for legal support in resolving the matter and her getting the animals back.

In a call to nominate justice innovators, we received one hundred and three (103) sign-ups by individuals and organisations from Uganda, Kenya and Malawi. The scope of their justice Innovations was limited to cost reductions, procedures or processes, access to knowledge, improvements in attitudes and perceptions, and innovations towards solving physical barrier challenges.



Fig 13: The Nyando office burning down during the strikes.



Fig 14: A teary Karen Kiare receives Nyando's cheque at the Justice Innovator Workshop, 2023.



Fig 15: Nyando Social Justice Centre's new home.

By the end of the project, nine (9) of the most impactful innovations chosen by the public were each supported with One Thousand United States Dollars ($1000) to amplify their work. All these Justice innovations undertakings culminated in The Legal Aid Innovations Conference (LAICON).

The nine finalists included;

- ***Uganda- Concern for the Girl Child, Kuman Youth Drama Group and Centre for Technology Dispute Resolution (CTDRU).***
- ***Kenya – Nyando Social Justice Centre, The Full Circle Dispute Resolution Hub and Kisumu Mediation Centre.***
- ***Malawi – Area Hub 22, Chikulamayembe Women Forum and Youth Response for Social Change.***

> *"... and we were saying if we are going to get this money today, we are going to use the money to start rebuilding our Centre so that the women and children who have been coming to our Centre to get Justice will be able to able to locate us. We are glad and humbled that now we can start rebuilding our Centre,"* Kiarie said in a teary acceptance speech at the Workshop.

We thank our partners in Malawi, the Gender and Justice Unit, for supporting us to reach justice innovators nationwide.



Fig 16: The BarefootLaw Box in Paicho District.

THE BAREFOOTLAW BOX

For people like Atim Sarah, whose story is shared at the top of this report, significant hindrances to Access to Justice are the physical, social, psychological and economic inaccessibility of Justice pathways such as the Police, Court, or even Lawyers.

To aid in overcoming some of these hindrances, we created The BarefootLaw Box, commonly referred to as Law Box, a remodeled shipping container into a cost-efficient and high-impact way to extend technology to rural hard-to-reach communities in a bid to enhance access to Justice.

In November 2023, we deployed the second (2nd) BarefootLaw Box at the Paicho Sub-county headquarters in Gulu. The solar-powered office is fitted with an Internet-connected device such as a television and through video conferencing, people within Kole and Gulu are linked to lawyers based in any part of Uganda.

Paicho was previously home to the largest Internally Displaced People's camp during the LRA insurgency and has undergone an 11-year journey of recovery since the cessation of hostilities. The presence of the LawBox will support the resolution that comes with the consequent social conflicts arising from issues such as land disputes, family matters, gender violence, and illegal deforestation, occasionally escalating to violence.

The LawBoxes have since partnered with community leaders such as Local Council leaders in the respective and nearby sub-counties, the Police, and the Court for various engagements, including virtual sensitisation sessions for the leaders to help them dispense Justice according to the Law.

Since its deployment, we have conducted 32 legal trainings, that is, with Local and cultural leaders, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), 82 mediations, and 220 cases handled. The cases handled include Domestic Violence issues, land ownership rights, criminal matters, etc.

THE FIRST EVER JUSTICE MICROGRID – SOLAR FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE



Fig 17: Solar panels and power house located behind the BarefootLaw Box in Bala, Kole. Project in Partnership with the Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF).

On Thursday, 18 August 2023, the BarefootLaw team, joined by Kole District leaders, handed over grounds for installing a solar plant. In collaboration with the Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF), the solar plant, is expected to provide sustainable power to the BarefootLaw Box, nearby town council offices, the police station and community walkways.

> *"We have seen in the communities in which we operate a spike in legal problems, especially at night, and on busy market and community days because of the darkness. Unfortunately, the most affected are the most vulnerable people in our communities: women, girls and the elderly,"* Abila said during the handover.



Fig 18: Solar lights installed at the Bala Market and nearby water-collection to act as a deterent to crimes against women due to darkness at night.

As of the end of 2023, three (3) solar lights have already been set up in the Bala Market area. By embracing renewable energy, we are reducing our carbon footprint and ensuring uninterrupted power supply, contributing to a more secure and sustainable justice system.



Fig 19: Gerald poses for a photo with the solar installation engineers at Bala.



Fig 20: Solar powered streetlight lighting up a market day night in Bala.



Fig 21: BarefootLaw is now at the Hague Humanity Hub. (Humanity Hub.n.d)

DATA-DRIVEN, EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY TO INFLUENCE SYSTEMS CHANGE

We made big leaps in the direction of influencing systems change through new global collaborations with the Commonwealth and The City of The Hague.

OFFERING FIRST-HAND GLOBAL SOUTH- GLOBAL NORTH KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGES - BAREFOOTLAW IN THE HAGUE

In March 2023, BarefootLaw announced a physical presence in The City of The Hague.

The Hague is the international city of peace and justice. As pioneers of digital technology for access to Justice, we have been at the forefront of innovations in using tech to make access to Justice and the Law available to vulnerable communities for the past ten (10) years.

Our presence in The Hague is to broaden and refine our collaborations towards realising access to Justice for all, explicitly innovating around SDG 16- peace, Justice and strong institutions.

Located at The Hague Humanity Hub, this move is perfect for sharing lessons we have learnt over the past years and making a meaningful contribution to the policy body around technology's effectiveness in access to Justice.

As an organisation with founding roots in Africa, we offer development partners in Europe first-hand experience, rich lessons and proximate, practical solutions to thematic justice issues affecting Africa whilst developing creative solutions towards their resolution. Our doors open to sharing lessons, creating partnerships, and learning from organisations and individuals.

OUR ADDRESS

The Hague Humanity hub
Fluwelen Burgwal 58
2511 CJ The Hague

info@barefootlaw.org



Please feel welcome to pay our Europe Lead, Robert Okello, a visit at The Hague Humanity Hub, for a chat, coffee or high five!



Fig 22: BarefootLaw Europe Lead, Robert Okello.

RESEARCH ON APPROACHES AND INNOVATIONS IN THE PROVISION OF LEGAL SERVICES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Earlier in this report, we met Caren Kiarie of Nyando Social Justice Centre in Kenya. This was possible due to a research study BarefootLaw is conducting on grassroots innovations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Here, access to legal services is limited despite a growing population, innovative approaches are essential. Legal services extend beyond courtroom matters to encompass legal education and empowerment before disputes arise. With only a small number of licensed attorneys serving a large population, enhancing accessibility to quality legal services is crucial for empowering individuals to prevent or resolve legal issues. However, research on grassroots legal innovations and their impact remains limited.

This study therefore aims to identify grassroots innovations in Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, and very soon, Zambia, assess their impact, and explore their potential applicability elsewhere. To ensure impartiality, a crowdsourcing approach is used to identify innovative legal service providers, ensuring representation from diverse perspectives. Recognizing and rewarding innovators is crucial for fostering a culture of beneficial service provision and facilitating societal progress.

The findings from Uganda Kenya and Malawi underscore the importance of innovative approaches and technology in enhancing access to justice. By scaling up successful innovations, widening legal jurisdiction where appropriate, and strengthening community sensitization efforts, countries can make significant progress in improving access to justice for all.

Embracing AI and digital technology can further streamline legal processes and bridge gaps in information and service delivery, particularly in remote areas. Additionally, efforts to strengthen local courts, translate legal materials into local languages, and maintain an enabling environment for NGOs are essential for ensuring a more equitable and inclusive legal system.

By implementing these recommendations, Uganda and Malawi can move closer to achieving their goals of ensuring justice is accessible and available to all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances.



Fig 23: The research and documentation team visit a drug recovery home offering some legal services to survivors in Mombasa, Kenya.



Fig 24: The research team in Blantyre, surveying residents on their interactions with justice innovations in Malawi.

BAREFOOTLAW BECOMES A COMMONWEALTH ACCREDITED ORGANISATION- EXPANDING LEGAL ACCESS FOR ALL

The Commonwealth Secretariat announced BarefootLaw as a Commonwealth Accredited Organisation on Thursday, 20 July, via their Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. This strategic partnership marks a significant milestone in BarefootLaw's mission to enhance access to Justice and legal information for underserved populations.

This Accreditation gives us a platform to collaborate with over eighty (80) like-minded organisations, governments, and institutions worldwide, amplifying our impact and reach across the 2.6 billion peoples of The Commonwealth. It will enable us to share best practices, knowledge, and resources with other members, fostering a global network of legal empowerment advocates.

In addition, this partnership will enhance BarefootLaw's capacity to influence policy, strengthen legal frameworks, and support initiatives that promote social Justice and human rights within the Commonwealth.

BarefootLaw's affiliation with the Commonwealth reinforces its position as a leader in legal empowerment. It signifies its ongoing dedication to promoting access to Justice and legal rights for marginalised communities worldwide. Through this partnership, BarefootLaw envisions a future where everyone has the knowledge and resources to assert their legal rights and pursue a fair and just society regardless of their socioeconomic background.



Fig 25: Gerald poses for a photo with The Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland, the 6th Commonwealth Secretary- General.



Fig 26: The BarefootLaw team at the BFL@ 10 Gala.

THE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

How does one celebrate ten years of leading in innovating the Law using digital technology to make access to Justice a reality for all? There is no blanket template to how to approach it, but we celebrate adequately.

"A TREE FOR JUSTICE" CAMPAIGN

Our ten-year story is best told under the canopy of a tree. Trees have been a significant part of our BarefootLaw justice story, whether it be one of our first legal sensitisations in Akokoro District or the hundreds of women who with us were harboured under trees to learn about the Law and how to use our digital tools to get free legal guidance during the LEWUTi Project.

Rural African communities have for centuries used trees for vital life-sustaining purposes, for example, medicine. They gathered under trees to share knowledge and peacefully discuss trivial matters affecting the community unit. Such discussions included disputes between neighbours, clan members, and families. The meetings were also a platform to synergise strategies on trade agricultural improvement, among other uses.

In a bid to give back to mother nature that has so gracefully sheltered us, BarefootLaw launched our A Tree for Justice Campaign, with the hope that we can contribute to trees for more amicable resolve in the future and do our part in restoring the health of our planet. The campaign is also a way in which the people who have used our services to solve their legal issues can give back.

The National Forestry Authority of Uganda provided us seedlings of indigenous tree species to plant, nurture, and distribute among friends of BarefootLaw. We planted nearly one thousand seedlings, mostly with our community-based partner organisations and leaders. We intend to continue the campaign for the future of our planet's health and amicable legal resolve.



Fig 27: BarefootLaw's "A Tree For Justice" campaign in action.

FAILING FORWARD: BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH INNOVATION - BFL@10 CELEBRATION IN THE HAGUE

> *"When we started BarefootLaw they called us crazy and mad. 10 years later, they are all crazy and mad,"* poem by Gerald Abila, ED BarefootLaw on legal technology.

On 10 October 2023, at the prestigious The Hague Humanity Hub, BarefootLaw celebrated its 10th anniversary under the theme "Failing Forward: Building Resilience through Innovation." The event, which brought together practitioners, academicians, students and legal innovators within the peace and Justice ecosystems in The Hague, turned out to be a day of reflection, collaboration, and exploration on how to achieve a more inclusive future for legal technology. The celebration offered an opportunity to deliberate how technology can accelerate access to Justice and how legal innovators can position themselves in fast-paced technological development.

The discussion brought together legal innovation and social impact investment experts, including Lisa Jordan, Managing Director of DRK, Kanan Dhru, Senior lecturer on Technology and Law at Hague University of Applied Sciences and Gerald Abila, Executive Director of BarefootLaw.

The Recording can be watched here: BFL@10 Celebration in The Hague



Fig 28: Collage of photos taken at the BFL@10 celebration at the Hague.

LAICON 2023

> *"Together, we can shape a future where legal empowerment knows no boundaries and where the pursuit of justice is an inherent part of the human experience,"* Gerald Abila, the Founder and Executive Director of BarefootLaw, at the annual Legal Aid Innovation Conference (LAICON) that happened on Tuesday, 12 December,2023 at Kabira Country Club

It was a two-day event that culminated in the BFL@10 Gala on Wednesday, 13 December. This year's theme was "Celebrating a Decade of Accelerating Justice through Legal Innovation. What Next?" The conference, which the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation supported, brought together new and old justice innovators to reflect on their impact and deliberate on the future of Justice in Africa. For the first time since its inception in 2017, LAICON explored justice innovations and practices in countries other than Uganda. We had innovators from Kenya and Malawi join in to share their experiences.

The amazing twist to this event was hosting some people who have experienced our services over the years. Often when organisations plan seminars, webinars, and conferences, the people on the receiving end of the services are left out. We were happy to break that cycle. Twenty people travelled hundreds of kilometres to come and celebrate the tenth anniversary of "their lawyers" and participated on panels during LAICON.When we go into their communities, they treat us like guests. It was fulfilling to return that honour.

THE GALA

We hosted friends for dinner and merrymaking at Kabira Country Club for the final celebration.

BarefootLaw thanks every individual and organisation that has supported us over the last decade. Together, we have made our services available to over 1 million people in Uganda and Africa and have helped improve many lives since 2013.



Fig 29: BarefootLaw CEO Gerald Abila(far right) and some of the people that BarefootLaw has served pose for a photo at the Gala.

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR PARTNERS OVER THE YEARS

King Baudouin Foundation
Working together for a better society

https://kbs-frb.be/

Enabel

https://www.enabel.be/

WEHUBIT
https://www.wehubit.be/

Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/contact/embassies-consulates-general/uganda

Draper Richards Kaplan FOUNDATION

https://www.drkfoundation.org/

echoing Green

https://echoinggreen.org/

The Commonwealth

https://thecommonwealth.org/

DOVETAIL IMPACT FOUNDATION

https://dovetailimpact.org/

WILLIAM + FLORA Hewlett Foundation

https://hewlett.org/

African Visionary Fund

https://africanvisionary.org/

Segal Family Foundation

https://www.segalfamilyfoundation.org/

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

https://www.giz.de/

digital HUMAN RIGHTS lab

https://digitalhumanrightslab.org/

MULAGO

https://www.mulagofoundation.org/

dioraphte

https://www.dioraphte.nl/

MFF Morgridge FAMILY FOUNDATION

https://morgridgefamilyfoundation.org/

change.org

https://www.change.org/

MICAH 6|8 FOUNDATION

https://www.micah-68.org/

SINT ANTONIUS STICHTING PROJECTEN

https://www.aham.nl/SAS-P/

AZURIT

https://azuritfoundation.org/

JONES DAY

https://www.jonesday.com/

CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

https://www.mott.org/

ucc UGANDA COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

https://www.ucc.co.ug/

myriad usa

https://myriadusa.org/

HiiL user friendly justice

https://www.hiil.org/