



WEHUBIT

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Uganda



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Learning from Legal Empowerment of Women Using Technology and Innovation - LEWUTI

Can digital social innovation increase women's and youth rights, inclusion and empowerment, how and in which context ?

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Reason

Most Ugandans – **especially women**, have very limited access to legal services, particularly in rural areas, because of a **deep-rooted patriarchal system**, **restricted access to correct information** and a **lack of resources to access the already limited legal services**.

For instance, most **local leaders** (cultural and political) believe that women cannot own land although the law says otherwise. As a result, their rights are infringed upon, they have limited **recourse for injustice** and therefore do not enjoy the **full potential of rights and duties** they are entitled to.

Digital Social Innovation

The project , aimed to “**increase women's access to justice through digital solutions for legal empowerment**”, and developed digital tools to **overcome physical, social and financial barriers to reach legal support** for women living in the rural area of the districts of Gulu and Lira, northern Uganda.

The digital tools - **SMS, Interactive Voice Response (IVR)** and a **call center** – gave women access to knowledge, legal support and guidance. They supported the project's trained **community-based mediators** (both woman and men) in providing access to legal support at the grassroots level through gender sensitive Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) *.



* ADR covers a wide array of dispute resolution practices in Uganda, that range from mediation by cultural leaders to formal conciliation by courts. It is considered as a peacebuilding mechanism as it allows the search for common ground and reduces the risk of conflict or impaired social relations.



From the perspective of the human rights-based approach (HRBA)

The goal of the HRBA is, on the one hand, to empower **rights holders** - **women in northern Uganda** - to claim their rights and to participate in their own development process. On the other hand, to share the capacities with the **duty bearers** - **local leaders, public authorities** - to respect, protect and fulfil those rights.

The project's key assumption is that once equipped with knowledge and access to adequate spaces and tools, women shall **take action**. The project also worked on reducing structural discrimination by **involving men in community outreaches** (local leaders, male members of families).



7723 women provided with legal support

3538 of which through the digital tools

497 people made use of the ADR mechanism

254 were women

KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ The digital innovation provided a safe space for women to **access information freely**. Women using the digital tools were mainly rural young women (18-35) who had access to mobile phones and were “digitally literate”.
- ▶ Women who had no phone themselves could also access information through the mobile phone of a **trusted** and/or **neutral person** (fellow women, relative... who they can speak to in a safe space). However, this is a one-time contact and they are less or no possibilities for further direct line contact.
- ▶ The tools women used most were the IVR platform, call center and SMS because these are the **simplest** to use, even for illiterate women, and are **free** (the project bears the costs). They can be used on **very basic mobile phones** (10\$) that can only text and make/receive call.
- ▶ The digital tools helped to improve **knowledge of users about their rights** and made the link with community-based mediators who provide a **context adapted justice resolution mechanism**.
- ▶ Information & training sessions (Community outreaches) in small groups (35-50) are important to let **women AND men** learn about the **women's rights** and how to use **digital tools** and **mediation services**. They also allow trained groups to ask questions directly and raise very specific community-based issues.





My husband's relatives attended the training and now they know that I'm aware of their unlawful acts against my family and how to act towards enforcing my rights

Florence Lalam,
34-year-old widow in Arut village

The legal sensitization helped me very much because it opened my mind to legal information. Now, I have continued access to this legal information, via the phone through SMS and phone calls, and they respond to me

Francesca Aryemo,
a twenty-five year old teacher



Through BarefootLaw we also want to contribute to SDG 16, 'Peace, justice and strong institutions'. For us it was a matter of answering the question, "how do we make justice accessible to all?"

Michael Kwizera,
Lewuti project coordinator

More stories about the project ?



LESSONS LEARNED



Inclusion and equity

Digital tools can provide services in diverse languages, allowing to **reach out at large scale to remote communities**. Literacy can still remain an issue, which is why simple language was used and answers were **simplified**.

Stakeholders and users' responsiveness

Community leaders, mostly men, do not feel the need to use the digital tools as their rights are usually not impaired. However, to ensure the **promotion of the tools and ADR**, and to **trigger a change in mentality**, a specific role of support for **leaders share a positive attitude on women's rights** and **less conservative** could have been foreseen in the **information & training sessions** and **overall mobilization of communities**.

Women requested that men were not only informed about the information and training sessions taking place but be part of the sessions in order for them to **learn about the rights of women**, as well as other rights issues. This enabled them to understand the work of the projects and overcome **wrong assumptions and suspicious**.

Use of digital tools beyond project's end

There is a **risk of downturn** in usage of the tools and of the ADR mechanism if no **information & training sessions** are being held. The small scale sessions are expensive as they require more human resources. **Radios can play the role of remote community outreach** but they are more effective as first-step large scale mobilizer.

Community-based mediators can also use the digital tools to get **extra legal information** to support their work. These mediators, as well as the local leaders and communities that are willing to do so, can continue to use the tools after the project ends.

PERSPECTIVES

The approach will be expanded to a **wider area** (more districts) in a four-year program named FATE (**From Access to Equality**), involving **multiple partners**: ASF, BarefootLaw, Penal Reform International and Uganda Women's Network.

In the future can further focus on the **building of strong networks** and **partnerships** of rights protectors and access to justice actors, who can support women in accessing legal information and guidance. These networks would use a **referral mechanism** (digital case referral tool), to leverage the strength of different players in providing legal support.

Digital tools can only be effective when the design and the approach are **context specific**. Integrating simple digital tools and already existing approaches (community outreach and mediation) will **remain a priority to increase awareness** and **behavioural change**.

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