One On One with the Community Paralegals

MEET THE CLASS OF 2012
HRAPF COMMUNITY PARALEGAL TRAINING: THE SECOND INTAKE

FROM COMMUNITY PARALEGAL TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: STORIES OF FOUNDERS OF ORGANISATIONS

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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<tr>
<td>ACCI</td>
<td>Action for Community Change Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCL</td>
<td>Crested Crane Lighters</td>
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<td>EADWA</td>
<td>Empowered At Dusk Women’s Association</td>
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<td>HRAPF</td>
<td>Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum</td>
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<td>IBU</td>
<td>Ice Breakers Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTI</td>
<td>Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender and Intersex persons</td>
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<td>MARPI</td>
<td>Most At Risk Populations Initiative</td>
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<td>SIPD</td>
<td>Support Initiative for People with Congenital Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEU</td>
<td>Trans Equality Uganda</td>
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<td>TITS</td>
<td>Transgender, Intersex and Transsexual Uganda</td>
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<td>TSIU</td>
<td>Trans Support Initiative Uganda</td>
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<td>WONETHA</td>
<td>Women’s Organisation Network for Human Rights Advocacy</td>
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<td>WOPEIN</td>
<td>Women Positive Empowerment Initiative Uganda</td>
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I am delighted to introduce the second issue of the ‘I AM A COMMUNITY PARALEGAL’ magazine. This magazine is for Community Paralegals who have been trained under HRAPF’s Community Paralegal Training Program. The purpose of the magazine is to provide an avenue for Community Paralegals to share their experiences and stories and to publicise their challenges, successes and achievements and to inspire other marginalised persons that they too can make it.

All the Community Paralegals featured in this magazine have been trained under HRAPF’s Community Paralegal Training Programme. This programme was started in 2010 and since then, 125 Community Paralegals have been trained. Of these, 47 focus on LGBTI issues; 30 defend the rights of sex workers; 21 work with women and girls living with HIV/AIDS and 20 on land justice issues. Seven of these trainees are HRAPF staff members.

The first issue of the magazine was the ‘Pioneer edition’ and featured stories from the first batch of paralegals to be trained by HRAPF. This second edition features stories from the second batch of HRAPF-trained paralegals who completed their training in 2012. The magazine provides a record of their work and experiences from the time they had been trained. It also reflects on the effectiveness of the programme itself and the working arrangements between HRAPF and the trained paralegals.

This is the second issue - and it is primarily dedicated to the paralegals trained in 2012. It also however contains the profiles of Community Paralegals who have founded or co-founded their own organisations, and the progress they are making so far. The HRAPF Community Paralegal Training program empowers the trainees to be creative and innovative. It also gives them an opportunity to work for at least a week with HRAPF lawyers and to see how the systems at HRAPF work and also experience the justice system firsthand. Establishing and successfully maintaining their own organisations is one way in which the Community Paralegals have decided to use the knowledge, inspiration and mentorship obtained from the training. HRAPF usually facilitates the registration of such organisations and serves as company secretaries to the young organisations until they pick up or until after a specific period. Therefore, such successful ventures are a sign of the extent to which the training empowers the trainees.

HRAPF defines ‘Community Paralegals’ as ‘persons belonging to one of HRAPF’s targeted communities that have received basic training in law and procedure and therefore possess the basic skills and motivation required to aid their fellow community members in handling legal disputes, and linking them to lawyers when the need arises. Community Paralegals are trained to serve a specific community and to respond to a particular need. In fact, the HRAPF Community Paralegal Training Program was birthed from the overwhelming need for legal aid service provision to members of the LGBTI community from 2009 onwards. In this year, the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was tabled in Parliament and it caused an upsurge in the number of human rights violations suffered by LGBTI persons. HRAPF’s newly opened legal aid clinic could not adequately respond to each and every case. HRAPF therefore decided to look to the communities themselves in order to fill the gap.

The paralegal training curriculum is made up of four modules, covered in four separate sessions. The first three sessions are four-day trainings, and the last one is a five days placement with the HRAPF Legal Aid Clinic. The four trainings are scheduled over a period of nine months to one year to ensure that the trainees put their new skills into practise gradually. The first module covered in the training introduces the legal system in Uganda. The second module covers criminal law and procedure in Uganda while the third module focuses on human rights and civil law processes in Uganda. The fourth module is the one-week placement at HRAPF, where the paralegals are familiarised with courts, police stations and other bodies and offices which they will be frequenting in carrying out their work, as well as with HRAPF itself. Upon completion of the training, trainees are awarded certificates at a formal ceremony and celebration after which they are considered to be qualified as Community Paralegals.

The stringent recruitment process for the Training Programme involves selected partner organisations and the communities HRAPF works with recommending trainees. These recommendations are then considered by HRAPF and a limited number of trainees are admitted to the programme. HRAPF trained Community Paralegals are expected to serve the communities...
who have recommended them in this capacity. They are equipped to provide legal aid; identify and follow up on cases; create awareness on human rights and mobilise communities.

HRAPF continues to support and work with Community Paralegals after they have completed their training. The organisation hosts a quarterly meeting at which the Community Paralegals are given the opportunity to share their experiences with one another, to exchange advice and ideas and report on the cases they are currently handling. HRAPF also facilitates the work of Community Paralegals by reimbursing their transport and telephone costs.

In this second issue of ‘I am a Community Paralegal’, we are proud to provide a platform to our second batch of Community Paralegals as well as to those who have founded and co-founded organisations to share their stories, experiences and wisdom.

HRAPF acknowledges the financial and technical support provided by the American Jewish World Service (AJWS), Hivos and Positive Action for Children Fund over the years. The Community Paralegal Training Program, and the subsequent achievements and victories in the fight for human rights and equality documented in this magazine, would not have been possible without this support. AJWS supported this publication.

HRAPF is also grateful to each of the Community Paralegals who have shared their stories in this magazine. We are delighted to continue our partnership with you and to see the incredible work that each of you are doing in your communities and spheres of influence.

Finally, HRAPF is grateful to the community members, lawyers and staff members who have all contributed to the creation of the second issue of this publication.

We commend the Community Paralegals featured in this magazine for their hard work, dedication, bravery and innovation.

Adrian Jjuuko
Executive Director, HRAPF

HRAPF’s newly opened legal aid clinic could not adequately respond to each and every case. HRAPF therefore decided to look to the communities themselves in order to fill the gap.
HRAPF’s first community paralegal training was conducted in 2011. During this first training, five persons working with different LGBTI groups; two persons from sex worker groups and two HRAPF staff members completed the training. Their stories were well documented in the ‘Pioneer edition’ of this magazine last year.

In 2012, a second batch of nine paralegals were successfully trained. Of these five were from LGBTI groups and two from sex worker groups. The five working with LGBTI groups were: Joel Ssepuya from Spectrum Initiative Uganda; Tom Tumusiime from Rainbow Health Foundation Mbarara; Ibrahim Mawanda from Support Initiative for People with Congenital Disorders (SIPD); Morgan Kanyike from Youth on Rock Foundation (YRF) and Cleo Kambugu from Trans Support Initiative Uganda (TSIU). The ones from the sex worker organisations were: Pamela Aciro from Women’s Organisation Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA) Gulu and Sanyu Hajjarah Batte from Lady Mermaids Bureau (LMB). Clovice Nyakatura who is a HRAPF staff member was also trained with this group as well as one of the organisation’s trustees, Fridah Kewodi.

In the first module of the training, the trainees were introduced to the fundamental legal concepts and terminology, the building blocks of the law in Uganda as well as the court system and different levels of the judiciary. An oversight was also given into the law enforcement system in Uganda with a special emphasis on the Uganda Police Force. As the norm is with the HRAPF paralegal training, the group was prepared for work in the field by visiting Mukono Police Station and giving them the opportunity to interact with police officers. They were also introduced to the concept of a ‘Community Paralegal’ as well as the roles of a Community Paralegal. The first training took place from 20 to 22 June 2012 in Mukono district.

The second training took place from 22 to 24 August 2012. It was focused on criminal law and procedure in Uganda. It covered the offences that LGBTI persons regularly suffer and the basic procedures they have to follow in terms of what to do when they are arrested. They were taught how to apply for police bond and the necessary requirements for bail and were introduced to the trial processes: plea-taking, giving evidence in court, judgements and sentencing and the right to appeal. The trainees were also taken to the Chief Magistrates Court in Mukono to observe court proceedings and interacted with the state attorney, Sam Waira, and other officials from the Directorate of Public Prosecutions. They were able to appreciate the role of the State Attorney in prosecution, especially in sanctioning files.

The third training took place from 30 October to 2 November 2012. The third module is based on the concept of human rights and other civil processes. The trainees were introduced to the concept of human rights. Modes of enforcement of human rights were also discussed as well as the various strategic litigation cases concerning LBGTI rights. Trainees were taken through the various civil actions that they can institute against any violation including employment contracts and specific torts like assault, battery and false imprisonment. Issues relating to marriage and divorce, child custody, adoption and parentage, landlord and tenant relationships and property rights were also discussed. The training also covered practical aspects such as communication, writing, leadership and presentation skills.

The trainings were facilitated by mainly lawyers drawn from HRAPF staff. These were: Adrian Jjuuko; Faridah Ikyiimaana; Veronica Kavunani; Patricia Kimera; Fridah Mutesi, and Francis Tumwesige.

The paralegals were placed at three different organisations that operate legal aid clinics from 12 to 23 November 2012. These organisations were HRAPF, Refugee Law Project and Platform for Labour Action. This placement gave the trainees the opportunity to interact with lawyers, go to court and police to witness proceedings and understand how cases are handled in practice.

A ceremony was held to award certificates to the paralegals who had completed the training on 23 November 2012. Paralegals who had commenced their training in 2011 also received completion certificates at this ceremony. The ceremony had a special guest in Gitta Zomorodi, then a program officer at American Jewish World Service.
HRAPF has so far walked a delightful road with the second batch of Community Paralegals and is grateful for the relationships that have been established between the organisation and the members of this group.

The 2012 paralegals at the combined pass out ceremony for both the first and second group of paralegals on 23 November 2012.

The participants posing for a group photo with Patricia Kimera after the second module of the paralegal training on criminal law and procedure.

Ibrahim Mawanda (centre), one the 2012 paralegals at a quarterly paralegal sharing session at HRAPF held in 2016. Paralegals who have completed the training programme in 2012 continue their collaboration and engagement with HRAPF.

The 2012 paralegals at the combined pass out ceremony for both the first and second group of paralegals on 23 November 2012.
Mr. Adrian Jjuuko facilitating during the paralegal training.

Morgan Kanyike and Ibrahim Mawanda attending one of the refresher courses in 2017.

A consultative meeting to enhance access to justice for the intersex community hosted by Ibrahim Mawanda and Tom Tumwiine trained paralegals from SIPD.

Some of the second batch of Community Paralegals attending a quarterly sharing sessions.

A community member sharing practical pointers with trainees during the 2012 training.

Morgan Kanyike congratulating Community Paralegals on their successful completion of the training programme at a ceremony held on 22 June 2018.
PART II

MEET THE CLASS OF 2012

Hajjara is the Executive Director of Lady Mermaids Bureau, an organisation which advocates for the rights of LGBTI persons and sex workers.

She describes herself as a mother, feminist, sex worker activist and a human rights defender. She works to promote, protect and advocate for the human rights and dignity of sex workers and other key and priority populations and to challenge brutality, oppression and injustice. She also represents Key and Priority Populations on the Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanism.

Being trained as a Community Paralegal enhanced her capacity and knowledge about the laws and their enforcement procedures and has made her far more effective in her human rights advocacy efforts. She says it was one of the best experiences of her life which gave her confidence to work with the technicalities and language of the law and to administer paralegal assistance to victims of human rights violations. She has gained the ability to monitor, report and document human rights violations and abuses of sex workers and to offer legal aid services to survivors of human rights abuses by securing police bonds and processing production warrants. She also uses her knowledge and experience to train senior police officers and other third parties on issues concerning sex workers and other Key Populations. Her passion is driven by the visible impact of her work in her community.

Tom is the Director of Victor’s Initiative Foundation Mbarara. The organisation works with the LGBTI community in South and Western Uganda. Tom was working for Rainbow Health Foundation when he joined the Paralegal Training Programme in 2012. Tom has become involved in human rights work because he likes to help people who share his goals. As a human rights defender, he decided to undertake the HRAPF Paralegal Training because he needed knowledge on how the law works and which human rights are protected in the national and international context. He says that he could not continue his work within the community without legal knowledge. Tom explains that he experienced human rights violations himself before joining the programme and there was no one who could intervene for him immediately. He had no choice but to do what he could to obtain legal knowledge. He says that the paralegal trainings were not all easy for him; he says that the legal terminology was daunting for him to take in. He says that he would have liked the training to have taken place over a longer period of time rather than being condensed into three weeks. When Tom is not working, he likes to spend time in quiet places such as gardens and the riverside.
Ibrahim is a human rights activist, social worker, documentations officer and Community Paralegal. He is an extrovert and passionate about social work and helping vulnerable children and other people to make positive changes in their lives. Ibrahim was working with Support Initiative for People with Congenital Disorders (SIPD) when he joined the Paralegal Training Programme in 2012. He still works for them as a documentation officer. Ibrahim enjoys working with SIPD because it enables him to advocate for the rights of intersex children and adults in Uganda and the whole of East Africa. Ibrahim says that he gained various personal and professional skills during the course of the paralegal training. He says that he feels better equipped to provide counselling to intersex persons since his communication skills and confidence had improved. He is also able to provide legal services to clients such as securing bond and making referrals.

Ibrahim is grateful to HRAPF for making this opportunity available to him as well as to SIPD for selecting him to be trained.

CLEO KAMBUGU

Cleo is a 32 year-old Ugandan transgender activist, with an honours BSc. in Agriculture and currently reading towards an MSc. in Molecular Biology and Biotechnology from Makerere University. Her activism revolves around her work as a social anthropologist and researcher for the transgender community in Uganda.

Cleo worked as a Programme Officer for grant-making, fundraising and research at Trans Support Initiative Uganda (TSIU) at the time when she joined the Paralegal Training Programme in 2012. She is now in charge of grant making at the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI-EASHRI).

In her bid to raise awareness about the need for comprehensive trans-specific health for the trans community in East Africa, Cleo did a documentary on transgender people called ‘The Pearl of Africa’ in which she featured as the main subject. The documentary won the PPFA Maggie Award for Media Excellence in Global Journalism 2015. It premiered in the Hot Docs Film festival and has since then moved on to feature in different film festivals including IDFA, One World Film Festival, Peace and Love Film Festival, International Queer Immigrants Festival, Afrikamera, Encounters Film Festival, Out Fest and BAFA. She is currently working on an autobiography based on her documentary.

Cleo continues to lend a hand to regional, continental and global processes to raise awareness about and support for the trans community and people. She facilitated conversations that led to the formation of the International Trans Fund and is currently doing the same with ISDAO - the West African Fund. She sits on Astraea Lesbian Foundation’s International Activist Advisory Board, Transgender Europe’s Trans Murder Monitoring and Trans Violence Tracking Advisory Committee and
At the time I joined the paralegal training, I was working as a program officer for a trans-led organization called Trans Support Initiative Uganda (TSIU). This organisation was working with transgender individuals in Uganda around building equity and attaining social justice. At the time, every time the Anti-Homosexuality Act was even mentioned, it meant insecurity for transgender people. Because of the way transgender people express their gender and how they are perceived, they are targeted as stereotypical gay persons. Most trans persons in Uganda do not have access to hormonal replacement therapy or surgery, which causes them to stand out and become easy targets for harassment and discrimination. They are targeted by their parents, society, church, everyone. We were working to develop a security plan as an organisation to be able to respond to community security needs. One of the things that was needed was a rapid response unit and one of the capacity gaps that we had identified was the lack of paralegal skills in being able to provide immediate legal aid to individuals when a need arose. It was timely for TSIU, as an organisation working with a community that faces the most risks, to be invited to participate in HRAPF’s second paralegal training.

The HRAPF Paralegal Training was unlike any other training I have attended. I have previously attended trainings where it was attempted to impart technical skills in a very short period of time and it was not very successful. You need more than two days to teach paralegal skills to community members who have no prior understanding or even appreciation of the usefulness of such paralegal skills. This was an intense training and it was divided into modules and spread over a number of months. I liked the idea of imparting knowledge and then giving the recipients some time to deal with that information and have opportunity for follow-up and feedback.

At the beginning of every training, and at the end of every training there was an evaluation of your knowledge and attitude. I liked the focus on individual appreciation of the topic, beyond mere understanding. HRAPF took into account that we came from different places in terms of appreciating and engaging with the law. At the end of the training, we had an opportunity to intern at a human rights organisation. I was placed at Refugee Law Project and could put into practice what I had learned with the refugee community in Uganda. We also had field visits to particular police stations and magistrates courts. The police visits were important because, as Trans people we stigmatise the police and also fear them. Interacting with the police and seeing how they work helped to break some of that stigma and to realise that a good relationship with police is actually possible.

Law can be heavy, especially for someone who does not have a background in it. I like that HRAPF broke the training up into several different smaller trainings that were spread over a period of time, during which people get to deal with whatever they have learnt and also implement it.

Something about the training that is never really evaluated but so important is the relationships that are built. Even though I changed jobs and moved out of Uganda, I still maintain very close contact with my faculty that we worked with in terms of them being very approachable when I have a situation. I was also able to build long-term relationships with the other activists in my cohort. It is an inherent component and outcome of the project.

As far as my career progress after the training is concerned, it allowed me to build a solid background in terms of understanding the law as a programs officer and particularly working on Trans health and security. I was able to inform the programming of TSIU particularly during a period when the Anti-Homosexuality Act was being discussed on the floor of Parliament. The Committee that TSIU served was able to benefit from my knowledge in terms of managing our security program through rapid response. After I left TSIU and joined the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI-EASHRI) which is an indigenous activist fund for sex workers and sexual minorities. I started in the grant-making and capacity-building division and that meant that my own appreciation of security, the law and how they are integrated with organizing translated to UHAI’s grant-making and capacity-support.

As the head of grant-making, these skills are very important. The Community Paralegal Training allowed me to gain a better understanding of legal aid. While Uganda and Kenya have been able to build legal aid structures
I am a community PARALEGAL | June 2018

I became **the first woman to officially change their name and gender in Uganda.** It had never been done before.

At community level to be able to respond to security threats that come around elections and different things, this is not the case for all countries in East Africa. I am able to make better-informed decisions about the establishment of these legal aid structures in countries like Burundi and Tanzania where there has been a huge pushback from society and the government. Right now Burundi is thinking of establishing a security response committee and key to that is creating a paralegal system to respond to cases and document violations. HRAPF’s Paralegal Training Programme is able to reach unanticipated geographical areas.

HRAPF has a rigorous selection process, deliberately designed to attract individuals whose work in a particular organisation would translate into a trickle-down effect. In my case, the trickle-down effect has been way beyond what HRAPF had anticipated. Back then, I was a programs person who formed the programming of a transgender organization. My legal knowledge would inform Uganda’s security response around transgender issues as well as legal aid service provision to this community. At the time, we were the only trans-led organisation so that meant that whatever impact HRAPF made through the Paralegal Training Programme was for the whole Trans community in Uganda.

I believe in the agency of community to be able to create the change that they need and I believe in statutory processes. People shouldn’t just be in the room, they should be at the table and when they speak, they should speak to be heard and not to be silenced. That’s my belief. That’s something I hold very close to myself. In the past, I’ve used different forms of advocacy, particularly film, not as an alternative, but as a key tool for advocacy because there is power to pictures that goes beyond numbers and statistics. This is my own form of activism as a person that I engage in.

I also believe in the power of language and the power of words in order to inform change.

Through this journey, my working relationship with HRAPF has been excellent, both personally and professionally. I worked with HRAPF when I was with TSIU and I’m currently working with HRAPF as a grantee. HRAPF played a very pivotal role in facilitating the process of changing my name and gender on my passport. I became the first person to officially change their name and gender in Uganda. It had never been done before. I also had a security incident where HRAPF was able to respond really fast and they were able to secure security for me. I’ve worked with HRAPF as an activist and as a donor and every time I’m asked about what model works and what community legal aid should look like, especially for other East African countries, I always recite HRAPF as the ideal model.
PAMELA ACIRO

IN HER OWN WORDS:

She says the following about the training:

At the time that I was trained as a Community Paralegal I was working with Women’s Organisation Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA). WONETHA wanted to train one paralegal from each of the districts that they were working in and I was selected for Gulu.

I gained much legal knowledge from the training. I am now able to act as a surety and witness in court for my community members and can also participate actively in the activities of the local council courts in my parish. I know how to secure police bond for community members in need and work hard to make sure they are released before they are taken to court. The majority of cases I deal with are cases of harassment by the police and misunderstandings between sex workers and their customers in the brothels. Sometimes conflicts arise within the sex worker community itself.

As a paralegal is it my role to stop stigma, teach community members to accept one another and build relationships with the police so that they are on our side when it comes to releasing sex workers who were arrested. The fact that I know the law differentiates me from other sex workers. I am in a position to help other sex workers because of what I know.

The greatest challenge I face as a paralegal is working with the community who sometimes do not want to accept you and would even ask who has employed you. As a paralegal, you also face greater risk when you get arrested because the police know you and ask you for money. They know you are a sex worker and also as a person working with sex workers and so you must have money.

I am grateful to HRAPF for enabling me to have this opportunity and I enjoyed working with the organisation. I have learned so many new things and hope that HRAPF would extend its services to Gulu.

Pamela is a Community Paralegal based in Gulu. She became involved in human rights work after facing stigma and difficulty in accessing services and exercising her rights and freedoms as a sex worker. She is passionate about helping her community to enforce their human rights. She is also a mother and enjoys cooking.

PAMELA became involved in human rights work after facing stigma and difficulty in accessing services and exercising her rights and freedoms as a sex worker.
IN HIS OWN WORDS:

I was selected by my organisation to take part in HRAPF's paralegal training in 2012. I decided to undergo the training because I knew it would empower our organisation to deal with arrests, prosecution and fights between family members. I wanted to know where to start if one of our members are arrested.

The training has been useful to me at a professional level and has made me more effective within the community. I have gained confidence and I am now able to argue with policy-makers and law enforcers. I can now confidently argue with police and stand up for rights because I am comfortable with legal terminology and I know my rights. I have gained knowledge on processing documents when someone has been detained, how sureties are identified, how to process bail and bond and what the difference is between the two. I also have gained some knowledge about the international human rights instruments that Uganda is party to. I have subsequently stood surety to so many people in the community.

The training has also improved my advocacy skills. I was able, for example, to engage in advocacy on the HIV Prevention and Control Bill by contesting the provision requiring of health workers to disclose their patients’ HIV status on the basis of the Constitution. I consider it an achievement that I now know how to document cases. It is a very important skill in order to keep track of cases and to be transparent and accountable to donors. I also share what I have learned with community members at large. It has helped me to further my studies in humanitarian leadership as the course contains a legal component. My community regularly invites me to train them in practical areas, such as what to do when someone is arrested and at what point the case would have to be referred.

I have handled many cases since my training. Last year I was invited by the UNCHR to assess cases of Ugandans applying for refugee status on the basis of their sexual orientation.

I am a co-founder of Youth on Rock Foundation. Our organisation is focused on health and economic empowerment of LGBT people. We also document violations and carry out research on community level on things that affect Men who have Sex
with Men (MSM) such as arrests, family denial, lack of employment and forced evictions. We realised that there was an urgent need for health interventions after one of our members fell very ill and died under terrible circumstances. We decided that there was need to start up an HIV club for MSM. After making a documentary with BBC called ‘The worst place in the world to be gay’, the club was turned into an organisation. We started connecting LGBT people with friendly healthcare services. We started negotiating with MARPI Mulago to extend their services to sexual minorities. We also started saving clubs and a performing arts club for our members. We performed on a weekly basis at Teak Hotel and invited a variety of guests. Unfortunately the success of the performing arts club caused jealousy and conflict within the LGBT community and it was discontinued. Considering my work with YRF, the paralegal training helped me to know how to handle security; how to handle traumatising situations and to help members to come out of challenging situations.

One of the challenges I face as a paralegal is facilitation. Paralegals cannot do their work well and passionately on an empty stomach. You can be detained and become a security risk yourself due to the work you are doing. We are exposed in a way because we leave our contact details at the police station when we intervene in cases. Another challenge is that community members are not as careful as they could be concerning their own safety because they know that there are paralegals available to help them if they are arrested. Community members also tend to believe that paralegals and organisations like ours have lots of money and this causes conflict.

I have a good experience of working with HRAPF. I think it will be good if the organisation keeps in contact with the paralegals on a more regular basis. Laws and policies are generated and changed all the time; paralegals need to be updated on these developments in the law. Refresher courses are definitely needed. I was pleased to learn that HRAPF is now providing the opportunity to trained paralegals to obtain a Diploma in Law from the Law Development Centre.
HRAPF is committed to sharing our knowledge, resources and experience to support organisations which focus on particular areas of minority rights activism and which are able to serve communities that are beyond HRAPF’s reach. HRAPF is furthermore committed to fostering and supporting talent and passion in the members of the communities that we work with. It is therefore a great source of pride to consider the many organisations which have been founded by Community Paralegals subsequent to their training. Community Paralegals are often in a position where they come face-to-face with a specific and pervasive need within their own communities. These Community Paralegals take it upon themselves to find a way to address these needs. From the interviews conducted with this group, it appears that the training would often simply provide a passionate, talented, creative individual with an extra boost of confidence to take the leap and start up their own organisation. This section of the magazine features stories on and by six community paralegals who have founded or co-founded organisations. These organisations facilitate access to healthcare facilities for marginalised groups; engage in human rights activism for and with sex workers and members of the LGBTI community; facilitate economic empowerment; offer counselling services and employ the creative arts to raise awareness on transgender rights to name but a few.

In the articles in this section, paralegals who are founders and co-founders of organisations tell us about their organisations, their paralegal training experience and their views of the role and importance of paralegals in the struggle for the equal protection and recognition of rights of sexual minorities.

Transgender rights, law and the role of community paralegals: A shared experience

By Hajjati Abdul Jamal Uthuman, founder and Executive Director, Rainbow Mirrors

I have been an active member of the LGBTI community for a number of years. I have participated in HRAPF activities before and have been instrumental in sensitising and supporting other community members.

I was trained as community paralegal by HRAPF in the year 2015.

As a culmination of my years of work, dedication, passion and commitment to the rights of LGBTI persons and transgender people in particular, I started an organisation called Rainbow Mirrors Uganda in 2015. It got legally registered in 2016. I am the Executive Director. The organisation is already off to a good start. The reason I am so passionate about my work is because I have always had great passion for human rights and since I started engaging with HRAPF in 2015, I developed an appreciation for the work that they do. I always wanted to be part of the work and to contribute meaningfully towards transgender rights activism and also help colleagues who get in conflict with the law. That is why when Shawn Mugisha contacted me and told me about this opportunity...
to be trained as a paralegal by HRAPF, I was excited to take up the challenge and utilise the opportunity.

My experience as a paralegal trainee was challenging but interesting as I made good friends, shared my personal experience and became more vibrant as regards to human rights issues. I also acknowledge the boost in self-confidence and managerial skills that the training equipped me with. Having the legal knowledge about human rights enabled me to understand Uganda’s legal framework. I am much appreciated within the community we serve and the organisation I head has also gained recognition because of the experience I received from the paralegal training which has contributed very positively to the way the organisation is run and managed. In the course of my work, I have handled a number of cases. The most common cases I have to deal with are cases of blackmail. I sensitise community members and also counsel them. Ugandans insist on thinking that LGBTI people have a lot of money and that their lifestyles are funded by donors. They therefore target them a lot for extortion. Transgender people however suffer the most because they have become the public face of the LGBTI community in Uganda. Sometimes, the threat actually comes from within the community itself.

There is a case I handled involving a couple. One partner demanded money from the other and threatened to expose their relationship unless the other party paid him off. In another case, I assisted an LGBTI client to relocate within the outskirts of Kampala when their identity was compromised and they were being threatened, with some people trying to extort money from them. I have also helped a number of clients to draft Memoranda and Articles of Association for company registration and employment contracts among other issues. My strong point is in negotiation and communication. Nearly all the cases I handle, especially those featuring only members of the community, get settled in my office. I am a good negotiator and I manage most of the time to secure peaceful and amicable settlements of my clients’ issues without having to resort to police or other law enforcement mechanisms. I do not like reporting cases to police, especially when there are two community members involved.

My best experience as a trainee was the court visit to Mukono Chief Magistrate’s Court. It enabled me to relate to the processes that had been discussed during the training. Through this training, I also met lawyers, and I enjoyed interacting with each of them especially meeting and being taught by Adrian Jjuuko whom I had initially only heard about but never met before. This training for me was the beginning of life. To put it simply, from there on, I was able to know how I identify. Initially, I was not familiar with the term transgender but after the training and the constant engagements with other paralegals and HRAPF, I was able to recognise and appreciate who I am. The training was also an eye opener for me, since it made me more aware of the challenges I was about to face as a transgender woman who was deeply invested in being at the frontline fighting for their recognition. The training gave birth to a new vibrant transgender woman able to deliberate on issues of transgender women and LGBTI persons at large. It improved my networking skills, proposal writing and ability to engage potential funders for projects that involve transgender women. Lastly, and most importantly, this training bred the idea of registering an organisation, which I actually did. With the knowledge I had acquired from the training, I was able to start the process of registering an organisation and HRAPF supported the idea. They actually facilitated the registration of the organisation.

My idea for starting up the organisation actually started by looking at HRAPF. Looking at the legislative framework and the economic status and living conditions of transgender people. It is very hard for transgender persons to get employment in Uganda. My parents had land which could assist us in starting up Rainbow Mirrors farm. I wanted to change the stereotype of transgender people not wanting to work. Every year we choose 10 members and we give each of them a part of the land. After two harvests, we see how we can help them to start up something from the profit they have made and saved through our savings scheme. Some of our members are farming with pigs and chickens. We have had seven harvests so far.

I was also looking at the artistic part of it. It came to my knowledge that transgender women are talented and that our performances captivate audiences. It came to my mind that we can use our talent and artistic development to influence policy and educate. We started up the Rainbow Mirrors Annual Festival event that looks at encouraging amateur and professional transgender sex workers. We bring out social issues in the performing arts: in a dance, in a skit, in a side performance play. We have had two events so far and have attracted high level individuals, including policy makers and government officials.

Our mission is to promote, protect and advance young transwomen’s human rights through fostering leadership, personal economic and professional growth. That is through collaborations, capacity development and inclusion in all spheres and the visual arts. Rainbow Mirrors works with youth ranging from the age of 18-27 years. Our goal is to sustain, support and enable young transwomen sex workers create programs and influence policies in areas of gender, sexuality, health education, arts and governance.

I believe the Paralegal Training is one of the most successful programmes among the LGBTI persons and I hope that HRAPF continues to train more people. I would however advise that there should be more engagement and follow-up with paralegals who have started organisations to make sure they comply with legal obligations.
The role of the paralegal training in my journey

By Lillian Namiiro, co-founder and Executive Director Women Positive Empowerment Initiative Uganda (WOPEIN)

I am a single mother of two and a sex worker leader living and working in Kampala. I am still searching for a stable and understanding partner to share my life with. I was trained as a Community Paralegal in 2013 and have since been instrumental in handling cases of arrests of sex workers in my community. I have become part of a vibrant network of paralegals working with the marginalised communities in Uganda.

I first learnt about HRAPF’s paralegal training programme when working with Crested Crane Lighters, an organisation that campaigns for the rights of sexual minorities. My Executive Director recommended me for the training and I accepted. I was motivated to become a paralegal because I really wanted to know my rights as a woman and a citizen of Uganda. I have always wanted to be able to advocate for the rights of my fellow sex workers as a marginalised group because they suffer many violations. I wanted to learn how I can defend them and help to get them out of trouble with the police.

From the training, I acquired interview skills and communication skills. I also learnt the laws that affect sex workers so that I can teach my fellow sex workers about the law and about their rights. I also learnt how to deal with cases at the police. With all these skills, I can now comfortably deal with the police when they arrest my colleagues. I am also able to interview my colleagues when they have disputes and can intervene in their issues so that we can find a solution together. I am also able to intervene at police for cases of assault.

After the training, I was involved in founding Women Positive Empowerment Initiative Uganda (WOPEIN) in 2014. The five of us were working with the sex worker community and realised that HIV positive sex workers were not getting access to advice and psychosocial support in a medical environment. The organisation has two components: one focusing on transwomen and one on sex workers. The organisation does advocacy in the legal and health sphere. We do referrals of clients, distribution of condoms and lubricants, public education, legal support, outreaches and nutrition support. We have meetings with our members and inform them about their health rights. We also help our clients to obtain bail and bond and refer them to health centres.

The Paralegal Training was useful to me as it is where I gained the knowledge to start my organisation and became more equipped to help my community members who did not know about their rights. I would like one of my staff members at WOPEIN to be trained as a paralegal.

I have faced quite a number of challenges in doing paralegal work, the biggest of which are facilitation and time. I have a lot of work to do because I must find a way to sustain my children, and yet I do not get paid for doing paralegal work. I have to find a way to balance my time so that I can do my work as a paralegal and still work to earn a living. Sometimes HRAPF gives me some money for facilitation when I take them a report of a case I handled but this takes a lot of time so in the meantime I have to use my own money. I also have a problem with lack of coordination with the HRAPF lawyers. When I come across a case I cannot handle, I try to get in touch with a HRAPF’s lawyers. However when they do not answer or when they promise to call back and then forget to do so, it becomes really frustrating. Sometimes I just need advice but I am unable to reach the lawyers. It is also frustrating when sometimes the lawyers are rude to me. They do not always show us respect as paralegals, yet they say we are their contact with the community.
The story of my paralegal experience begins just after the end of my training for community paralegals working with LGBTI and sex worker communities offered by HRAPF. The training exposed me to the reality that marginalised groups like the LGBTI community in Uganda face, most notably the difficulty in enjoying their inherent human rights like any other Ugandan. After my paralegal training, I was formally employed by HRAPF as a community paralegal, with the responsibility of responding to cases reported by other paralegals and peer educators in the field. I had the opportunity to interface with a number of different paralegals and community persons both in my capacity as a paralegal and as a member of the HRAPF staff, and I have learnt that community paralegals play a very crucial role in the justice system and should be recognised as such.

The paralegal training illustrated the impact community-members trained in basic law, mediation and advocacy can have on the lives of marginalised groups in Uganda and the world over. My experiences before and after training have shaped me to understand the realities in which marginalised individuals live and work, and more often than not struggle to survive. The training equipped me with the necessary motivation, attitude and skills to help communities solve basic legal problems by linking them to lawyers. During the training, we were equipped with communication and negotiation skills, taught the law and its enforcement in Uganda, the courts, police and other relevant institutions in the justice system and most importantly the enforcement of human rights within the Ugandan justice system.

The Kampala Declaration on Community Paralegals, 2012 stresses, it is imperative for governments to recognise the role community paralegals play in the justice system. The government ought to commit to the development of policy and legislation regarding paralegals. The government of Uganda and development partners should invest in the scale-up of community paralegal efforts. Paralegals should not be limited to capital cities or a handful of districts--all citizens deserve access to primary justice services. It is however very important for state recognition not to entail state control. Government should respect the independence of community paralegals, so as not to hinder the crucial role they play. It has been more than fifty years since Africans began achieving independence from colonialism with calls for freedom, development, and social justice. The struggle to realise those dreams is far from over. Community paralegals can help carry it forward.

That said, my experience after the training has taught me the need for paralegals to share methods and approaches used to address the challenges that marginalised communities go through in striving to access justice. This will help strengthen the grassroots movement to help bring justice to those who live outside the protection of the law. In that regard, legal aid service providers should continue to develop creative, flexible models to advance justice - models that combine education, mediation, organisation, and advocacy - and all in a way that responds to the social and economic challenges of marginalised groups in Uganda.
I was motivated to start an organisation because I have experienced sexual violence and harassment by the police and community members and so have my colleagues. I teamed up with other sex workers so that we could advocate for the rights of sex workers at large. Before, we could not access justice when our rights were being violated. The vision of the organisation is a society where female sex workers are treated justly with respect and dignity. Our mission is to promote and advocate for equal rights and equitable opportunities for all sex workers in social, political, economic, sexual and reproductive services.

The objectives of the organisation is to advocate for a conducive policy and legislative environment for sex workers in Uganda; to promote health and reproductive rights and services for sex workers and to provide income generating initiatives. The organisation has been in existence for 10 years and it has 5 employees and 4 volunteers.

The difference that the organisation has made in our community is that sex workers now know their rights and know where to go if their rights have been violated. They also know more about the law because as an organisation we have been carrying out awareness sessions on the law, community group meetings and community dialogues among key populations.
HRAPF has really done a tremendous job as far as facilitating the process of access to justice for affected marginalised groups is concerned. HRAPF has helped in building the capacity of different organisations through facilitating awareness sessions which are conducted by the paralegals themselves. The organisation has also presented refresher courses on the new laws and policies so we get to know which ones are affecting us. It has also helped in recommending some of our organizations for funding.

One of the challenges that I face as a paralegal is raising funds for transport. Sometimes a case has to be followed up over three days and it is difficult to meet that need.

The vision of the organisation is a society where female sex workers are treated justly with respect and dignity.

Our mission is to promote and advocate for equal rights and equitable opportunities for all sex workers in social, political, economic, sexual and reproductive services.
The challenge of being transgender in Uganda:
How the Paralegal Training changed me

An interview with Emmalia Atwiine

Emmalia Atwiine is a transgender woman and a social worker working with the Transgender Network Uganda and the Action for Community Change Initiative.

IACPM: Thank you so much for talking to us.

EMMALIA: Thank you. I am glad to talk to you.

IACPM: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

EMMALIA: Well, I am 24 years old. I am a trans-woman and a social worker. I am currently working with Transgender Network Uganda and Action for Community Change Initiative. I really love cooking and reading. Learning new things, especially about different places is my greatest pleasure.

IACPM: What caused this excitement? Why were you motivated to take up the opportunity?

EMMALIA: When the people from HRAPF came to see my ED, we discussed a lot of issues about the paralegal project. They told us what they would be teaching, how we would benefit from the program and the work we would be able to do after that. I am a transgender woman. Surely you can see why I was so interested in how to legally protect myself and other transgender persons at the time. The situation back then was pretty terrible. It was an opportunity for me to learn how the law affects others of my kind, and how we could work around and with the law to advance our rights and access justice.

IACPM: Tell us a little about your experience as a trainee.

EMMALIA: I was trained in 2015. At that time, I was working with Transgender Equality Uganda. Some people came from HRAPF to have a meeting with the Executive Director (ED) and four staff members about the paralegal project and the trainings. This was my first time to hear of it. After the meeting, the ED recommended me to HRAPF as a paralegal trainee and I received the letter inviting me to HRAPF. As you can imagine, I was very happy to receive that letter.

IACPM: What caused this excitement? Why were you motivated to take up the opportunity?
IACPM: Which topic interested you the most?

EMMALIA: I was very shocked that there are no special rights for transgender people and LGBTI people. I thought there would be some kind of special status for them, like for women and children. It was a real revelation for me. It was also interesting for me to learn that there are special sections in the law that restrict the existence of LGBTI persons. I had never considered that the law affects me like that in Uganda. However, the most interesting thing by far was learning that I could change my name. I had wanted to change my name for a while but did not know how to go about it.

IACPM: We understand that you were part of a team that set up a new organization. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

EMMALIA: Action for Community Change Initiative was founded in 2017 and I supported its establishment. It is a transgender and sex worker-led organisation. It works with youth; those who are injecting drugs and those who have been rejected by their family members. We work in Kampala and Wakiso. I had the confidence to take on the responsibility of drafting the constitution and MOUs with the organisations we work with because I have been trained as a paralegal. I could also know that we should start a Community-based Organisation. There are a number of other organisations that wants me to intervene in their work, especially the legal part.

IACPM: Which services and support does ACCI provide?

EMMALIA: ACCI works with people who have been traumatised. It currently has a staff of four members and we counsel people. We form psychosocial support groups, do follow-ups and referrals of our clients. We also get help from service providers. We do night-time outreaches, so-called ‘moonlight’ outreaches since most of our clients are sex workers and they fear moving during the day. We provide them with condoms, lubricants and health services.

IACPM: Since the training, what have you learnt? What are your views about the training and the paralegal program in general?

EMMALIA: HRAPF has to train more bisexual people and lesbians. There are so few paralegals who identify as lesbian or bisexual, yet there is a big community of such people that we must reach out to. The training itself is also short. Three days is so little time to cover the entire module. Sometimes I feel like the facilitators rush through some topics because the time is short, yet we need some good time to understand these complicated legal concepts. I think the training should be like a week to give us time to understand better.

IACPM: Any last words?

EMMALIA: I am very grateful to the donors who support HRAPF to enable them train us and continuously engage us. But I seriously wish that the sharing sessions would be held monthly. A quarter is a really long time in my opinion.

Benard Ssembatya is the Team Leader of Vijana na Children’s Foundation Uganda (VINACEF).

IACPM: How would you describe yourself? Who is Benard Ssembatya?

BENARD: I am Ugandan male in my thirties. I have a degree in Social Sciences as well as a diploma in Development Studies. I am a creative, result-orientated, self-motivated person. I have the capacity to handle multiple tasks with minimal supervision; I have strong interpersonal skills; I am also very willing to learn and to share the knowledge that I have with others.
IACPM: How did you become involved in human rights work?

BENARD: Growing up I saw that community members who are LGBTI were affected through blackmail and arrest. Many people I know have suffered discrimination and have been removed from their leadership positions in church. I have suffered as an LGBTI person myself, my family has rejected me and has forced me to leave the family home. I believe that everyone’s rights are important regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. That is why I advocate for the rights of minorities.

IACPM: Tell us about your paralegal training experience. Why did you decide to join the training programme and how did you find it?

BENARD: I was motivated to join the HRAPF paralegal programme to acquire at least basic legal and human rights knowledge and skills. I started my paralegal training in May 2016 and finished in May 2017. This came at a right time where I was always struggling to support the vulnerable communities and see them arrested and blackmailed with limited access to any form of legal representation. The programme certainly did equip me with the knowledge I wanted to have and have strengthened my ability to advocate for vulnerable communities who are affected by punitive laws and policies.

IACPM: What have you gained from paralegal training in a professional and personal sense?

BENARD: I have learnt to do things for myself in a manner that I was not able to do before. I deal with contracts, negotiate around cases, bail out most of the affected community members LGBTIs and sex workers and know how to solve such cases and when to refer them to lawyers. I have gained confidence and knowledge. I am confident to approach large donors such as UNAIDS and the Elton John AIDS Foundation to get funding for my organisation. In terms of setting up an organisation, the training has equipped me to be able to draft memoranda of understanding and to negotiate terms of reference.

IACPM: What are the future prospects of VINACEF and projects that you are looking forward to?

BENARD: We are continuing our work in improving access to health services in a free and fair environment. We are also working in a coalition with sex workers and it’s called Youth Coalition Affairs, its work is to build capacity and strengthen advocacy in health organizations. We have submitted a proposal on menstrual hygiene management to see if lesbians and sex workers have sufficient knowledge in this area.

IACPM: How would you describe your working relationship with HRAPF?

BENARD: HRAPF has been a father. That is where I go and get guidance on how I am supposed to run things and do advocacy. They have been there for me, up to the point of supporting me in a family meeting where my family wanted to evict me and move me out of the family. They have also helped to relocate me.

I have learnt to do things for myself...
When I joined HRAPF, I did not know much about the paralegal program. I just thought we as the lawyers would do all the legal aid service provision that needed to be done. The paralegal program was a very pleasant surprise when I heard of it, because of how much easier it made work for the lawyers.

The first time I was called on to train paralegals was in 2015. I facilitated on both criminal and civil aspects of the law. I realised how keen the paralegals were on learning the practical aspects of the law and I found this very interesting. They were even more interested than law students. In fact, all the trainings I have facilitated at since then have just reinforced this belief. The people that we train are so keen and eager to learn and this is a good thing because learning the law and how it works can actually be complicated if one is not interested.

When we train paralegals, what we are looking at is that paralegals should be able to handle cases. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that most paralegals do more of referring than handling the cases, which in my opinion defeats the entire purpose. I feel that maybe they are not so confident in their own knowledge and abilities and this is sad because we try to teach them all that they need to learn.

We also give them a number of publications when we train them. I wish that they would read these publications and boost their own knowledge further, because teaching can only go so far. I want to encourage paralegals to read, and to be confident. Your training has empowered you to do this work. There is no need to refer every single case that comes your way. Handle as many of them as you can and refer only those that are complicated so that the programme can better achieve its purpose.

I find this program very well-structured and quite innovative. If it were to work well, I would be very confident that it would produce competent individuals to bring justice closer to the marginalised communities. However, I firmly believe that we should focus more on evaluation. There are so many people who attend these trainings and yet learn very little from there. If we are looking for people who will help their peers, then we must test them to be sure that they have learnt and they have the competence to handle these cases.

We could have evaluation tests and then pass out only those who are competent to work. Others are competent enough but they lack the confidence needed to do this work. All this means that we have to run around all the time and follow up every single case ourselves, yet as lawyers at HRAPF we are spread rather thin.

Perhaps the selection process could also be made more competitive, so as to get the people that we need because I know a number of people who have attended the trainings because they wanted to learn, but not necessarily handle cases. This is not the reason for
the paralegal training. We train paralegals to help their peers. Any other reason for taking part in the training is subsidiary.

This programme should be more closely monitored, for instance we could check on the paralegals by phone ever so often to know how they are doing because in my opinion, the quarterly sharing sessions are too few and far between.

As a trainer, my best advice to all paralegals is the same advice that legal practitioners keep getting: read. Read as much about the law as you can. Even lawyers have to continually supplement their legal knowledge through continuing legal education. I feel that they only lack confidence and this confidence can only be gained through knowledge. Read the publications we give you. Internalise them. If you need more, come by the office and pick them up. Learn as much as you can to so that you can be able to serve the community better.

Otherwise, I would add my voice to the other lawyers at HRAPF and thank you heartily for the work done. The paralegals have truly made a difference in the lives of a number of people and this is a great thing. To all the paralegals out there, bravo.

Read the publications we give you. Internalise them. If you need more, come by the office and pick them up. Learn as much as you can to so that you can be able to serve the community better.
A Magazine for Community Paralegals Working with Marginalised Communities in Uganda

The making of the community paralegal: Experiences and expectations

Francis Tumwesige Ateenyi

Francis is a partner with Cristal Advocates and a former Legal Officer at HRAPF. He participated in the training of the first and second cohorts of the HRAPF paralegals between 2011 and 2013 and has over eight years of experience working with and advising paralegals on access to justice and human rights.

The Constitution of Uganda 1995 (as amended) was designed to promote access to justice by all persons, safeguard equality of all persons before and under the law and facilitate expeditious settlement of disputes and grievances. Whereas both the Constitution and enabling legislation and policies put in place formal institutions to realise these noble aspirations, including courts of law, the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Uganda Police Force (UPF) and the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) among others, the common man’s access to such institutions remains impeded by numerous obstacles. These obstacles range from ignorance of the law and procedures, geographical distance to the nearest relevant contact office as well as economic hardships and social vulnerability. Access to lawyers is equally elusive for some of the vulnerable members of the public.

This inevitably created a gap which civil society organisations sought to fill by training and deploying paralegals. Paralegals take on legal support work but also undertake non-legal and equally important roles of community mobilisation, community liaison linking grassroots communities to the civil society, police, courts, prisons and other actors.

Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) joined other civil society organisations to address this need through establishment of the paralegal training program. HRAPF’s training focused on equipping persons working with sexual minorities with paralegal skills and basic knowledge of the law and practice. This proved to be a critical intervention at the time when most lawyers shied away from clients who were members of sexual minority groups but legal services were also not affordable to members of sexual minority communities. Equally, accessing the formal justice institutions such as courts, the police, prisons, and the Uganda Human Rights Commission was a headache due to the prevailing stigma. As a trainer, it was a mixed experience of anxiety, relief, hope and expectation.

There was relief that at the end of the training, members of sexual minorities communities would have a ready pool of paralegals who were from within their communities to reach out to for the basic problems they faced on a daily basis. Indeed, the eagerness of the trainees to learn and avail themselves at the service of their colleagues was one of the major satisfying aspects of the trainings. Although training in law at any level is traditionally a very laborious and taxing endeavour, the fire and zeal demonstrated by the trainees provided hope and expectation that their dreams would

Paralegals take on legal support work but also undertake non-legal and equally important roles of community mobilisation, community liaison linking grassroots communities to the civil society, police, courts, prisons and other actors.
be fulfilled yet there was anxiety about how and where.

The anxiety was fuelled by the fact that the world which awaited the trainees was not really prepared for them. It was not uncommon for even enrolled advocates representing clients from sexual minorities communities to be scoffed at and humiliated by officials of the very institutions which are charged with protection of human rights and administration of justice. Police officers at some of the major police stations in Kampala and upcountry would often advise lawyers to ‘get better clients’. Since this was a pioneer program in the whole country, one wondered how easily the trained paralegals would engage and cope with the formal institutions.

The training was carried out at a time when the role of paralegals as key players in facilitating access to justice was still unappreciated or simply not understood by formal institutions in the sector. It was heartening to see representatives of institutions such as the police admit as much. Not only were such representatives co-facilitators of some sessions, they largely were also learning about the concept and role of paralegals. The training also provided a platform for first time engagements between the trainees and the formal justice institutions. Paralegals cannot work independent from the formal justice institutions and must be considered as part and parcel of the entire machinery of administration of justice. I am pleased to learn that the trained paralegals have established robust working relationships with the Uganda Police Force, the courts of law and the Uganda Prisons and this can only keep improving.

Another concern was and continues to be the absence of a legal framework under which the trained paralegals would operate and offer their services after the training. Although most, if not all of the trainees, were already employed by civil society organisations and were to continue operating under their administrative procedures, the absence of a broader framework recognising and regulating their role and services was a setback.

Unfortunately, since 2012 this position has not changed as numerous government initiatives are still uncompleted. The Legal Aid Policy, though drafted, is yet to be adopted by the government while the Law Council, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, has been in the process of drafting and enacting paralegal regulations under the Advocates Act but these too are only still in the pipeline. Fast-tracking the adoption of the Legal Aid Policy and the Paralegal Regulations will define and streamline the position and role of the paralegal services within the broader Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS). This will also help provide a legal anchor to paralegal training institutions such as HRAPF whose paralegal training programs have proved to be a vital yet unsung cog in the wheel of justice.

"... trained paralegals have established robust working relationships with the Uganda Police Force, the courts of law and the Uganda Prisons and this can only keep improving."
Every year, the publication of this magazine is a celebration, or even a monument to all we have achieved as a community of activists in the fight for the rights of sexual minorities in Uganda. HRAPF has been advocating for the rights of LGBTI persons and sex workers since 2008 and, over the years, has become like a tree with deep roots and many flourishing branches. One of these branches most certainly is the Community Paralegals, who, after completing the HRAPF Training Programme, step up to defend the rights of sexual minorities in their communities, raise awareness, improve access to services and resources and found and strengthen organisations which do the same.

In a difficult and often discouraging field, it is a source of great joy and pride to see community activists step into the role of fully-fledged Community Paralegals: ready to speak and fight for the rights of their peers. HRAPF, as the only organisation in Uganda to run a registered legal aid clinic offering specialised services to sexual minorities, is grateful to add to the number of hands on board and feet on the ground on an annual basis. Marginalised communities face challenges and the severe violation of their rights in every corner of the country and it is a matter of necessity to continually add to the number of trained persons who are able to handle these cases. Community Paralegals form a network from within the communities we serve and are able to respond to crisis situations and come up with creative solutions and solid advice in legal matters and cases of violation of human rights.

The Community Paralegal Training Programme furthermore serves to scale the invisible wall that often prevents community members from approaching and working comfortably with lawyers. Our training aims to demystify both the law and the legal profession and to equip community members to engage confidently with police officers and court personnel. Knowledge indeed is power.
The 125 Community Paralegals that have been trained by HRAPF over the course of the past nine years have served their communities with passion and innovation. The Programme is doubtlessly a great success and, as our Community Paralegals establish their careers, its impact is being felt even beyond the borders of Uganda. The Programme is also an ode to the strategy of empowerment and partnership, which achieves far greater successes than mere service provision ever could: the Programme produces evidence of the fact that members of marginalised communities are powerful agents in the fight for their own rights.

As a facilitator at most of the trainings, I am always happy to engage with the trainees who are so full of life and hope for the future, despite the difficult legal and social environment that they live and work in. They always without fail come on time for the trainings, enthusiastic for what we have to offer. It is this that drives us at HRAPF to ensure that the community paralegal training program remains vibrant, relevant and empowering. We are always innovating and learning. We attend other peoples’ training so that we learn how to make ours better. We change teaching methods, we change facilitators, and establish new relationships with different stakeholders in order to maintain the high bar that we have set for this program.

The community paralegals interviewed for this edition raise many important issues, which require HRAPF to change. Our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Directorate will have deeper conversations with them to understand the issues further, and then have a discussion with the programme team as well as HRAPF management to ensure that change happens.

Due to the success of this program and the need to further expand it and make it more professional, the Community Capacity Enhancement programme team has been specifically carved out of the Access to Justice programme to cater for such initiatives. We now expect a more professional approach to the trainings, as well as many new changes to make the training better.

Therefore, as HRAPF, we commit to doing much better both in the training and the support afterwards. We are grateful for the ongoing and ever-growing relationship that we, as an organisation, have with the sex worker and LGBTI communities. Thank you to each and every Community Paralegal that have shared their stories and experiences in this issue of ‘I AM A COMMUNITY PARALEGAL’. Thank you for all that you are doing and for facing challenges head-on as we work together to take human rights to all.

Adrian Jjuuko
ABOUT HRAPF

BACKGROUND

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

LEGAL STATUS

HRAPF is incorporated under the laws of Uganda as a company limited by guarantee.

VISION

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

MISSION

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

HRAPF’S OBJECTIVES

1. To create awareness on the national, regional and international human rights regime.

2. To promote access to justice for marginalised persons and Most at Risk Populations groups.

3. To undertake research and legal advocacy for the rights of marginalised persons and Most at Risk Populations groups.

4. To network and collaborate with key strategic partners, government, communities and individuals at national, regional and international level.

5. To enhance the capacity of marginalised groups, Most at Risk Populations and key stakeholders to participate effectively in the promotion and respect of the rights of marginalised persons.

6. To maintain a strong and vibrant human rights organisation.
OUR TARGET CONSTITUENCIES

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

HRAPF VALUES

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

SLOGAN

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