



# The Legal Aid Forum

Working Together For Equitable Access to Justice



**NEWSLETTER**

► ISSUE 2, 2025

## COMMUNITY LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

At the heart of our work is one mission: making justice accessible, affordable, and people-centered. We do this by combining legal awareness, advice, representation, and grassroots initiatives that bring justice closer to communities. In the first half of 2025, these efforts reached millions across Rwanda—showing the power of community legal empowerment in action.

## BRINGING JUSTICE CLOSER: LEGAL AID WEEK IN KIGALI EMPOWERS THOUSANDS



From 16th - 27th June this Year, we partnered with the City of Kigali and successfully conducted a highly impactful Legal Aid Week, with activities spanning across the three districts of Kicukiro, Nyarugenge, and Gasabo.

Under the theme “Working Together for Citizen-Centred Justice,” this initiative aimed to improve public understanding of legal rights, especially in the critical areas of the new land law and family law. The week served as a vital platform to

empower citizens with the knowledge they need to navigate legal systems, resolve disputes, and claim their rights.

Throughout the week LAF and the City of Kigali mobilized legal professionals, local leaders, and volunteers to reach the people where they are in communities, marketplaces, and through mass media. As a result, 5,500 individuals received legal support on the spot through face-to-face consultations, legal advice, and mediation.

Of the 101 legal concerns raised by citizens during the week, 49% were resolved immediately by on-site legal experts. The remaining cases were formally referred to competent institutions for follow-up, ensuring that no voice was left unheard and no case was left unaddressed.

Additionally, an estimated 8 million Rwandans were reached through targeted messaging on radio and television, extending the impact far beyond physical locations.

In addition to legal assistance, the event offered an opportunity for direct engagement between citizens and local leaders. Community members were encouraged to present their legal and social concerns, fostering open dialogue and reinforcing the principles of transparency, accountability, and participatory governance.

At its core, Legal Aid Week is about empowering the public to understand, and claim their rights. By creating a space where citizens can both raise their legal challenges and learn about available recourse the initiative helps build a more informed and legally empowered society.

During the ceremony concluding the week, we were honored to receive an award as an outstanding contributor to Legal Aid Week, in recognition of our active role in organizing and supporting the week's activities aimed at improving access to justice.

[https://youtu.be/tu7TJilpn\\_E?si=ql\\_IjAVJD7JyGFqA](https://youtu.be/tu7TJilpn_E?si=ql_IjAVJD7JyGFqA)





## OUR REACH FROM JANUARY TO JULY

Our legal empowerment efforts use a variety of strategies, including community-based paralegals, mobile phone technology, Mobile Legal Aid Clinics, media outreach, university legal aid clinics, posters, and more. Through these initiatives, we strive to empower the Rwandan community to understand, claim, and protect their rights.



### IVR

**1,130** people received legal education  
(615 Women ,515 Male)



### Walk-ins

**63** received legal assistance  
(27 Men 36 Women).



### 1022 Call Center

**237** new call-in cases received legal advice (136 Men, 101 Women)



### ADR Center

**35** Cases were mediated  
**12** cases were plea bargained



### Community-Based Paralegals

**1,845 legal cases** were successfully resolved at the community level  
(580 Men 1265 Women).

**24,099 individuals** were sensitized on key legal topics



### Legal representation

**81** were given legal representation  
(46 Men 35 Women).

## PROMOTION & PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Our promotion and protection of human rights focuses on ensuring everyone can enjoy their freedoms and dignity, while safeguarding those whose rights are at risk.

## WORKSHOP ON DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY AND RESPONSIBLE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



The rapid growth of digital technologies has transformed how Rwandans access and share information. While this creates opportunities for transparency and engagement, it also fuels risks such as misinformation, hate speech, and fake news. Low levels of digital media literacy make it harder for citizens and journalists alike to critically assess online content, threatening both trust and stability.

In response to these challenges, we partnered with the Rwanda Media Commission to conduct nationwide awareness campaigns on digital media literacy and responsible freedom of expression. As part of these efforts, a high-level workshop was held in Kigali on 10 July 2025, bringing together journalists, civil society leaders, government representatives, and public institutions to reflect on freedom of expression, its legal boundaries, and its role in strengthening democracy. Speakers stressed that while the right is constitutionally guaranteed, it must be exercised responsibly never as a tool to misinform, incite hatred, or undermine dignity.

The workshop brought together journalists, legal practitioners civil society leaders, and public institutions with the rapid growth of digital technologies has transformed how Rwandans access and share information.

*Media literacy is no longer optional, it is essential. As the Rwanda Governance board is entrusted With media sector coordination, we strongly support initiatives that build citizen's capacities to engage meaningfully, responsibly, and ethically in the digital space.*

**PEACEMAKER MBUGIRAMIHIGO**

Media Policy Analyst at RGB



*Promoting digital media literacy and responsible freedom of expression contributes to cathartic changes in society by fostering constructive dialogue and informed public debates. It safeguards against online threats and misinformation campaigns, thus contributing to national security and stability. Moreover, ethical reporting supports the credibility and integrity of Rwandan media outlets, reinforcing journalism's role in delivering unbiased and accurate information to the public.*

**Naomi SZOKOL**

Program Officer Delegation of the European Union in Rwanda





*At the heart of responsible journalism lies a strong understanding of ethics and the law. When journalists are well-informed about ethical reporting practices and the legal limits of freedom of expression, they can significantly reduce their exposure to legal disputes and court proceedings.*

*Promoting ethical journalism is not only about avoiding legal trouble it's also about building public trust, strengthening media credibility, and ensuring that information shared with the public is accurate, respectful, and constructive. By supporting media professionals through training and dialogue, we help create a media environment that is both free and fair one where rights are exercised responsibly and protected by law.*

**MR. ANDREWS KANANGA,**  
*Executive Director of the Legal Aid Forum*

Digital literacy enables citizens not just to consume content, but to question it, understand it, and respond to it with clarity and confidence.

Key recommendations included strengthening media capacity and ethics, expanding digital literacy in schools and communities, adopting a National Media and Information Literacy Policy, improving protection and financing for journalists, and enhancing cooperation with law enforcement. The workshop concluded with the adoption of the Kigali Declaration on Responsible Freedom of Expression, a national commitment to build a media environment that is ethical, inclusive, and resilient in the digital age.

## **OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOGNIZED AS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OF THE MONTH**



We are proud to share that our Executive Director, Andrews Kananga, was featured as Human Rights Defender of the Month by Defend Defenders in March this year. His recognition reflects a lifelong commitment to advancing justice and human rights in Rwanda and across the region.

From his early role as National Legal Advisor to the Gacaca Courts, where he contributed to Rwanda's post-genocide justice and reconciliation, to his leadership in building the Legal Aid Forum into Rwanda's largest legal aid and human rights organization, Andrews has consistently championed access to justice for the most vulnerable.

Reflecting on his journey, Andrews shared: “A history of injustice, massive violations of human rights, decades of misery in refugee camps for our people, oppression and hatred, greatly impacted me growing up. I thought by becoming a lawyer, I could contribute and I am glad that currently, I am living the dream.

This recognition also underscores the resilience of Rwanda’s human rights movement in a challenging civic space, and highlights the critical role of leadership, coalition-building, and innovation in protecting and empowering human rights defenders.

## **FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF 2021 UPR RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA**



Since 2014, we have been convening the Rwanda civil society Coalition on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) coalition of 37 organizations, to galvanize civil society participation in the UPR mechanism.

The Coalition has been involved in the UPR process by participating in national consultations, conducting advocacy, taking the floor at the HRC during the adoption of the report, and monitoring the implementation of UPR recommendations by producing alternative reports, and raising public awareness to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation in advancing human rights.

In 2023, the Coalition conducted a Midterm Assessment to evaluate Rwanda's progress in implementing the 160 human rights recommendations it had accepted during the country's third UPR cycle in 2021. Building on this work, the coalition carried out a final assessment in 2025 to provide a comprehensive picture of progress and remaining challenges. As part of this process, data collectors were trained on a data collection tool developed by LAF to ensure consistency and alignment with the national UPR roadmap.

They were then deployed to various institutions across the country to gather information. The findings informed the drafting of the Alternative UPR Final Assessment Report which was subsequently validated and adopted by Coalition members. The event brought together over 100 representatives from government institutions, civil society, development



partners, and media to review Rwanda's human rights progress and explore opportunities for stronger collaboration.

The Alternative UPR Final Assessment Report has since been submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, ahead of Rwanda's next official UPR review scheduled for 2026. Through this process, LAF and the Civil Society Coalition reaffirm their commitment to promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation in the UPR process.

[LAF Final assessment report of implementation of 2021 UPR recommendations by the Republic of Rwanda.pdf](#)

## PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS SHOWCASING RWANDA'S JUSTICE REFORMS AT SDG 16 CONFERENCE IN NEW YORK



The SDG 16 Conference held on 12 May at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, brought global leaders, policymakers, and civil society together around the theme “Advancing Peace, Justice, and Institutions for Sustainable Development.” to reaffirm commitments to building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. The discussions centered on addressing the widening

justice funding gap and advancing people-centered justice for all, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Against this backdrop, our Executive Director Andrews Kananga joined a high-level panel on the Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+, a renewed civil society roadmap urging more tangible, people centered justice initiatives.

In his remarks, Mr. Kananga highlighted Rwanda’s ambitious transformative progress in pursuing SDG 16, built on post-genocide reconciliation, the rule of law, and citizen-centered governance. He underscored the importance of accessible, cost-effective, community-based justice that leaves no one behind. Panelists highlighted a widening gap between the international community’s commitments and declining investments in peace, noting challenges such as increased militarization, population displacement and community disempowerment.

The declaration calls for a shift in financial priorities, including redirecting military expenditures toward justice systems and conflict prevention, alongside measures like establishing a debt convention and curbing illicit financial flows. The conference concluded with the adoption of the 2025 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+

## SHOWCASING LEGAL PROGRESS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AT CSW69



During CSW69, we co-organized a side event with UN Women and the Gender Monitoring Office on the theme *“Equality Before the Law in Rwanda – Gains, Gaps, and Future Reforms.”*

In a panel discussion, our Executive Director highlighted the critical role of legal frameworks in advancing gender equality, drawing from our research assessment on Rwanda’s progress in building a gender-responsive legal system. He outlined significant gains, including:

- The elimination of discriminatory laws
- Equal rights in leadership, labor, land, and family
- Ratification of key treaties such as CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol
- Extension of maternity and paternity leave

Importantly, this theme has now been selected to feature at the 2026 CSW session—an opportunity to further elevate Rwanda’s experience and lessons learned on the global stage.

## COURTESY VISIT BY MOTT FOUNDATION



We were delighted to host Mr. Lorenzo M. Wakefield, from our partner Mott Foundation, during his visit to Rwanda in March. His trip reaffirmed our strong partnership with the Foundation, together with the Ministry of Justice and the Rwanda Judiciary, we hosted Mr. Wakefield at the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Center, where he saw firsthand how mediation and plea-bargaining are helping to resolve cases more quickly, reduce court backlogs, and build community trust in justice institutions.

during his visit to Rwanda in March. His trip reaffirmed our strong partnership with the Foundation, which has been instrumental in helping us scale up grassroots legal empowerment across the country.

Alongside our partners at Haguruka NGO, we also travelled with him to Ngoma District to meet dedicated community paralegals working directly in villages. These paralegals are transforming lives by helping people understand their rights and



resolve disputes peacefully without costly court processes making justice truly accessible and people centered. This visit was powerful reminder of the impact of grassroots legal empowerment and vital role of strong partnership in making Justice a reality for all vulnerable communities.



## ANNUAL POLICY DIALOGUE ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE



In March this year, we proudly hosted our first Annual Policy Dialogue on Access to Justice, a milestone moment for us, and one that set the stage for deeper, more inclusive conversations on the future of justice in Rwanda.

The dialogue brought together government representatives, civil society, lawyers, legal aid clinics, and development partners. to reflect on the state of access to justice in Rwanda and explore pathways for to strengthening it The dialogue kicked off with a keynote address from challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in making justice accessible, afford- able, and sustainable for all His words underscored the importance of collective responsibility in shaping a justice system that truly meets the needs of citizens.

We also had the opportunity to share our own reflections on the state of legal aid in Rwanda, where our Executive Director highlighted achievements, persistent gaps, and called for stronger collaboration across institutions.

Our message was simple but urgent: only by working together can we ensure that vulnerable communities can meaningfully exercise their right to access to justice.

The panel discussion that followed was dynamic and engaging, covering topics such as financing access to justice, translating policy into practice, and amplifying the role of pro bono work and civil society. The energy in the room was inspiring, and the dialogue concluded with concrete recommendations to guide future efforts.





## CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S

In March, we joined the world in marking International Women's Day by celebrating the women who drive our mission forward every day. At LAF, women are not only at the heart of our work but also at the forefront of advancing access to justice, community empowerment, and people-centered legal reform in Rwanda. On this occasion, we reaffirmed our commitment to supporting gender-sensitive legal aid, and ensuring that women across Rwanda can access the justice they deserve.

