barefootlaw

BAREFOOTLAW
Annual Report 2025









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FOREWORD

By Gerald Abila, Founder and C.E.O., BarefootLaw

> As I reflect on the year behind us, I am reminded of a simple truth: justice is among the surest foundations of peace. In a world marked by uncertainty, conflict, and inequality, the work of bringing the law closer to people has never been more urgent.



In 2025, BarefootLaw reached an important milestone. Last year, BarefootLaw helped more than 22,000 people resolve their legal problems. By comparison, that work represents more than half the annual caseload of Uganda's High Court and nearly 10% of the cases resolved by the entire judiciary. Behind those numbers are real lives and real struggles: families navigating inheritance disputes, farmers seeking to protect their land, workers recovering unpaid wages, women searching for safety and dignity, and small businesses striving not only to survive, but to grow.

The numbers in this report show that access to justice is not a peripheral concern. It is central to whether communities can live in peace and whether people can build secure and dignified lives. They remind us that when legal information, advice, and mediation are made accessible, disputes can be resolved earlier, more fairly, and at far less human and economic cost.

In the turbulence of the world today, may these figures stand as proof that sustainable peace in communities can only be achieved where there is rule of law and access to justice. Peace is not secured by force alone, nor sustained by fear. It is built, patiently and deliberately, when people are able to resolve disputes with dignity, fairness, and trust in the systems that serve them.

This milestone was achieved with the generous support of our partners, whose belief in this work has helped keep the law within reach for people who might otherwise be excluded from it. Your support has enabled innovation, strengthened trust, and opened pathways for communities to address disputes before they deepen into conflict. For that reason, this report is also a tribute to you.

I close with this reminder:
peace built on fear or force is always fragile. Peace built on justice and dignity is the kind that endures.

Thank you

for walking this journey with us as we continue creating peaceful communities in which people can thrive.



WHO WE ARE

Our Purpose

We are creating peaceful communities where people can thrive.

Our Mission

We provide accessible legal services for the people across Africa to resolve their legal issues.

Our Vision

BarefootLaw envisions worlds (real and virtual) where all persons have access to justice and the law to empower themselves and their communities to thrive.

Our Values

- Professionalism
- Passion for the Law
- Relentless Improvement
- Empathetic Service

01. PROFESSIONALISM

WE ARE PROFESSIONAL, ALWAYS:

Our commitment to courtesy, integrity, and responsibility during all our work is unquestionable. While pursuing our vision, we collaborate and aspire to live to the highest standards of personal honesty and behaviour.

02. PASSION FOR THE LAW

THE LAW IS OUR PASSION:

At BarefootLaw, we are never too busy for the people that seek and use our services. We are committed to contributing to the development of a fair, equitable and just world which addresses the legal needs of all persons and communities.

03. RELENTLESS IMPROVEMENT

WE PURSUE IMPROVEMENT RELENTLESSLY:

We are very demanding of ourselves and challenge ourselves to the extraordinary - committed to finding innovative, sustainable solutions to problems that threaten the dignity of persons and communities in this fast-changing world.

04. EMPATHETIC SERVICE

WE LISTEN. WE CARE. WE SERVE:

We treasure our diversity and thrive in it. We respect and value each other. We will always take a position in your best interests.

OUR WORK



At BarefootLaw, we recognise that justice for marginalised communities is not delivered through a single legal intervention. Rather, it is the outcome of a holistic and sustained process that enables people to understand their rights, exercise them confidently, and achieve outcomes that improve their lives and livelihoods. Justice, in this sense, is both a legal and a development issue.

Our Theory of Change is grounded in the belief that holistic justice is essential for sustainable development. When people can resolve land disputes, secure labour rights, or challenge exploitation, they are better positioned to participate economically, live peacefully within their communities, and make informed decisions about their futures. Justice, therefore, becomes both an enabler and an outcome of development.

HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

BarefootLaw's approach is based on the principle that lasting justice outcomes occur when individuals and communities are empowered with legal information. This ensures that people are not only aware of their rights, but also have the tools needed to act on them and see their actions translate into real legal and social outcomes.

Our work is organised around four mutually reinforcing impact pathways, which together operationalise holistic justice at scale:



OUR WORK.OUR WORK

01

Promoting Access to Legal Information

We equip communities with clear, practical, and accessible legal information so that people can recognise injustice, understand their rights, and identify available remedies. Legal empowerment begins with knowledge, particularly in contexts where misconception and fear of the law are widespread.

02

Enhancing Access to Legal Services

Knowledge alone is insufficient without pathways to action. We provide physical & virtual legal consultation, mediation support, and referral services that help people translate awareness into resolution whether through alternative dispute resolution or engagement with formal justice institutions.

03

Community Movement and Partnership Building

Justice is strengthened when communities mobilise collectively and when trusted local actors support justice seeking behaviour. We work with community leaders, grassroots organisations, state and non-state actors to create an enabling environment where justice is socially supported and institutionally responsive.

04

Evidence Generation and Learning

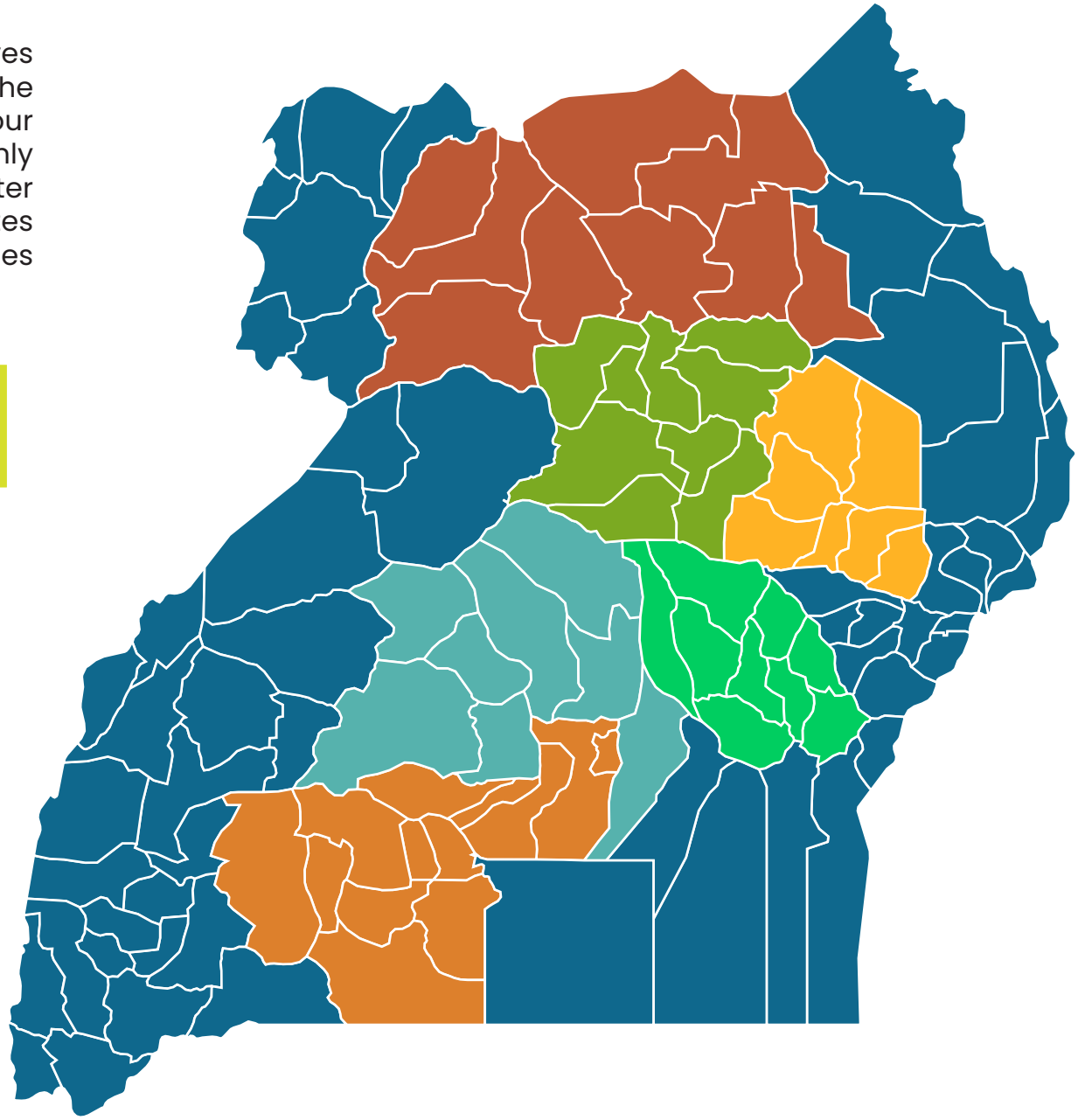
We generate and use evidence from our work to improve practice and demonstrate what works in delivering access to justice for marginalised populations. This learning strengthens accountability and contributes to the Body of Knowledge in enhancing access to justice for marginalised communities.

OUR IMPACT

By combining these pathways, BarefootLaw moves beyond case-by-case solutions to address the structural and systemic drivers of injustice in our society. Our model ensures that people are not only assisted in moments of crisis, but are also better equipped to prevent future harm, resolve disputes peacefully, thereby building peaceful communities where they can thrive.

5 REGIONS COVERED ACROSS UGANDA

- Teso
- Lango
- Buganda
- Acoli
- Busoga



OVER

28 MILLION

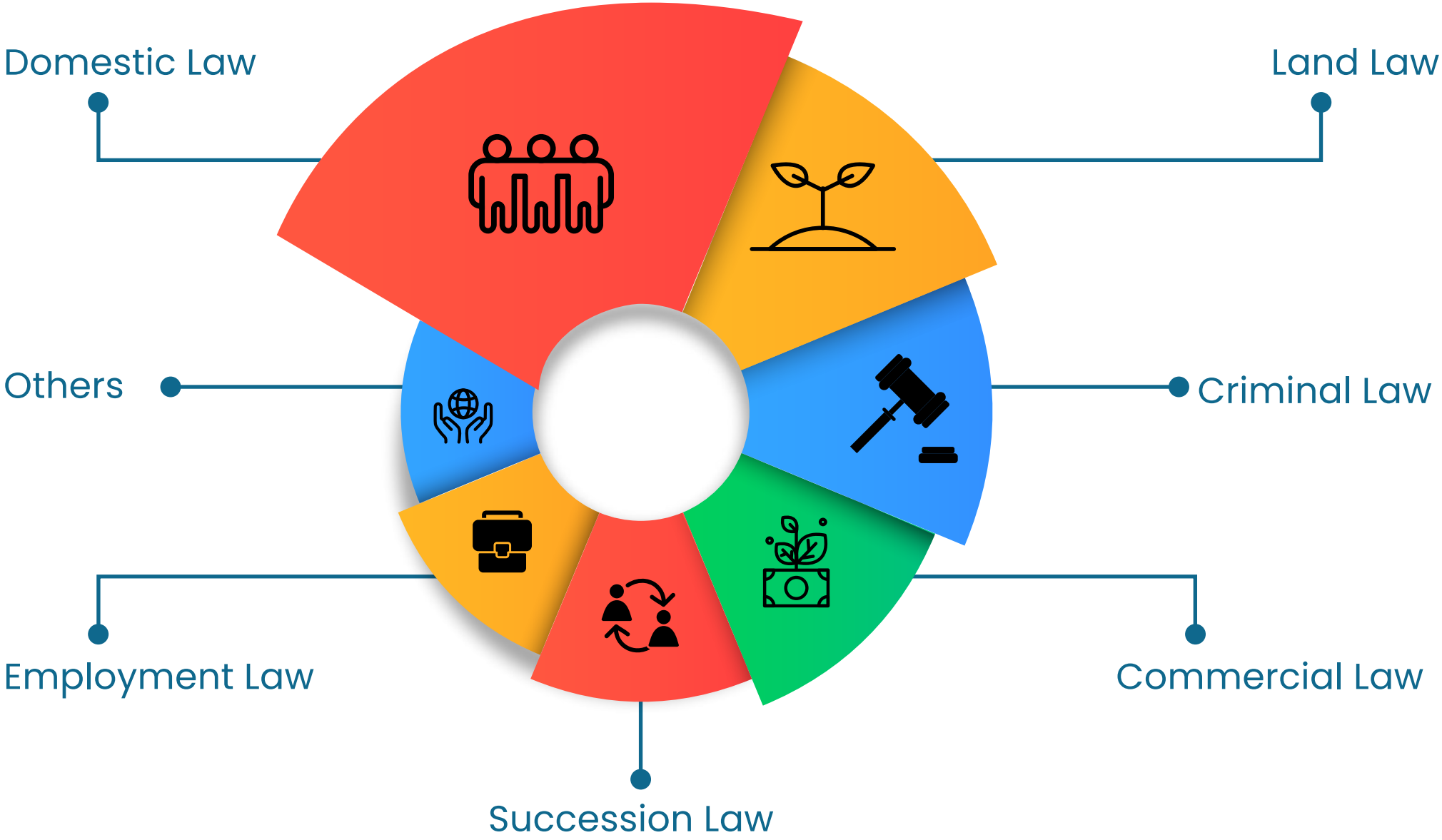
ACCOUNTS REACHED WITH LEGAL INFORMATION

17,266

LEGAL MATTERS HANDLED THIS YEAR



DISTRIBUTION OF 17,266 LEGAL MATTERS HANDLED BY CATEGORY













PROMOTING ACCESS TO LEGAL INFORMATION

Knowledge that empowers people to recognise injustice and act.

The journey to justice begins with access to information. For many of the communities BarefootLaw serves, formal legal institutions remain distant geographically and economically. In these contexts, lack of legal knowledge often means that injustice goes unrecognised, rights go unclaimed, and disputes escalate unnecessarily. Bridging this information gap is therefore a critical entry point for justice.

BarefootLaw is leveraging digital platforms and social media to bring the law closer to everyday people particularly those who would otherwise never interact with a lawyer. We share simplified, practical legal information in formats that are accessible, relatable, and responsive to people's real-life concerns.



Figure 1: Our legal team sharing practical legal information on radio, breaking down the law in local languages and reaching rural communities across Uganda to empower people with knowledge of their rights and pathways to justice.

BRINGING THE LAW TO EVERYDAY DIGITAL SPACES WHERE PEOPLE LEARN, ASK, AND ACT

During the year, **587 social media posts reached audiences across the country and beyond, generating 17266 legal cases and inquiries handled by our legal team.** This demonstrates how accessible legal information does more than raise awareness, it activates justice-seeking behaviour, connecting people directly to legal support when they need it most.

To deepen engagement and respond to community questions in real time, BarefootLaw hosted 10 live sessions on Instagram and TikTok, covering issues that directly affect people's daily lives. These included conversations on marriage and family law, succession and inheritance challenges faced by women, employment rights, and interactive question-and-answer sessions. By addressing these topics in simple language and localised contexts, the sessions helped demystify the law and provided practical guidance people could immediately apply.



Figure 2: A behind-the-scenes look at our TikTok Lives on succession law & will writing, using digital platforms to simplify complex legal issues and reach communities with timely, accessible justice information.

587 SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS
reached audiences across the country and beyond

17266 LEGAL CASES & INQUIRIES GENERATED
through our social media posts

By simplifying legal information and delivering it through platforms people already use, BarefootLaw is transforming social media into a gateway to justice. Digital legal education not only expanded our reach but also strengthened justice outcomes by ensuring that knowledge translated into action. In doing so, we reaffirmed that when people understand the law, they are better equipped to protect their rights, resolve disputes peacefully, and pursue fair outcomes.

Justice rooted in community realities.

For many marginalised communities, access to justice is shaped not only by the law, but by deeply rooted social norms, cultural practices, and power dynamics. BarefootLaw's community engagement and outreach model recognises that sustainable justice outcomes require meeting people where they are and addressing the specific justice challenges, they face.

Our Sunday and Friday community outreaches are deliberately timed and designed to maximise participation, reaching people in spaces where trust, dialogue, and collective reflection already exist. These outreaches are community specific and problem driven, responding directly to issues identified by the communities themselves. Common focus areas included harmful cultural narratives such as widow inheritance, women's property and inheritance rights, child maintenance, and family justice matters.

Each outreach is preceded by a needs assessment from the community, often communicated through local leaders, religious leaders, or cultural leaders seeking legal solutions to persistent justice challenges. This demand-driven approach ensures that interventions are relevant, timely, and grounded in lived experience rather than externally imposed agendas.

Outreaches are structured to address misconceptions about the law, clarify rights and promote lawful and peaceful pathways to dispute resolution. Where possible, government actors and duty bearers are engaged to bridge the gap between communities and state justice mechanisms, reinforcing accountability and trust. Through the year we conducted 97 community engagement activities, serving 7,124 people, across Uganda strengthening community understanding of the law and enabling individuals particularly women and vulnerable groups to recognise injustice and take informed action.

97 **community engagement activities**

7,124 **people served across Uganda**



Figure 3: Our legal team conducting a Sunday outreach at a church near the BarefootLaw Box in Namutumba, bringing community-based legal support closer to where people live and worship.

ENGAGING RELIGIOUS LEADERS AS JUSTICE ACTORS

Recognising the influence of faith leaders within communities, BarefootLaw worked closely with religious leaders as key partners in advancing justice. This engagement has yielded tangible results, particularly in strengthening women's property rights. Religious leaders that previously did not issue marriage certificates upon officiating marriage have begun documenting marriages, an important practice that reinforces women's legal claims to marital property and provides critical protection in cases of separation, divorce, or succession. By aligning legal principles with trusted community institutions, BarefootLaw is embedding justice within everyday community structures.



Figure 4: Our lawyer providing family law information at a mosque, empowering families with knowledge to understand and protect their rights.

VSLA TRAINING- ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS A PATHWAY TO JUSTICE

Economic vulnerability is both a cause and consequence of injustice. Many community members organise themselves into Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to improve their economic wellbeing. However, without legal knowledge, these groups often face challenges related to registration, governance, financial management, and access to formal systems leaving them exposed to disputes, fraud, and exclusion.

BarefootLaw's VSLA trainings integrates legal and economic empowerment, recognising that access to justice is strengthened when communities are economically strengthened and legally informed. The trainings focused on practical legal issues such as group registration, internal governance, opening and managing bank accounts, and understanding rights and obligations as organised entities.

Through this approach, BarefootLaw supported 20 VSLAs, equipping members with the legal knowledge necessary to protect their collective interests, resolve disputes internally, and engage safely with financial and administrative institutions.

By combining targeted community outreaches, trusted local leadership, and legal empowerment of economic groups, BarefootLaw is advancing a model of access to justice that is participatory, preventive, and sustainable. These interventions not only resolved immediate justice challenges but also strengthened community capacity to; address future disputes, challenge harmful norms, and claim rights collectively.



Figure 6: A Village Savings & Loan Association shortly after receiving a training from our BarefootLaw Box in Gulu, strengthening legal awareness to support sustainable justice and community empowerment.

PROGRESS MADE THIS YEAR

587 posts on simplified legal content reaching over 28 million using our socials

10 virtual legal sessions conducted

68% of people that received our legal information acted on it.

SUCCESS STORY

Alice's uncle was detained on suspicion of stealing a television. Like many Ugandans, Alice did not know what steps to take after the arrest. She tried several "claimed solutions," but none worked. As a result, her uncle was taken to prison on remand.

Alice later saw a post shared by BarefootLaw on its digital platform and decided to reach out to BarefootLaw for legal assistance. The BarefootLaw legal team provided tailored legal information specific to her situation. With this guidance, Alice was empowered to take action to address her justice needs. Her uncle was released after the correct legal steps were followed.

Alice later expressed her satisfaction and thanked BarefootLaw for the information shared.

"My uncle has been released, thank you so much for your help"
– Alice



ENHANCING ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES

> Turning legal needs into fair and timely justice outcomes.

Access to legal services is where legal knowledge becomes real justice. For many marginalised people, understanding their rights is only the first step, meaningful access to advice, mediation, and dispute resolution is what safeguards their rights and transforms lives. Without accessible legal services, justice remains out of reach and systemic inequality deepens.

Across Uganda and the broader African context, the justice gap is obvious. An estimated 5.1 billion people worldwide remain without meaningful access to justice, especially those living in marginalised communities who face barriers such as cost, distance, and discrimination. This gap undermines social inclusion, economic growth, and community resilience.

BarefootLaw's model breaks down these barriers through accessible virtual legal consultations and locally grounded mediations, ensuring that legal empowerment is not confined to a few privileged people.

LEGAL CONSULTATIONS THAT TRANSLATE LAW INTO JUSTICE ACTION

Knowledge is only powerful when people can apply it to their own circumstances. Many individuals who receive legal information still need personalised guidance to interpret how the law applies to their specific situation.

Legal consultations bridge this gap by enabling people to understand their justice needs in relation to what the law says and what their options are.



Figure 5: Legal consultations at the BarefootLaw Box in Namutumba, offering timely, one-on-one support that turns legal knowledge into real solutions for the communities that we serve.

To overcome traditional barriers such as high legal costs and the difficulty of physically reaching lawyers especially for rural and low-income communities, BarefootLaw leveraged technology to connect people with legal professionals virtually. As a result, our legal team has achieved a 77.2% satisfaction rating from people served.

BREAKDOWN OF LEGAL CONSULTATIONS CONDUCTED:

DOMESTIC
18%

CRIMINAL
16%

COMMERCIAL
15%

LAND
12%

HUMAN RIGHTS
10%

EMPLOYMENT
09%

SUCCESSION
07%

ADMINISTRATIVE
06%

CONSTITUTIONAL
04%

OTHERS
03%

The range of cases handled through legal consultations reflects the everyday justice challenges faced by marginalised communities. Domestic, criminal, commercial, and land related matters together account for most inquiries, highlighting how family stability, personal liberty, livelihoods, and productive assets are closely tied to access to legal advice. This breadth of cases underscores the role of legal consultations as an entry point for early intervention, preventing disputes from escalating into prolonged conflict or economic loss.

MEDIATION: RESOLVING DISPUTES LOCALLY AND FAIRLY

Formal justice systems can be slow, expensive, and intimidating, leaving many disputes unresolved and community tensions unaddressed. Mediation offers a people centred alternative that brings disputing parties together in a structured but less formal setting, allowing for faster and mutually acceptable outcomes.

During the year, BarefootLaw facilitated 153 mediations, with an 88% success rate under our standard operating procedures for mediations (resolution within the first two hours). Disputes addressed included:



Figure 6: An ongoing mediation at the BarefootLaw Box in Kole, facilitating fair dialogue and resolving community disputes to strengthen local access to justice.

BREAKDOWN OF LEGAL MEDIATIONS CONDUCTED:

During the year, **BarefootLaw facilitated 153 mediations, with an 88% success rate** under our standard operating procedures for mediations (resolution within the first two hours). Disputes addressed included:

FAMILY
57%

LAND
37%

COMMERCIAL
05%

OTHERS
01%

The legal categories of mediations handled during the year point to the central role mediation plays in resolving disputes that directly affect social cohesion and economic wellbeing. Family and land matters make up most mediations, reflecting persistent challenges around relationships, caregiving responsibilities, inheritance, and land use. By resolving these disputes quickly and amicably, mediation helps preserve family ties, safeguard women's and children's rights, and return land and other assets to productive use. Commercial and other disputes, though fewer in number, further illustrate how mediation offers a practical, people-centred alternative for resolving conflicts efficiently while reducing pressure on formal justice institutions.

LEGAL SERVICES AS A DRIVER OF DEVELOPMENT

Enhancing access to legal services goes far beyond promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all. **Access to justice is the foundation of broader development outcomes:**

- *Unresolved legal issues such as land disputes or labour violations can trap households in cycles of poverty. Empowering people to resolve these disputes builds economic and livelihood stability.*
- *When custodial and maintenance disputes are resolved fairly, children have improved opportunities to stay in school rather than drop out due to financial insecurity. This contributes to the right to quality education for children.*
- *Land rights directly impact food production and household nutrition; unresolved land disputes deter land use and investment.*
- *Legal services that support women's rights especially in family and succession matters promote gender equity and economic empowerment for women and girls.*

The justice gap remains a major obstacle to peace and development. BarefootLaw recognises this reality and places equal access to justice at the heart of peace, inclusion, and prosperity. By bringing legal services to the doorstep of the marginalised both physically and digitally BarefootLaw ensures better handling of disputes in these communities' community hence **Creating Peaceful Communities Where People Can Thrive**.

THE FROM ACCESS TO EQUALITY (FATE) PROJECT (2021-2025)

The FATE Project was a four-year initiative designed to empower women and girls in rural and marginalised communities in Uganda to access justice and claim their rights. Implemented across 11 districts, the project was delivered through a consortium of four partners: BarefootLaw, Avocats Sans Frontières Uganda (ASF Uganda), Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) and Penal Reform International (PRI), with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda.

At its core, FATE recognised a simple but urgent truth: many injustices faced by women and girls in rural communities persist not because laws do not exist, but because those affected do not know their rights, or cannot access support to enforce them.



Figure 7: FATE Steering committee session, with representatives from ASF, UWONET and PRI, hosted at the BarefootLaw head office.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO LEGAL INFORMATION

Over the four years, the project directly served more than 13,000 women and girls with legal information and support. Access points were deliberately placed close to the communities that needed them most. Two BarefootLaw Boxes were installed in Gulu and Namutumba to serve as community-based legal information hubs. These Boxes became safe spaces where women could seek guidance on land rights, domestic violence, marriage, inheritance, and other justice concerns without fear or intimidation. For many women, this was the first time they had ever spoken to someone about their legal rights.



Figure 8: BarefootLaw Boxes installed in Gulu(above) and Namatumba(below)

CHALLENGING HARMFUL NORMS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

One of the transformative thematic interventions under FATE was "Wills for Women." In many communities, cultural practices such as widow inheritance treated women as property rather than rights holders. Through legal literacy and practical support in will writing, the project directly challenged these norms and reinforced women's rights to own and inherit property.

Importantly, the project recognised that justice for women cannot be achieved by working with women alone. Men were engaged as natural justice partners in addressing gender-based violence, widow inheritance, and other harmful practices. This inclusive approach reduced resistance and strengthened community ownership of change.

TRANSFORMING VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATIONS (VSLAS)

Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) were identified as powerful grassroots justice actors. Initially, many of these groups operated informally and often used harsh or illegal methods to recover loans. Through legal empowerment and structured support, these groups transformed: They registered as formal legal entities, Opened bank accounts, Adopted constitutions to govern their operations and Shifted from illegal property seizure to mediation-based recovery mechanisms.

By the end of the project, many had become compliant, investment-ready community institutions. Beyond financial empowerment, they became platforms for advancing justice conversations and collective action against gender-based violence.





Figure 9: VSLA Trainings conducted by members from the BarefootLaw team

WORKING WITH LOCAL, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Access to justice in rural communities often begins with local and cultural leaders. FATE invested heavily in training these leaders to become agents of lawful and fair dispute resolution.

Traditionally, some cultural courts ruled disputes based on influence or numbers for example, deciding cases in favour of whoever arrived with more supporters. Women were sometimes banished on accusations of witchcraft or deprived of land through customary practices. Through engagement and dialogue, leaders began turning to statutory law as a guiding framework. Cultural leaders were encouraged to disregard practices inconsistent with national law. In one region, a chief publicly called upon cultural institutions to uphold the law and reject harmful norms.



Figure 10: The Paramount Chief of Acholi, Rwot Onen David Acana II visits the BarefootLaw Box

A major lesson learned was the central role of religious leaders. In some communities, harmful practices such as early child marriage were justified using religious interpretations. By working directly with these leaders, the project opened space for dialogue. Some began questioning these practices and supported the issuance of marriage certificates an important step in protecting women's property rights, particularly upon the death of a spouse.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MINI-GRANTS

Recognising the link between economic dependency and gender-based violence, FATE provided mini-grants to women and women-led groups. The objective was clear: reduce financial vulnerability within households and create economic stability that could lower conflict and violence. Economic empowerment became both a prevention and protection strategy, reinforcing the broader justice outcomes of the project.

DIGITAL PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT: EXPANDING JUSTICE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

FATE also invested in digital innovation. A digital platform, powered by the I-Nodes digital platform, was developed to connect marginalised communities directly to lawyers and justice institutions. Through this platform: Individuals could consult lawyers remotely; Institutions were connected to legal professionals and BarefootLaw expanded its reach beyond physical locations. The platform reduced geographical barriers and demonstrated how technology can extend justice services to hard-to-reach populations.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE: A CULMINATION OF CHANGE

The FATE Project concluded with a National Women's Conference, which brought together women leaders, community actors, cultural representatives, consortium partners, and stakeholders. The conference served as a reflection point showcasing stories of transformation, sharing lessons learned, and reinforcing collective commitment to advancing women's access to justice. It was not simply a closing event; it was a celebration of changed mindsets, strengthened institutions, and empowered communities.



Figure 11: Justice actors from PRI, ASF, JLOS, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, BarefootLaw and UWONET, at the National Women's conference.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE: A CULMINATION OF CHANGE

The FATE Project demonstrated that access to justice requires more than legal information. It demands community ownership, institutional reform, cultural dialogue, economic empowerment, and technological innovation.

Over four years, the project strengthened justice ecosystems in rural Uganda transforming savings groups into lawful institutions, training leaders as change agents, equipping women with information to protect their property, and building digital bridges to legal support.

Most importantly, it restored dignity. Women who once believed injustice was inevitable began to see the law as a tool they could use. That shift from silence to action is the true legacy of BarefootLaw under the FATE project.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE OUTCOMES: ANNUAL PERFORMANCE SNAPSHOT

22,258 people

served this year with legal services, with 77.2% satisfaction rating.

Most legal consultations this year focused on

DOMESTIC
18%

CRIMINAL
16%

COMMERCIAL
15%

LAND
12%

153 *mediations conducted with 88% resolution rate*

57% *of mediations conducted related to family law.*

SUCCESS STORY

On Christmas Day, Jane approached the Police in Namutumba District seeking assistance regarding a custody dispute with her former partner, Phil. The couple, who previously cohabited, share a 7-year-old daughter. Jane reported ongoing disagreements over primary custody, while Phil expressed concerns that he had been denied access to his child and that their daughter was attending a school that did not meet his expectations for quality education.

RESOLUTION

Through mediation, both parties were guided to reach a mutually agreeable solution. It was resolved that Jane would have primary custody of the child during school days, while Phil would have custody during school holidays. Jane agreed to identify a better school for their daughter and to share details of school fees and requirements with Phil, allowing both parents to make collective decisions. Phil committed to paying the agreed-upon school fees.

This intervention and others, highlight the role of the BarefootLaw Box in facilitating constructive dialogue, ensuring the child's best interests are prioritized, and promoting shared parental responsibility within the community.



COMMUNITY MOVEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

> Justice strengthened through collective action and trusted partnerships.

Through partnerships, we connect communities to civil society, justice institutions, and regional and global platforms. Our approach amplifies grassroots voices and fosters coordinated responses to justice challenges. By nurturing these networks and alliances, we contribute to sustainable change where communities are active drivers of reform and accountability.

AMPLIFYING GRASSROOTS VOICES IN GLOBAL DECISION-MAKING: COLLABORATION AT THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In September, as world leaders and changemakers convened in New York for UNGA Week, a shared message echoed across high-level discussions: global development is at a turning point. Conversations moved beyond cautious reform toward calls for a fundamental redesign of development approaches ones that prioritize trust-based partnerships, long-term investment, and the leadership of local organizations closest to communities.

Against this backdrop, BarefootLaw engaged at the United Nations General Assembly to elevate grassroots justice experiences into global policy conversations.



Figure 12: Katie Bunten-Wamaru (left) of the Africa Collaborative with BarefootLaw CEO, Gerald Abila (right) during the UNGA Week in New York.

By sharing evidence and lessons drawn directly from community-level work, BarefootLaw contributed practical insights on how access to justice challenges are experienced by marginalized populations and what people-centred solutions look like in practice. This engagement strengthened collaboration with international actors and reinforced the case for anchoring global commitments in local realities, ensuring that emerging global frameworks reflect the voices, needs, and agency of the communities they are meant to serve.

OUR ENGAGEMENT IN THE JUSTICE ECOSYSTEM AT THE JUSTICE MATTERS CONFERENCE, NETHERLANDS

At the Justice Matters Conference in the Netherlands, BarefootLaw contributed to global conversations on strengthening justice ecosystems by sharing practical insights from our work in advancing access to justice through technology. Represented by our Director of Development, Michael Kwizera, BarefootLaw highlighted how digital tools can expand justice services for underserved and marginalized communities when they are designed and implemented with people at the centre.



Figure 13: BarefootLaw's, Director of Development-Micheal Kwizera presenting at the Justice Matters Conference in the Netherlands.

We emphasized that innovation cannot exist in isolation. Effective justice innovation must be grounded in local context, responsive to community realities, and developed in partnership with the people it seeks to serve. Drawing from BarefootLaw's experience, the presentation underscored the risks of adopting technology-driven solutions without understanding social, economic, and cultural dynamics, and reinforced the importance of aligning innovation with community trust, accessibility, and human support systems.



Figure 12: Panel discussions at the conference on the intricacies of scaling innovations in access to justice.

Through this engagement, BarefootLaw continues to reaffirm its role within the global justice ecosystem as a practitioner advocating for people centred, context driven innovation that strengthens, rather than replaces, human pathways to justice.

ADVANCING JUSTICE INNOVATION AND GOVERNANCE THROUGH DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT: VISIT FROM THE DUTCH AMBASSADOR

The visit from the Dutch Ambassador to Uganda, Her Excellency Frederieke Quispel, provided an opportunity for strategic dialogue on justice reform, legal empowerment, and innovation. Through direct engagement, BarefootLaw shared practical insights from its community-based interventions, helping to shape diplomatic perspectives on how locally driven solutions can strengthen access to justice. The visit deepened cooperation and opened pathways for aligning grassroots justice priorities with international development and governance agendas, reinforcing the value of evidence-based, community-centred approaches to advancing justice systems.





Figure 15: Her Excellency the Dutch Ambassador attending a Legal VSLA training at the Namutumba BarefootLaw Box.



Figure 16: Tree planting ceremony led by Her Excellency the Dutch Ambassador to Uganda, alongside local leaders of Namutumba Nsinze Town Council, marking the conclusion of her visit to the BarefootLaw Box.

STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE, RIGHTS-BASED JUSTICE SYSTEMS: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE AUSTRIAN EMBASSY IN UGANDA

In 2025, BarefootLaw had the honour of hosting senior representatives of the Austrian Government for a strategic exchange on access to justice, legal empowerment, and the role of civil society in strengthening justice systems. The engagement brought together Dr. Simone Knapp, the Austrian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti, & South Sudan, and Dr. Katja Yvonne Kerschbaumer, Head of the Austrian Embassy and the Austrian Development Agency and the BarefootLaw team to discuss and enhance collaboration.



Figure 17: Picture Moment: Our CEO of BarefootLaw (left) with Her Excellency Dr. Simone Knapp , Austrian Ambassador to Uganda.



Figure 18:Group photo with representatives from the Austrian Embassy in Uganda and the BarefootLaw team at the Head Office in Kampala.

The visit provided an opportunity for BarefootLaw to present community-rooted evidence and lived experiences from its work with marginalized communities, informing policy thinking on inclusive and people-centred justice approaches. It also fostered mutual understanding and strengthened cooperation around rights-based justice systems, reinforcing the critical role of local civil society organizations in advancing equitable access to justice.

EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE COMMUNITY-LED JUSTICE SOLUTIONS: VISIT FROM THE SCHOONER FOUNDATION

BarefootLaw was honoured to host Julia Pettengil, the Executive Director of The Schooner Foundation, for a visit focused on exploring scalable, people centred justice solutions.



Figure 19:Julia Pettengill, Executive Director of The Schooner Foundation, pictured with the BarefootLaw team during her visit.



Figure 20:BarefootLaw's Director of Operations demonstrating how technology is leveraged to deliver simplified legal information and practical guidance.

The engagement provided an opportunity to share BarefootLaw Impact, learning, and innovation journey, showcasing how technology and deep community engagement particularly through initiatives such as the BarefootLaw Boxed are breaking down barriers to legal information and service for the people in remote and underserved communities.

BUILDING REGIONAL JUSTICE SOLUTIONS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS: ZAMBIA JUSTICE INNOVATOR CONFERENCE

BarefootLaw, in collaboration with the Southern African Institute for Policy and Research (SAIPAR), hosted the Zambia Justice Innovator Conference, bringing together diverse justice actors from across Zambia's justice ecosystem. The conference provided a platform for dialogue, learning, and collaboration among civil society organizations, legal practitioners, community-based actors, and policy influencers committed to advancing access to justice.



Figure 21: Presentations from one of the Nominated grassroots innovators at the Justice innovation conference in Zambia.

The primary objective of the conference was to identify, showcase, and support grassroots justice innovations that respond to the everyday legal challenges faced by communities. Through a participatory and transparent process, innovators were assessed on the relevance, effectiveness, and scalability of their solutions within the justice ecosystem.

At the conclusion of the conference, three grassroots justice innovators were recognized and awarded for their outstanding innovations: CHOMA Justice Network, Project Legal, The Legal Aid Initiative.

These organizations emerged as the winning innovators, reflecting strong public and stakeholder confidence in the practicality, impact, and sustainability of their approaches to delivering justice at the community level.

The Zambia Justice Innovator Conference reinforced the value of regional partnerships and peer learning in strengthening justice systems. By identifying locally driven solutions and fostering cross-border collaboration, BarefootLaw continues to contribute to the growth of an inclusive, innovative, and people-centred justice ecosystem across Africa.



Figure 22: Winners of the Innovation Challenge in Zambia: from left, Joe Mapikie from Choma Justice Network, Peter Musanshi's Project Legal, and on the right, The Legal Aid Initiative, whose solutions advance access to justice.

BRIDGING CUSTOM AND LAW: ADVANCING JUSTICE THROUGH ENGAGING CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

As part of our efforts to drive systems change in access to justice, BarefootLaw has worked closely with community cultural leaders to align traditional authority with legal standards. A key milestone in this work has been the commitment by Rwot Acana II of Acholi and his cultural parliament to uphold the law and actively discourage customary practices that contradict legal protections, particularly those that affect women and children.

This shift represents a transformative step in embedding legal norms within cultural institutions, thereby reshaping how justice is understood and delivered at the community level.



Figure 23: The Paramount Chief of Acholi, Rwot David Acana (left), visiting the BarefootLaw Box in Paicho, Gulu, to learn about BarefootLaw's work in his community. Gerald Abila, CEO and Founder of BarefootLaw (right), explains how the BarefootLaw Box advances access to justice for marginalized communities.

SCALING COMMUNITY-BASED ACCESS TO JUSTICE: OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE NGORA RESIDENT DISTRICT COMMISSIONER

The visit from the Ngora Resident District Commissioner (RDC) marked a key step in supporting the deployment of the fourth BarefootLaw Box in Ngora District. This engagement reinforced the importance of strategic partnerships with government structures in scaling community-based access to justice solutions.

Through collaboration with the RDC's office, BarefootLaw strengthens local ownership and legitimacy of its interventions, creating a pathway to scale access to justice across all 15 regions of Uganda.

BUILDING TOMORROW'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE CHAMPIONS: INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME AND FUTURE IDEAS WORKSHOP

On 8 August 2025, BarefootLaw convened its annual Future Ideas Conference at its offices in Ntinda Ministers Village, marking the completion of a 3-month internship programme involving 10 law students from Uganda Christian University, Makerere University, and Islamic University in Uganda.

The internship programme strengthens community-based access to justice by equipping law students with practical skills in alternative legal practice while embedding them within their home communities.

During the internship period, interns engaged community members and local leaders to identify legal challenges and facilitated referrals to BarefootLaw's legal team. Key legal issues addressed included marriage and family disputes, child custody and maintenance, employment matters, and land-related conflicts.









Figure 25: The Executive Director (ASF)-Irene Anying , alongside presentations sharing community-informed insights and recommendations, shaped through our internship program.

A strong emphasis was placed on community legal awareness and prevention. Each intern organized at least one legal sensitization activity, supported by BarefootLaw staff through physical and virtual participation. Interns documented their experiences through online reflective journals, contributing to continuous learning, supervision, and institutional knowledge.

In addition, interns explored the pressing community needs and developed context-specific, innovative solutions. These were presented at the Future Ideas Conference through a combination of presentations and an interactive panel discussion, fostering dialogue between interns, practitioners, and partners.

The conference was attended by representatives from Avocats Sans Frontières, Watoto Neighbourhood, Centre for Evangelism, alongside BarefootLaw staff. The quality and practicality of the interns' work demonstrated the programme's contribution to building a pipeline of socially conscious legal professionals and advancing sustainable, community-driven access to justice.The conference was attended by representatives from Avocats Sans Frontières, Watoto Neighbourhood, Centre for Evangelism, alongside BarefootLaw staff. The quality and practicality of the interns' work demonstrated the programme's contribution to building a pipeline of socially conscious legal professionals and advancing sustainable, community-driven access to justice.



Figure 20: Our Intern-Ashley Kijumba 's presentation themed "Un packing the Gender gaps in the legal system" at the Future Ideas Conference 2025.

OUR WORK WITH UGANDA POLICE

BarefootLaw works closely with the Uganda Police as a key partner in the implementation of activities at the BarefootLaw Boxes, strengthening coordinated and community centred, access to justice. Through this collaboration, police officers receive targeted training on domestic violence, with a strong emphasis on the protection of women and girls, improving survivor sensitive responses.



Figure 27: Police officers at the BarefootLaw Box in Namutumba pose for a photo following a virtual legal training session.

The police play an instrumental role in de-escalating disputes during mediations, provide security for BarefootLaw boxes and serve as a critical referral pathway, particularly for land related matters. Joint community outreaches with the police further enhance public awareness of legal rights and available justice service while ongoing collaboration supports effective handling of cases that require both legal and law enforcement intervention.



Figure 28: Training on gender-based violence for police officers at the BarefootLaw Box, focusing on the legal framework and the rights of both the accused and the accuser within the communities we serve.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO ADVANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In 2025, BarefootLaw deepened its commitment to community-centred justice by working closely with partners who share a common vision of dignity, inclusion, and rights-based empowerment. Recognising that access to justice is not a one-actor effort, BarefootLaw continued to collaborate with like-minded institutions to build a collective movement that promotes legal awareness, transparent and accountable institutions, and peaceful dispute resolution.

Through partnerships with organisations supporting victims of the LRA war, BarefootLaw created safe spaces for survivors often marginalised and discriminated against within their communities to be heard, learn about their rights, and gain practical knowledge on property protection and ownership. This work enabled survivors to confidently exercise their rights and reclaim their place within their communities.



Figure 29: Empowering survivors of the Lord's Resistance Army through legal knowledge and training.

BarefootLaw also worked alongside Sight for Development to strengthen the rights of vulnerable elderly persons, with a particular focus on property rights and succession planning. By equipping older community members with legal knowledge, this partnership helped safeguard their property and ensure dignity and security later in their life.

In collaboration with Watoto Childcare Ministries, BarefootLaw supported women and girls in shelters and surrounding communities by enhancing legal awareness related to livelihoods, education, and protection of rights.

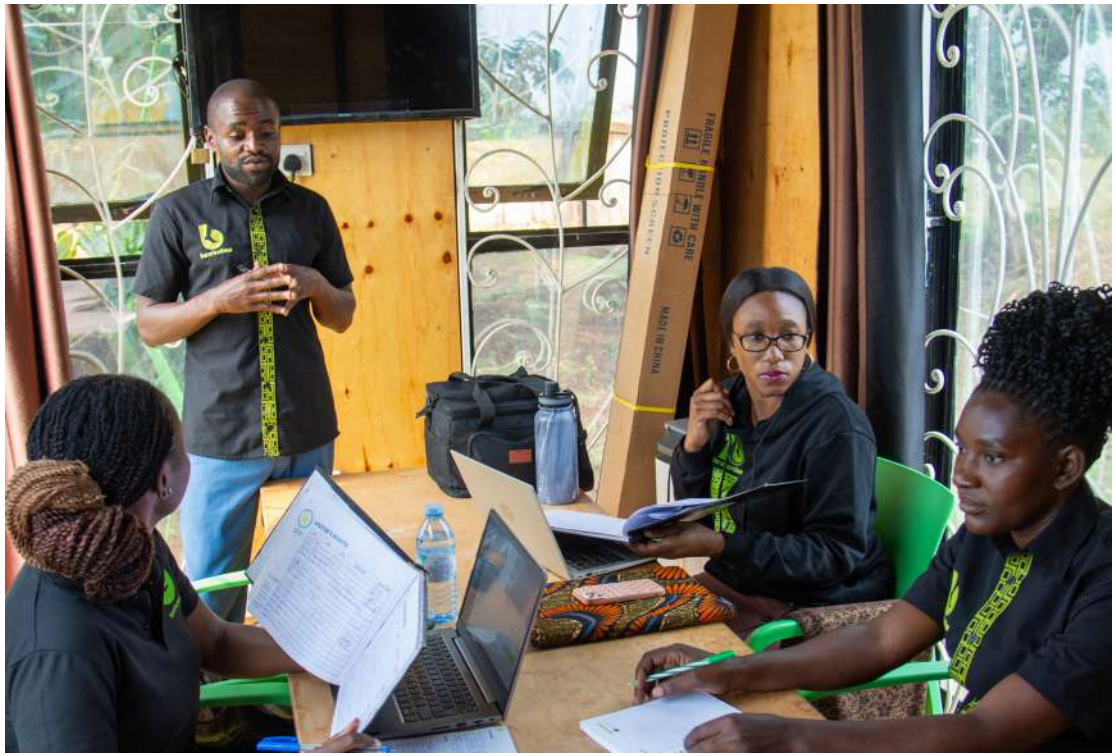
This engagement complemented broader social and economic empowerment efforts by ensuring that women and girls understand and can assert their legal rights.

Engagement with the Acholi Students Union provided a platform to work with young people across the Acholi sub-region, shaping the next generation of leaders and advocates. Through legal empowerment, youth were encouraged to recognise marginalisation, support vulnerable communities, and confidently use the law to defend rights where necessary.



Figure 30: Representatives from the Acholi Students Association exploring the role of youth in advancing access to justice for the Acholi community.

Collectively, these partnerships reinforced BarefootLaw's belief that sustainable access to justice is achieved through collaboration by working with communities, civil society, and institutions to embed the law in everyday life and strengthen pathways to justice for all.



EVIDENCE GENERATION

Using lived experiences to shape better justice outcomes.

After more than a decade of advancing access to justice for marginalised communities, BarefootLaw intentionally deepened its focus on evidence generation grounded in peoples lived experiences. We recognise that sustainable justice solutions are not designed in isolation they are shaped by listening to the people most affected by injustice and understanding how they define justice in their own lives.

This year, we documented Most Significant Change stories through success videos, creating space for the peopled served to share how our services have transformed their lives. These stories offered more than success narratives; they provided critical insight into what works, why it works, and how justice interventions can be strengthened.

Complementing this, BarefootLaw gathered direct feedback through digital platforms and community engagements, enabling us to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of our services from the perspective of the people we serve.



Figure 31: A focus group discussion led by the FATE End-of-Project Evaluation Team at the BarefootLaw Box in Namutumba, gathering community insights to assess impact and guide future justice interventions.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE TELLS US

Community feedback shows that BarefootLaw's people-centred approach is delivering clear and lasting justice outcomes. Access to legal information, mediation, and community outreach has strengthened land rights especially for women solved land conflicts thereby returning these assets to productive use. Families report improved relationships, reduced domestic violence, and increased responsibility for child and maternal care following mediation.

Legal empowerment of community groups, particularly VSLAs, has improved governance, accountability, and economic stability through lawful financial practices. Across communities, engagement with religious and cultural leaders has contributed to positive shifts in gender and social norms, reinforcing equality before the law and respect for shared rights.



Figure 32: A police officer at the Namutumba BarefootLaw Box creating clarification on legal matters, strengthening understanding between law enforcement and the community.

SUCCESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The evidence demonstrates that people centred justice works best when communities are listened to and involved as active agents of change. Peace is the foundation of prosperity in the communities we serve. When effective and fair dispute resolution is applied, communities are better positioned to strengthen livelihoods, build trust, and thrive.

Successes in reducing land conflicts, strengthening families, improving women's and children's protection, and promoting lawful economic practices confirm the value of combining legal information with mediation and community engagement.

Equally important, the lessons learned reinforce the need to continue simplifying legal information and strengthen local partnerships.



Figure 33: Our Outreach Lead engaging community members to gather feedback on services delivered, ensuring our justice interventions truly respond to the needs of marginalized communities.


THIS YEAR
IN A
SNAPSHOT

587
posts on simplified legal content reaching over 28 million using our socials

77%
satisfaction rating with the information shared

10
live sessions on the law

97
community engagement activities this year serving over 7100 people, **60% are women.**

22,258 PEOPLE SERVED

this year with legal services, with 77.2% satisfaction rating.

153 MEDIATIONS CONDUCTED

with 88% resolution rate

ACCESS TO LEGAL INFORMATION:

- DOMESTIC 18%
- CRIMINAL 16%
- COMMERCIAL 15%
- LAND 12%
- HUMAN RIGHTS 10%
- EMPLOYMENT 09%
- SUCCESSION 07%
- ADMINISTRATIVE 06%
- CONSTITUTIONAL 04%
- OTHERS 03%

ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES:

- FAMILY 57%
- LAND 37%
- COMMERCIAL 05%
- OTHERS 01%

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS FROM THE FATE END OF PROJECT EVALUATION

95%
of participants demonstrated knowledge of their rights.

92%
correctly identified 18 years as the legal age of marriage.

92.3%
were aware of their right to legal advice and representation.

68.3%
were aware of their right to legal advice and representation.

Land rights practice improved from a 60% baseline to 76.6%.

Overall satisfaction rating stood at 8.5 out of 10.

SUCCESS STORY

Strengthening Family Responsibility Through Mediation

Raphaella Auma approached the BarefootLaw Box seeking support regarding neglect and inadequate provision by her husband, Ekwaru Daniel, with whom she shares a two-month-old child. She reported that necessities such as soap, clothing, and medical care for the child were not being adequately provided. Raphaella also disclosed experiencing violence during pregnancy, ongoing health challenges after childbirth, and emotional distress due to what she perceived as deliberate neglect, as Daniel was reportedly prioritizing another household.

RESOLUTION

Through structured mediation facilitated at the BarefootLaw Box, both parties were engaged in dialogue to clarify responsibilities and agree on practical steps forward. As a result, Daniel committed to immediately provide essential items for the child, seek urgent medical attention for the child's illness, and fulfil his parental responsibility to consistently meet the child's needs. Raphaella also committed to maintaining a supportive and stable home environment. This intervention demonstrates the role of the BarefootLaw Box in providing accessible, community-based dispute resolution that promotes accountability, child welfare, and family stability. The parties were informed that they may return for further guidance should additional challenges arise, reinforcing sustained access to justice at the community level.

SUCCESS STORY

Clarifying Property Rights and Protecting Children's Welfare

Two women from Namutumba sought assistance at the BarefootLaw Box after their children were denied continued residence at their grandmother's home. The property is currently under the custody of the grandmother on behalf of her son who resides abroad. The complainants raised concerns about restricted access and the presence of an unfamiliar individual imposing limitations on the property.

During mediation, the respondents explained that the children's stay had led to recurring conflicts and alleged indiscipline and clarified that the property legally belongs to the son abroad. Through guided dialogue, the mediator explained the legal framework on property ownership, user rights, and beneficial interest, helping both parties understand who may legitimately claim rights over land and residence.

RESOLUTION

It was resolved that, since the complainants and their children did not hold a legal interest in the property, the children would return to their parents, with arrangements made for occasional visits to their grandmother. Consideration was given to vulnerable children, including orphans, who were allowed to remain, and school-going children were permitted to stay until the start of the next school term to ensure continuity in their education.

This case demonstrates the role of the BarefootLaw Box in reducing conflict through legal education, promoting fair and lawful resolutions, and ensuring that children's welfare remains central in community property disputes.

Disclaimer: All names used in these stories have been anonymised to protect the privacy, dignity, and safety of the individuals served, in line with our Do No Harm and confidentiality principles



OTHER ORGANISATIONAL UPDATES

IN MEMORIAM



Ms. Jamina Apio

We pause to remember and honour our dear workmate, Jamina Apio.
Though time has passed since Jamina left us, her presence is still deeply felt among us. She was more than a colleague, she was kind, dedicated, and always willing to support others with quiet strength and sincerity. Her commitment to her work and her care for the people around her left a lasting mark on our team.

Rest in peace, Jamina Apio. You will always be remembered.

IN MEMORIAM



Mr. Barry Segal

We honour the memory of Barry Segal founder of the Segal Family Foundation, who passed away in 2025.

The Segal family foundation has supported BarefootLaw through our growth and scale and has been instrumental in holding space for us amongst its peers and opening doors where we needed them to. They have been exemplary in the way funders and partners support each other, and we continue to value our partnership together.

It is our prayer that the memory of Barry is immortalised in the work of Segal Family Foundation and in the work of all the partners, grantees and people touched by his generosity.
May he rest in peace.

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR PARTNERS!

William + Flora Hewlett Foundation
https://hewlett.org/

Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
https://www.mott.org/

Dovetail Impact Foundation
https://dovetailimpact.org/

frey Charitable Foundation
https://www.freycharitablefoundation.org/

rippleworks
https://www.rippleworks.org/

African Collaborative
https://www.africancollab.org/

MFF Morgridge Family Foundation
https://morgridgefamilyfoundation.org/

Micah 6|8 Foundation
https://www.micah-68.org/

sas·p
https://www.aham.nl/SAS-P/

Jones Day
https://www.jonesday.com/

King Baudouin Foundation
Working together for a better society
https://kbs-frb.be/

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https://dioraphte.nl/en/

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THANK YOU FOR 2025!

WE LOOK FORWARD TO 2026 WITH YOU