



2020

ANNUAL REPORT

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We are grateful!

COVID-19 has tremendously affected access to justice for many Rwandans, especially during the hard lockdowns. The Legal Aid Forum mitigated the impact using ICT innovations, such as the 845 Platform and our toll-free line 1022, for our beneficiaries to be able to reach us during these unprecedented times. Despite the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has effectively limited the implementation of activities, several planned activities were carried out including research, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives for Justice Sector actors.

The Legal Aid Forum had a successful 2020 and built a foundation to continue this success in 2021. LAF is thankful to all partners and collaborators supporting its mission.

Our appreciation goes especially to the Government of Rwanda, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Rwanda, The European Union Delegation to Rwanda, USAID, UNHCR, Mott Steward Mott Foundation, UN Women, UNESCO, and The German Cooperation-GIZ.

We look forward to your continued support and collaboration.

Thank you!





List of abbreviations

LAF	Legal Aid Forum
GBV	Gender Based Violence
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
ICT	Information and communications technology
LACSF	Legal Aid Civil Society Fund
RIB	Rwanda Investigation Bureau
NPPA	National Public Prosecution Authority
RBP	Birth Registration Procedure
LAW	Legal Aid Week
PoC	Person of Concern
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RFL	Rwanda Forensics Laboratory
USSD	Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
IVR	Interactive voice response
RBA	Rwanda Bar Association
CSOs	Civil society organizations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ILO	International Labor Organization
NLAP	National Legal Aid Policy
FBOs	Faith-Based Organizations
RMC	Rwanda Media Commission
IPDC	International Program for the Development of Communication
JRLOS	Justice, Reconciliation, Law and Order Sector
ISMIC	Independent Selection and Monitoring Committee
IPS	Implementing Partners
MIS	Management Information System

General Introduction

The Legal Aid Forum (LAF) is a membership-based network of 38 national and international NGOs, professional bodies, universities, legal aid clinics, faith-based organizations, and trade unions that provide and/or support legal aid services to the indigent Rwandan population or vulnerable groups. Since its establishment in 2006, LAF has been providing direct legal aid services, capacity building, and legal education through raising awareness of laws and conducting research and advocacy to ensure that the indigent and vulnerable Rwandan population can access quality justice. Deepening and broadening access to quality justice, especially for the most indigent and vulnerable persons, and strengthening respect for human rights is a constant quest for The Legal Aid Forum, as it is for other justice sector stakeholders in Rwanda.

In 2020, a year that was globally characterized by the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, LAF managed to mark tremendous high-quality achievements toward its vision of ‘A Rwanda with equal access to Justice’ and its mission to promote and support the provision of accessible and quality legal aid services. LAF members, lawyers, legal officers, community-based paralegals, and support staff provided legal aid services and representation throughout Rwanda to the most vulnerable people including victims of GBV, refugees, asylum seekers, etc.

This report covers activities and corresponding results of implementation by the LAF network i.e. at both member organizations and the LAF secretariat levels in 2020. It is worth noting that, to comply with measures put in place to combat Covid-19, the use of ICT by LAF was highly impactful.

All implemented activities in 2020 were conducted following the LAF Strategic objectives divided into four thematic areas:

LEGAL EMPOWERMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal assistance and representation• Legal education and awareness on rights
KNOWLEDGE BUILDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Researches used to generate strategies & advocacy• Capacity building to staff, members and stakeholders
HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND PROTECTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• UPR Monitoring• Engaging with human rights treaty bodies and human rights mechanism.
INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal Aid Civil Society Fund• Grants making and fundraising



1. LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

The Legal Aid Forum offers pro bono legal assistance to the Rwandan population, especially indigent and vulnerable groups, and strengthens their capacity to use the law, formal and informal justice mechanisms, and dispute resolution to assert their rights and advance their interests. Legal empowerment promotes improved awareness of people's rights as well as collective legal action to combat structural injustices and transformation of the structures that exclude and discriminate against vulnerable groups.

In 2020, to achieve this objective the following interventions were executed: Legal assistance and representation, Legal and Human Rights education and awareness, Public Interest Litigation, and Gender justice.

1.1. Legal assistance and representation

Legal assistance refers to legal advice on matters such as succession how to initiate divorce proceedings, birth registration, change of names, orientation to the labor inspector, and enforcement of court decisions. In addition to the above, legal assistance is also provided to any person who might require it. Hence, this service is provided to beneficiaries every day from Monday to Friday. Legal representation, on the other hand, is representation by a lawyer before a court of law, Rwanda Investigation bureau, Prosecution, and other administrative entities. Currently, LAF works with external lawyers whose contracts are fixed terms and are in line with the Rwandan bar association's regulation in regard to retainers.



A Legal officer providing legal advice at the LAF office in 2020 ©LAF

In the framework of realizing access to justice for indigent and vulnerable groups, LAF established a legal aid unit following the promulgation of the Rwanda Bar Association law in 2013, which allows civil society organizations providing legal aid to hire both in-house and external lawyers. The unit provides legal aid in the form of legal assistance, advice, mediation, and representation before courts of law, the Rwanda Investigation Bureau, and the National Public Prosecution Authority. In 2020, the legal aid unit remained operational even during the restrictions imposed due to Covid-19 that halted almost all activities. In total, LAF was able to assist **925** beneficiaries from January to December 2020.

We can confirm that the majority of beneficiaries who received legal aid were satisfied with the results.

With the financial support from its donors, LAF also received limited funds, which helped to support forensic services such as pro bono DNA tests for beneficiaries in search of paternity cases. In 2020, LAF facilitated Pro bono DNA testing for **30** cases.

Below is a snapshot of legal representation and assistance for the year 2020 by the LAF secretariat.

1.1.1. Performance by the secretariat

During 2020, LAF provided legal assistance and representation to vulnerable individuals referred mainly by the LAF members, access to Justice Bureaus (MAJ), Government Institutions including National Public Prosecution Authority, National Commission for Human Rights, and others. In-house lawyers participated in the activities related to advocacy on the draft orders determining court fees in criminal and civil matters, and Comprehensive Legal Analysis of Gender Compliance under Rwandan Law among others. It is important to indicate that there are now two permanent lawyers and an intern in the legal aid unit.

1.1.2. Legal aid to refugees

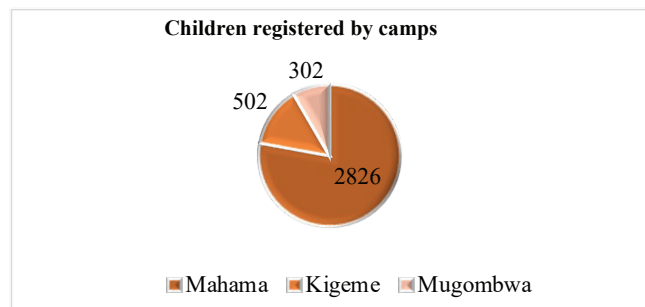
Since 2016, with the support of UNHCR, LAF is implementing a project “**Legal aid to refugees**”, with the overall objective of protecting refugee rights through civil registration, legal assistance, and awareness-raising on rights and obligations. The legal assistance provided ensures the protection of refugees as provided by national and international legal instruments so that refugees can enjoy their fundamental human rights.

In 2020, LAF worked in Mahama, Kigeme, and Mugombwa camps as well as Huye urban and provided legal aid services to more than 94,000 refugees and asylum seekers.

With the support of legal officers, partners, community-based paralegals, and refugee communities, the implementation of the project was successful in terms of service delivery at all levels throughout this year. However, some activities were suspended due to measures in place to curb the spread of COVID-19, especially birth registration, trainings, and awareness-raising activities.

1.1.2.1. Facilitation of Birth Registrations for refugees

In 2020, a total number of 3,630 (1,857 boys and 1,773 girls) refugee children were registered in civil status. Mahama camp leads the rest of the locations with the highest number of children registered at 2826, Kigeme follows with 502 registered children, and Mugombwa with 302 registered children.



Of the total number of registered children, 1,738 (878 boys and 860 girls) children were registered under the regular birth registration procedure (RBP) while 1,892 (979 boys and 913 girls) children were registered under the late birth registration procedure (LBR).

The big number of children registered under LBR was mainly due to two factors:

- **Covid-19 Lockdown:** In March, April, May, and September 2020, some camps were not accessible due to lockdowns put in place to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This halted birth registration in all camps; and

- **Children born outside the camps:** Some PoC gave birth to children outside of the camp and delayed registering their children.

To reduce the impact of covid-19 on birth registration, awareness campaigns on birth registration were carried out in camps and reached 7,782 refugees.

1.1.2.2. Legal Assistance to Refugees and Asylum Seekers

During this reporting period, legal officers provided general legal assistance and practicing lawyers provided representation to persons of concern (refugees and asylum seekers). The legal aid services provided include advice and legal counseling, the orientation of cases to competent institutions, paying medical expertise and other documents needed for a legal proceeding, mediation, reconciliation, accompanying beneficiaries when required, and representation before RIB, court, etc.

In total 1,050 PoC benefited from our legal aid services including:

- 79 SGBV incidents for which victims received legal assistance;
- 94 couples (93 from Mahama and 91 from Mugombwa) were facilitated to get legally married; and
- 549 PoC were identified in detention including **349** detained in 2020. They were all assisted at rehabilitation centers, RIB, prosecution, and court levels.

1.1.2.3. Legal awareness and education for refugees

In efforts to empower and build the capacities of refugees, LAF organized different sensitization campaigns, workshops, and trainings on national key laws like the GBV law, rights and obligations of

refugees under national and international laws, and crime prevention.

The training brought together refugees, local leaders from government institutions, host communities in all camps, and Huye urban.

As a result:

- 21,491 PoC were sensitized on SGBV laws and national laws;
- 126 PoC were trained on civil registration procedures and refugee rights and obligations in 3 camps and Huye urban; and
- 124 PoC benefited from the workshop for Refugee Representatives, local leaders, and other partners to discuss the rights & obligations of refugees and crime prevention (SGBV, drugs abuse, and human trafficking)-in all camps.

1.1.2.4. Preventing the impact of COVID-19 in camps and host communities





Pictures capture during the launch of the project.

With support from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Kigali, the Legal Aid Forum implemented a project titled “**Preventing the impact of COVID-19 in camps and Host communities**” to support prevention measures against the spread of COVID 19 in Refugee and host community settings in Rwanda.

Beneficiaries were protected through procuring and distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to prevent the spread of the pandemic among refugees and host community members in three (3) camps: Kigeme, Mugombwa, Mahama, and in Huye urban area.

Under this activity, LAF distributed food items to 100 vulnerable families including 60 unemployed refugees and 40 vulnerable Rwandans from Huye District. The families were identified with the help of partners and District Officials.

1.1.2.5. Challenges to legal assistance to Refugees

Although much was achieved in 2020, some challenges were encountered in regard to legal assistance to refugees. The main challenges faced were:

- Field Staff presence in camps was limited following measures imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19. It was difficult to provide legal assistance remotely since some cases require physical contact with the PoC. Some PoC did not have airtime or cellphones to make calls, others neither trusted the online services nor the paralegals selected among themselves;
- Delays in prosecution and court proceedings due to COVID 19 testing were also a challenge and affected the timely justice that is a right;
- The detention monitoring conducted by field staffs in different prisons where PoC are detained was suspended at the national level since March 2020, when access to detention facilities was banned;
- Regarding SGBV, many cases were not reported on time due to the culture of silence and negative solidarity where victims refuse to provide adequate information related to the suspect, especially on early pregnancy and domestic violence; and
- Some activities were suspended since the public gathering was prohibited to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The celebration of legal marriage to 39 couples from Kigeme and Huye Urban was suspended and training of partners on new laws and rights and obligations of refugees was also suspended due to COVID-19 measures.

1.1.2.6. Best practice in legal aid provision

Legal proceedings can be difficult for anyone due to complicated rules and potentially long duration. This is especially a huge problem for people with vision and hearing impairment, as they cannot give important details vital for fair rulings. Thus, a sign language interpreter in a court can allow them to tell their story and respond to questions about it. It is an important aspect of giving both plaintiffs and defendants fair treatment before the court of law. It is in this regard that LAF, in its efforts of ensuring good service delivery and swift Justice to the most Vulnerable groups especially people with disabilities, pays for sign language Interpreters to enable Lawyers to communicate with them for proper and efficient legal representation.

1.1.2.7. Success story



TWIZERIMANA Félicien was charged with sexually assaulting a minor. The prosecution did not conduct an in-depth investigation and therefore charged him with the above crime. Even though, the prosecution and the judge knew his speaking and hearing impairments, Félicien was neither questioned nor interrogated but the court went ahead to sentence him to 12 years of imprisonment. When the case first came to LAF, the first thing was to seek out the service of a translator who understood the sign language, LAF in collaboration with the judiciary including the

Prosecution and the Court of Appeal, agreed that TWIZERIMANA Félicien should first be taught the sign language so that he could explain himself on what happened. From Mageragere Prison, he was taught sign language as well as his legal counsel. When he was brought before the Court of Appeal because his case was now at this instance, it was discovered that the charges against him did not exist. It is clear that teaching him sign language gave him the ability to explain himself, it was clear that there was no evidence against him and thus was acquitted. [Click here to see the success story.](#)

1.2. Impact of legal aid on the Rwandan population

Legal aid empowers individuals and communities to know and enjoy their rights, as well as promotes the protection of human rights and rule of law. Measuring the full impact of the provision of legal aid assistance is not straight forward, however, it can be assessed based on the following:



The figures provided above indicate that LAF represented over **725** people in 2020. As the cost of accessing a lawyer can go as high as 500, 000RWF, ALF contributes to poverty eradication through pro bono legal assistance to vulnerable and indigent groups.



To ensure the availability and accessibility of legal services to ordinary Rwandans, LAF established toll-free mobile **8-4-5** Service. Callers can dial 845 and listen to legal content free of charge. LAF also established free legal aid hotline **1022** for the legal aid seekers to speak to LAF lawyers and get assistance with their cases. These innovations have greatly the need to travel long distances in search of legal aid services and cut back on associated costs.



Given that, some cases that LAF received included those related to the search for paternity; there is a need for the provision of DNA tests in such cases. DNA tests are the last resort taken by courts to make a ruling search for paternity cases. The cost for 1 DNA test is 267,000 RWF, which many cannot afford. Through the partnership with Rwanda Forensics Laboratory, LAF facilitates payment of DNA tests for its beneficiaries.

1.3. Legal education and awareness of rights

To empower Rwandan citizens in their rights and issues involving the law, LAF carries out several legal awareness activities. In 2020, LAF used the following approaches to provide legal education and awareness of rights:

1.3.1. First approach: Using ICT to Provide Legal Aid to the Rwandan Population

In 2017, LAF completed a study on citizen perception of justice and legal services in Rwanda, which found that the distance Rwandans have to travel to reach legal aid providers represents an access problem. Out of the 5,503 respondents interviewed, 27% had to walk between 30 minutes and 1 hour to reach the nearest legal aid provider. 16% had to walk between 1 and 3 hours, and approximately 3% had to travel more than 5 hours. In addition to being long distanced, it was found that citizens know very little to nothing about the law.

One of the key recommendations of that research was to find a way to provide individuals with access to legal information and advice without requiring them to travel long distances.

This was beneficial to citizens as traveling hours to and from a legal provider required them to forego earning income on the day of travel, while simultaneously requiring them to spend money related to the trip, most likely on transportation or food and drinks.

Based on this recommendation, in March 2018 LAF started Using ICT to Provide Legal Services to the Rwandan Population through the 8-4-5 Platform. Taking advantage of high mobile penetration in the country, LAF has managed to respond to existing needs for legal aid services by vulnerable groups countrywide. For example, in March 2018, 76.61% with 9,047,087 subscribers and in December 2020 is at 83.8% with 10,630,858 subscribers. As such, mobile phones were the best option for LAF to provide legal information, advice, and legal assistance to the vulnerable Rwandan population.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the globe, legal aid service providers were forced to embrace technology for the continuity of their daily business even during the lockdown. For LAF, it has been an opportunity to heighten this ICT platform and as result, most of the existing services were and are still available even during lockdown.

1.3.1.1. How it works

The service operates in 3 ways: legal education with IVR and USSD systems, legal advice via the call center established at the LAF secretariat, and legal assistance/representation through referral of critical cases to lawyers attached to the project.

¹ https://rura.rw/fileadmin/Documents/ICT/statistics/Monthly_Mobile_Statistics_report_as_of_march_2018.pdf

² https://rura.rw/fileadmin/Documents/ICT/statistics/Report_for_Mobile_telephones_in_Telecom_Statistics_report_as_of_December_2020.pdf

How the 845 legal education, advice, and assistance services work:

- **Step 1:** Callers or mobile subscribers dial *845# to read legal content (USSD);
- **Step 2:** Callers or mobile subscribers call 845 to listen to audio recorded legal content (IVR);
- **Step 3:** After listening to the content, if a caller is not satisfied, they have the option of booking a call back from LAF lawyers in the call center;
- **Step 4:** The Lawyer from the call center completes an intake form and provides general advice;
- **Step 5:** A caller is referred to the service provider who will be able to assist him/her including MAJ officers, Abunzi Committee, Courts, and others; and
- **Step 6:** where deemed necessary, a caller is given a lawyer from LAF or Bar Association for legal assistance or representation.

1.3.1.2. Performance

1.3.1.2.1. Conducting legal education via 845 (USSD and IVR)

In 2020, using IVR for legal education, 752,853 people accessed legal messages 1,886,415 times. Through USSD 150,507 people accessed legal content 151,877 times.

1.3.1.2.2. Provision of Legal advice by the call center

The 8-4-5 call center has seven active operators/lawyers. When a beneficiary has listened to legal content and still wishes to speak to a lawyer for further assistance, she/he books a call back from LAF lawyers on the platform.

Between January and December 2020, LAF call center lawyers called back and gave legal assistance to 41,525 people.



LAF Call center Legal Officers advising citizens on legal issues using the 845 platform

1.3.1.3. Impact beyond numbers

According to the project beneficiary feedback surveys, the levels of satisfaction indicated that beneficiaries are satisfied with the content of the messages at 78.2% and the satisfaction rate for the Call center service is 83.5%. 79% of respondents qualified legal messages as ‘very helpful/helpful’ and 13% as ‘somewhat helpful’ to them.

Success stories from beneficiaries also revealed a significant impact of service to most vulnerable individuals including those with disabilities who were assisted simply by making a phone call.

1.3.1.3.1. Success story

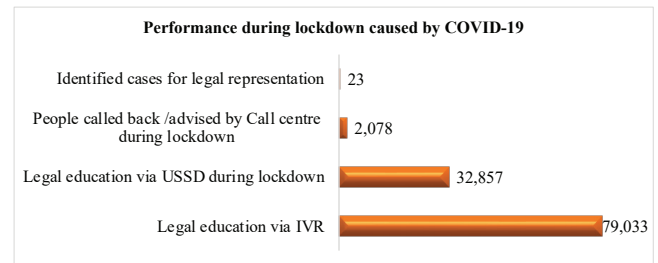
Testimony by Théoneste (on his bed): “The 845 service call center helped me without having to leave my home. They provided me with a lawyer who followed my case without any payment. He submitted my case to court, requesting for due compensation from the ones who assaulted me. I did not have to go to court and he defended me throughout. I only received calls from him to update me on the case. The court ruling was in my favor and I was compensated damages.”



1.3.1.3.2. Ensuring Access to Justice during the COVID-19 pandemic

With the experience of lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the 8-4-5 service remained operational in serving beneficiaries, which reiterated the importance of technology. Having this service in place, especially during the lockdown, Rwandans continued to receive legal aid services from their home.

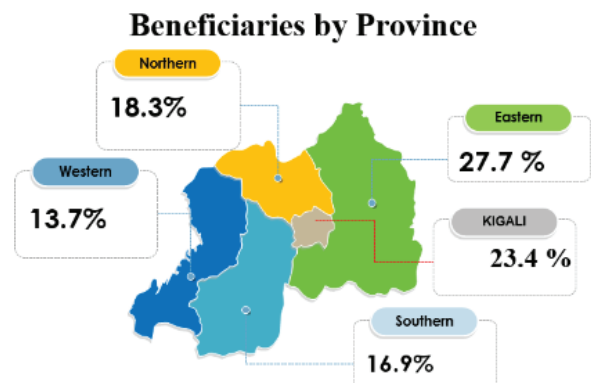
Below are figures from services provided during the hard lockdown period running from 16 March to 4 May 2020.



Figures from 845 legal services during hard lockdown

1.3.1.3.3. Tackling the issue of long-distance

As per the figures below, the service is accessible throughout all provinces of the country and the city of Kigali.



1.3.1.4. Experience sharing: Using ICT to Provide Justice Services

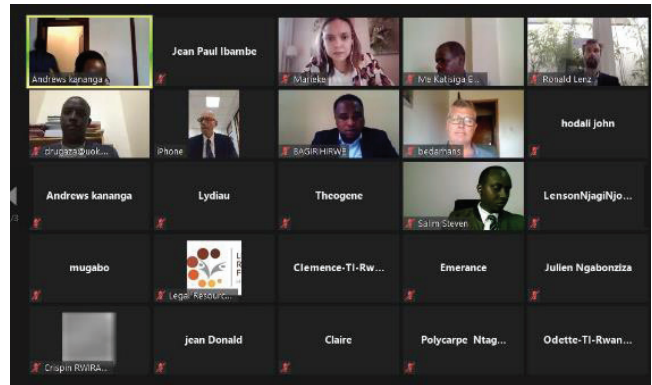


In July 2020, LAF organized a webinar to share best practices and innovations in justice delivery and make a case for their continued support. The webinar themed “Using ICT to Provide Justice Services” was also a learning opportunity for participants, particularly those intending to adopt similar approaches. It took place on 16 July 2020 and seventy-one (71) regional and international participants took part from Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Netherlands, Zambia, USA, and Denmark.

Key recommendations from the webinar included:

- The 845 system should be integrated with other existing systems like NIDA, IECMS, MAJ and Abunzi, and others, for easy information retrieval and sharing;
- Other countries that do not have such ICT initiatives should consider adopting them to advance access to justice and justice delivery in general;
- The sustainability in terms of service and finance of the existing innovations is a priority; donors and development partners should be engaged accordingly;
- HiiL will consider establishing an innovation hub in Kigali; and

➤ The Justice sector should modernize the models and processes developed in the past centuries, which are slow, difficult to use, and expensive.



A screenshot from the webinar with some of the active participants

1.3.2. Second approach: The Legal Aid Week

Since 2009, MINIJUST, LAF, RBA, and other Justice Sector Institutions conduct a legal aid week to help the vulnerable persons know about their rights and obligations, awareness of available legal services and those who provide them, and how to access them as well as awareness on the amicable settlement of disputes at the community level.

During the week, particular attention is paid to pending cases of vulnerable groups such as minors in conflict with the law, nursing mothers in detention, the sick and elderly, and women accused of different types of crime.

It is of utmost importance that these services were not halted even when the pandemic (COVID 19) was raging. Although Covid-19 is foremost a public health concern, its impact, as well as legal and policy responses by states, have much wider ramifications that can affect the ability of people to access justice in a timely, fair, and effective manner.

The crisis presents specific justice needs such as the rise in GBV cases, the economic fallout of communities, which makes inequalities more visible, loss of livelihoods, etc. Access to legal services and legal information is critical for empowering people and communities to address some of these issues during COVID 19 period.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, LAF adopted different approaches to avert the spread of the pandemic in line with the health measures in place were used including legal education and awareness through TV, radios, and social media as well as hotlines among others.

1.3.2.1. Objectives of the 2020 Legal Aid Week

The 2020 Legal Aid Week activities were carried out with the following objectives:

1. Helping the vulnerable to know their rights and obligations during COVID-19;
2. Legal representation in courts where needed;
3. Conducting public education and awareness about available legal services, those who provide them, and how to access them; and
4. Undertaking awareness activities about an amicable settlement of disputes at the community level.

1.3.2.2. The 2020 Legal Aid Week new approach

The 2020 legal aid week methodology was adapted to COVID-19 prevention measures. Outreach campaign comprised of the following:

1.3.2.2.1. Public education and awareness about legal rights and obligations through media

Legal education was conducted through television and radio talk shows as well as social media. Different themes related to access to justice and legal aid, specifically in the COVID-19 context, were discussed and listeners were allowed to ask questions on their justice-related issues. Electronic banners were posted and circulated on various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to raise awareness about the Legal Aid Week. The public was encouraged to interact and report any special cases or problems requiring LAF's or other institutions' attention.

The following themes were covered during the talk shows:

- Legal Aid Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic;
- Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), during COVID-19;
- The use of ICT in the provision of legal services, during COVID-19;
- Child protection and prevention of abuse during the COVID 19 pandemic;
- Court-annexed mediation in the Rwandan; and
- The role of CSOs in the provision of legal services.

Below is some information on the conducted talk shows.

1.3.2.2.1. TV talk show was aired on RBA on 25 October 2020

Theme: Legal Aid Services during COVID-19 Pandemic

Guests:

1. Me Andrews KANANGA, Executive Director Legal Aid Forum;
2. Mr. Narcisse MUPENZI, Community Justice Division Manager/Senior State Attorney, Ministry of Justice; and
3. Mr. Victor MUGABE, Executive Director, Rwanda Bar Association.



1.3.2.2. The Talk show aired simultaneously on TV and Radio 10 on 26th October 2020

Theme: Prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) during COVID-19

Guests:

1. KAYITESI Goretta, ANTI-GBV Officer, Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion;
2. UMURERWA Ninette, National Executive Secretary, Haguruka; and
3. MUREBWAYIRE Shafiga, Gender-Based Violence Crimes Division Manager, RIB.



1.3.2.2.3. Talk show aired simultaneously on Flash TV and Flash FM on 27th October 2020

Theme: Use of ICT in the provision of legal aid services during COVID-19

Guests:

1. Me Jean Paul IBAMBE, Project Coordinator, Legal Aid Forum;
2. Mr. Narcisse MUPENZI, Community Justice Division Manager/Senior State Attorney, Ministry of Justice; and
3. Mr. Victor MUGABE, Executive Director, Rwanda Bar Association

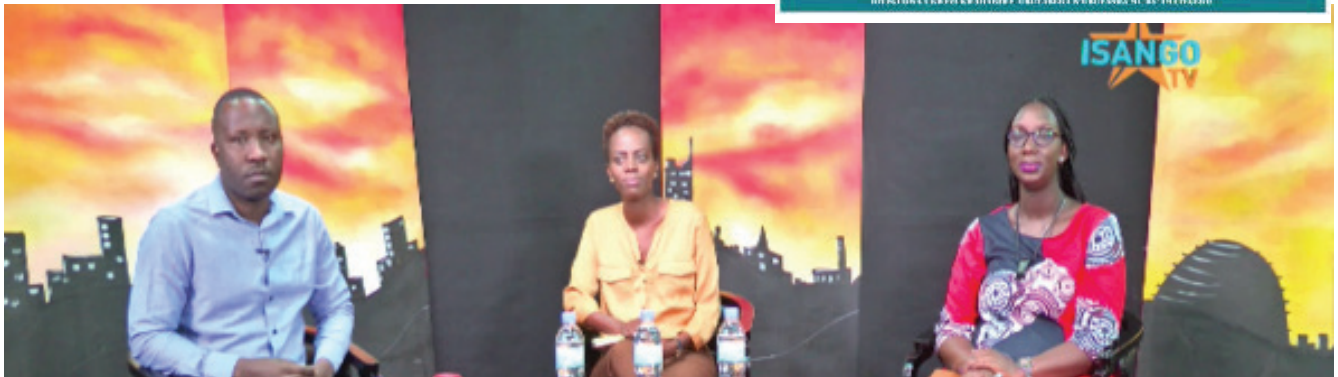


1.3.2.2.4. Talk-show aired simultaneously on Radio and TV Isango star on 28th October 2020

Theme: Child protection and prevention of abuse during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Guests:

1. Josianne NYIRAMONGI, Child Protection and Promotion Officer at the National Commission for Children (NCC);
2. Evariste MURWANASHYAKA, Programs Manager and Child Rights Focal Person at CLADHO; and
3. Me Marie Louise MUKASHEMA, Senior Legal Aid Attorney at Legal Aid Forum.



1.3.2.2.5. Talk show aired on Radio Rwanda on 29th October 2020

Theme: Court-annexed mediation

Guests:

1. Justice Harrison MUTABAZI, Spokesperson for the Judiciary in Rwanda; and
2. Bernadette UWICYEZA, ADR Advisor to the Judiciary of Rwanda



1.3.2.2.6. Talk-show aired simultaneously on 10 radio and TV stations on 01st November 2020

Media channels: Radio/TV Isango Star, Radio Isangano, Radio Ishingiro, Radio Izuba, Radio Huguka, Radio Inkoramutima, Fine FM Radio, Voice of Africa Radio, Authentic Radio, and Energy Radio

Theme: *The role of CSOs in the provision of legal services*



Guests:

1. Clarisse MUNEZERO, Senior Capacity Development Officer at LAF;
2. Me Beata UWIMABERA, senior Lawyer at ADL; and
3. Joseph KAJANGWE, Legal representative of ARDHO.

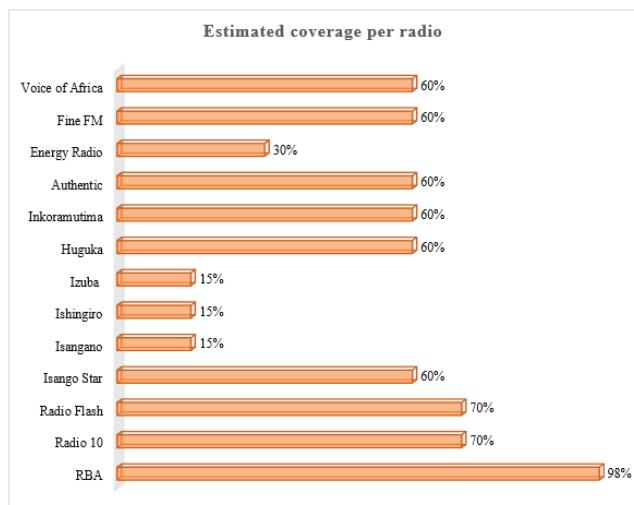


1.3.2.2.7. Estimated public reached by 2020 Legal Aid Week

Looking at the coverage of the media stations used for the awareness campaign it is obvious that a big number of citizens were reached. At least 70% of the Rwandan population had an opportunity to listen to 1 of the 6 talk-shows held during the legal

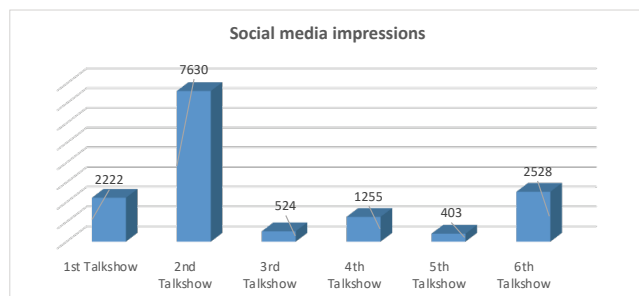
aid week. Comments and reactions received during the public education and awareness in media were also collected and responded to. A total of 94 citizens asked questions via social media or on-air.

Based on RURA’s report¹ on radios & TV coverage of the country, the following graph shows the estimated reach of the messages.



Before the campaign, an audio-visual spot was developed and broadcast on different media channels to raise awareness of the upcoming legal aid week. In addition to the audio-visual advertorial spot, electronic banners for every talk show were disseminated via LAF’s Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram pages. 14,562 people viewed all contents shared on social media for the legal aid week.

The graph below shows the impressions of each talk show banner and the spot:



¹ RURA, Radio stations approximate coverage in percentage and section 2 shows approximation coverage on maps as of 26th May 2020.

1.3.3. Use of toll-free lines

Today, a big number of Justice Sector institutions use toll-free/Hotlines to provide justice services. During legal aid week, these toll free legal aid helplines are dedicated to receiving and answering calls from citizens.

As a result, of the talk shows aired to raise awareness about the use of ICT to access legal aid, including legal education and advice, the number of citizens searching for legal content through LAF platforms skyrocketed during legal aid week. Through ICT platforms, Legal Aid Providers received 16,162 cases for legal advice. 48.5% of all cases were from women and 51.5% were from men.

1.3.3.3.1. Recommendations registered from 2020 legal aid week

The 2020, Legal Aid Week activities were carried out on traditional media channels and on social media. It initiated public education and awareness about the innovative and cost-cutting solutions that were put in place to circumvent the various constraints brought by COVID-19. It is important to underline that all ICT platforms currently in place call for continued public education and awareness. The 2020 media campaign did raise awareness thereof, but continued efforts are needed. The legal education activities undertaken by various legal aid providers should incorporate awareness about trends in the use of technology in the justice sector and requirements for legal service seekers, not only in terms of skills and understanding but also about financial implications. The latter components will be considered in the upcoming Legal Aid Weeks and elements to be considered will include both awareness and infrastructure required to further facilitate access to platforms already in place.

1.3.4. Third approach: Scaling up Grassroots Legal Empowerment in Rwanda through paralegal interventions

The Interventions of LAF are grounded in the recognition of certain political, economic, social, and legal factors that may have an impact on the various expected results. LAF works to promote and support access to justice for all vulnerable populations. An Equitable, functioning, and accessible justice system is crucial to combating poverty, promoting good governance, and the rule of law. It is a basic human right and an indispensable means of conflict resolution.

Therefore, to realize LAF's goal of equitable access to justice for all Rwandans, it is essential to put in place mechanisms for the provision of legal aid services. On that end, LAF has placed paralegals in all 30 districts in Rwanda to provide legal aid services in rural communities. With an in-depth knowledge of the community within which they live and work, paralegals can provide targeted advice and legal education. This addresses gaps relating to limited access to legal aid, especially at the grassroots level. To support their work, LAF provided bicycles to paralegal representatives at the district level to facilitate transportation as they move throughout communities, providing legal aid.

To ensure that paralegals are up to date on key laws and effectively provide legal aid, LAF conducts annual refresher training on different laws and legal aid performance standards. Additionally, LAF holds annual meetings with paralegal representatives to share best practices as well as any challenges they face during their work.

Different laws including the law governing land management, the law related to persons and family, the law related to matrimonial regimes

and succession, the law preventing and punishing Gender Based Violence, laws related to criminal and civil procedures, and the law related to public expropriation in Rwanda were used to prepare the training programs for Paralegals. Paralegals from all districts of the country benefited from these trainings.



LAF Paralegals are trained on a regular basis, so they provide quality services.

To address the issue related to the lack of working tools, LAF distributed diaries to Paralegals to document data and information on the services offered. This helped them to organize their data for effective reporting on the work done.

To address the issue related to weak reporting, LAF has established an online reporting mechanism through the SurveyCTO platform. SurveyCTO is a powerful and field-tested platform that allows users to collect high-quality data using mobile phones, tablets, or computers. To facilitate reporting on the work they do, 30 Tablets were distributed to paralegals (1 per district).

Paralegals were trained on how to use the tablets and report through SurveyCTO using a form developed by LAF. LAF monitors incoming reports in the SurveyCTO server for quality assurance of data sent by paralegals.



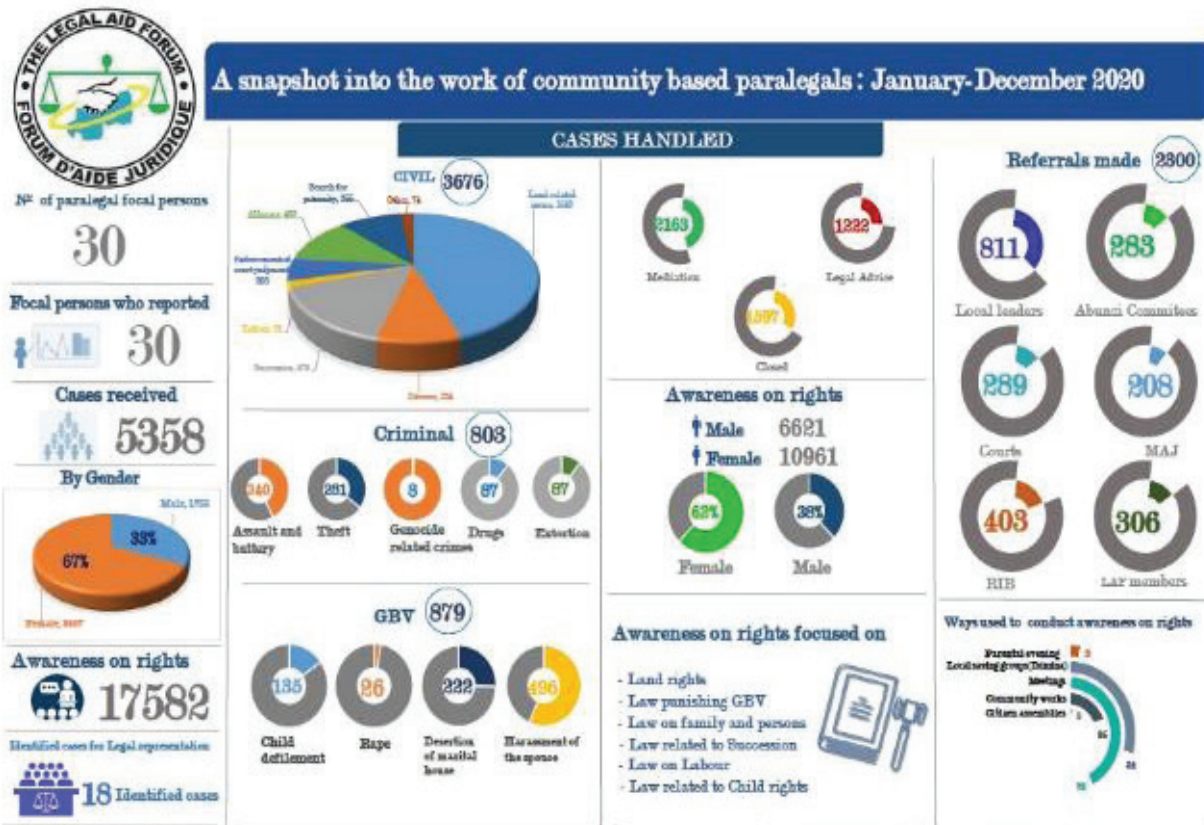
In the Kirehe district, a paralegal educating (training/teaching) citizens in the parental evening on child's rights

To address issues within rural communities, paralegals play a supportive role in assisting lawyers

who receive beneficiaries' legal issues on the telephone through the 845 platform. Paralegals help collect needed physical files from beneficiaries and bring them to LAF.

To address issues related to coordination and monitoring, focal persons were appointed to regularly follow and monitor the work of paralegals.

In 2020, 30 paralegals (representing each district in Rwanda) reported to have received 5,358 cases and conducted awareness on rights to 17,583 people. Below is a snapshot of the work of paralegals in 2020:



Focal persons: These are the Paralegals representing others at the district level. They collect data from paralegals within their respective districts and report by using tablets through SurveyCTO

A snapshot into the work of community-based paralegals in 2020

2. KNOWLEDGEBUILDING

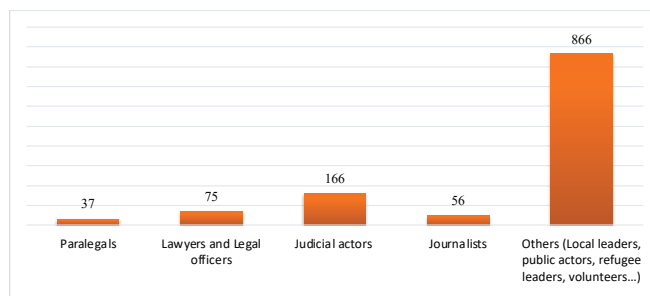
In 2020, under its strategic objective related to knowledge building, LAF worked to improve the quality and accessibility of legal aid services by reinforcing the capacity of all interveners in the area of legal aid as well as research. LAF has been engaged not only in the direct delivery of legal aid services across the country but has also been trying to set standards for quality legal aid services in the justice sector through capacity building of justice sector actors.

2.1. Capacity building of staff, members, and stakeholders

In 2020, LAF has identified capacity needs within some actors such as inconsistency in the provisions of legal aid services, lack of knowledge of some human rights principles, lack of knowledge of some applicable laws, etc. the identified needs helped in the designing of the training programs delivered in 2020. According to beneficiaries who attended trainings organized by LAF, these trainings have been an opportunity to gain more knowledge that is useful to their daily work. Such trainings offered them a space to learn from others' experiences.

In total 1,200 justice actors have been trained including lawyers, legal officers, judges, prosecutors,

investigators, journalists, paralegals, and local leaders at the district, sector, and cell levels and refugee leaders benefited from the training sessions organized by LAF. This number includes 358 people trained by LAF members under the projects implemented within the Legal Aid Civil Society Funds (LACSF) to permit them to gain needed knowledge for the smooth implementation of the projects.



Category of beneficiaries of LAF trainings in 2020

2.1.1. Topics covered during capacity building sessions

LAF is working to reinforce the capacity of all interveners in the area of legal aid. It aims at increasing their skills, professionalism, and ability to provide quality and accessible services to the population. In 2020, LAF did this through the organization of capacity-building sessions on different themes chosen to respond to the needs of participants and through the development of practice manuals.

In 2020, trainings organized were related to:

NO	Topic	Objectives of the training
1	The Legal Aid Performance Standards (LAPS)	To ensure high quality of legal aid services, LAF in collaboration with its partners developed Legal Aid Performance Standards. Legal Aid Providers and Paralegals have been trained on them to ensure great consistency in the delivery of legal aid services across legal aid providers operating in different parts of the country.
2	Conflict resolution and mediation	To help the Rwandan community and refugees' community enhance their ability to address various conflict issues that hinder the peaceful coexistence in a constructive and non-violent way.
3	Most useful laws	To enable Legal Aid Providers and Paralegals to use updated/current laws, trainings on the most useful laws were organized to provide them with useful knowledge needed in their daily work. Such laws include the law related to civil procedures, the law related to persons and family, the law related to GBV prevention and punishment, the law related to criminal procedures, the law related to the functioning of courts, etc.
4	Civil registration procedure	To enable refugee representatives to know the national procedures for registration of children (newborn babies) in the civil registration, so they can educate the members of refugee communities.
5	Refugee's rights and obligations:	To help local Rwandan leaders and other authorities that provide services to refugees to be aware of the rights of refugees on one hand; on the other hand, to help refugees to know their obligations from the national laws they have to respect.
6	Crime prevention	To raise awareness on the prevention of some crimes mostly noticed within the refugee communities such as drug abuse, SGBV, etc. The topic is intended to educate the refugee leaders about the sanctions punishing such crimes within the national laws.
7	International and national legal frameworks on freedom of expression and safety of journalists	To create a platform for knowledge building for participants on the national and international legal framework on underpinning the freedom of expression, access to information, and safety of journalists.
8	Training on human rights and judicial reporting:	To equip journalists with skills in judicial and human rights reporting, so that the citizens get the right information in the correct manner.



Participants posing for a group photo after the opening of Training of Trainers on the national and international legal framework on freedom of expression and safety of journalists on 8 December 2020

2.1.2. Trainings organized by other partners

LAF empowers its staff to enable them to perform well their duties. Two staff attended trainings organized by LAF partners as follows:

1. The procurement officer attended an online course on procurement organized by UNHCR, to gain skills in process of purchasing goods and services according to the requirements of UNHCR.
2. The project Coordinator for the legal aid to refugee project followed an online course on statelessness. He attended a training of legal aid providers on disability rights and inclusion organized by DIU and NUDOR and the training on advocacy for the rights of women in prisons organized by ARDHO.

2.1.3. Development of training modules and learning materials

2.1.3.1. Training module on the international and national frameworks on freedom of expression and safety of journalists

LAF has developed a training module on the international and national frameworks on freedom of expression and safety of journalists with support from UNESCO:

- Chapter 1 sets out the legal frameworks regarding the right to freedom of expression and how this right has been given effect in the national and regional context. However, the right is not absolute;
- Accordingly, chapter 2 explores the legitimate restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, as provided for in law and interpreted through various court decisions;

- Chapter 3 sets out the legal frameworks regarding the right of access to information with a particular emphasis on the important role that this plays in ensuring democratic political processes and sustainable development;
- Chapter 4 examines the safety of journalists, the issue of impunity, and highlights the physical risks that many journalists face in the pursuit of the truth;
- Chapter 5 explores contemporary challenges to freedom of expression that have arisen particularly through the exercise of the right online and how existing legal frameworks can be applied online; and
- Chapter 6, drawing on certain topics from the preceding modules, offers a gendered perspective on the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression, and how some of the challenges experienced affect women in unique and disproportionately severe ways.

This module was used for the training of trainers on the international and national frameworks on freedom of expression and safety of journalists and other trainings sessions on freedom of expression and safety of journalists conducted in 2020.

2.1.3.2. Training module on conflict resolution

LAF has developed a training module on conflict resolution. It highlights different steps and ways to be followed while solving problems between members of the community without causing other problems. It was used for the training session on conflict resolution.

It is worth noting that for other trainings, based on different human rights instruments and national laws, different modules, and presentations have been developed to be used in different training sessions.

2.1.4. Results of the trainings

Despite challenges caused by COVID in 2019, 2020 has been a successful year for the activities related to the capacity building of different actors within the justice sector. Participants in the trainings have been satisfied and ensured to use the knowledge gained to improve their daily work and recommended to LAF to continue the activities aiming to build the capacity of those intervening in the provision of justice/legal aid services.

The trainings on freedom of expression and safety of journalists allowed journalists to be aware of some useful principles followed by the courts that will guide them while reporting on cases treated by different courts. Such training also allowed us to discuss national legislation with regard to freedom of expression and safety of journalists, and identify some articles that need to be revised, for example, article 71 of the law related to civil, commercial, and administrative procedures because they are hindering the freedom of expression. Other further advocacy actions have also been identified. Through the session on conflict resolutions, participants learned methods to use in their daily work while dealing with the issues of citizens.



The Executive Director of LAF addressing the participants during the opening ceremony of Training for judges from Intermediate courts, High Court, and Court of Appeal on freedom of expression legal framework in December 2020.

The training on data management and reporting permitted LAF members to produce and submit good project reports regularly.

Refugees and local leaders have been equipped through the training they benefited with the knowledge that will allow them to respect the rights of refugees on one hand, and on the other hand, to respect the national laws because they also apply to refugees.

2.2. Research and Advocacy

Like in previous years, during the year 2020, LAF produced several important types of research used to generate strategies and advocacy. LAF plays a significant role in monitoring the indicators set by the state institutions in their policies on access to justice with information gathered from its

network, and through targeted research projects. LAF recommendations lead to concrete actions being taken to address human rights issues, reduce capacity gaps, and introduce innovative solutions to justice problems.

To achieve its research strategic objectives, LAF uses methods and techniques that proved to be effective in both qualitative and quantitative studies. Thus, consultation of existing documentation and reports on subject matters, secondary data collection through desk review and analysis, as well as first-hand data collections through interviews, FGDs, and surveys; data collection using ICT facilities and existing database constitute the main LAF methodological approach.

In addition, research is conducted by a team of qualified and experienced resource persons with the

support from either an ad hoc steering committee members, external reviewers, or stakeholders' working sessions to input and improve the research products.

Finally, well-printed copies of our research with relevant recommendations highlighted for the attention of various stakeholders are distributed to relevant institutions for further action. LAF researches have proved to be influential in the areas of Access to Justice, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law as they were used for advocacy.

Below is a summary list of research conducted by The Legal Aid Forum in 2020:

2.2.1. Research I: Fast Tracking Gender Equality in Law in Rwanda: Comprehensive Legal Analysis of Gender Compliance under Rwandan Laws

The Legal Aid Forum (LAF) conducted this legal analysis of gender compliance in Rwandan Laws in 2020 with the financial support from UN Women. The analysis had two aims: (1) reviewing laws that may discriminate explicitly (de jure) or implicitly (de facto)

based on gender, and (2) identifying any remaining gender gaps to be addressed by relevant institutions, so that Rwanda eliminates all gender discrimination in its laws. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with key stakeholders, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with key actors. This allowed for the verification and cross-checking of findings, as well as identification of enforcement-related gaps, where laws are not being enforced, or where laws are not themselves discriminatory but are applied in a way that leads to gender discrimination.

The findings suggest that, Rwanda has made significant efforts to prevent gender-based discrimination and promote equality between men and women. Despite these commendable efforts, some gaps still exist in the enforced laws, as well as some practical barriers that hinder the full attainment of equality between women and men. The key recommendations of this report include: (1) the repeal or amendment of several Rwandan laws that discriminate de jure or de facto based on gender (including some governing labor, the protection of the child, and succession). (2) Awareness-raising and capacity building to improve gender gaps in implementation and enforcement of certain laws. (3) The ratification of key ILO Conventions related to advancing gender equality.



The Executive Director of LAF (first left) chatting with Hon. Minister of Gender Equality and family Promotion (middle) and The Country Director of UN Women in Rwanda at the validation workshop.

2.2.2. Research II: Assessment of the Implementation of the National Legal Aid Policy (2014-2018)

The Legal Aid Forum (LAF) has conducted this assessment of the National Legal Aid Policy (NLAP) with the aim of understanding and analysing its status of implementation thus far, with a special focus on its initial implementation plan running from 2014 to 2018. To achieve this, a mixed methodology, combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis, was applied including an extensive review of the existing literature on the delivery of legal aid services in Rwanda, as well as interviews with key state and non-state stakeholders, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with non-state institutions active in legal aid. Findings highlight the lack (1) of full implementation of the NLAP, (2) of coordination of legal aid, (3) of a legal aid fund that was set to be established and fully operational by June 2015, and (4) of standardized training and capacity development strategy organized on ad hoc basis. Despite the ongoing challenges for legal aid providers, especially non-state actors, they have provided and continue to provide legal aid relatively well, not necessarily in conformity with the policy but according to their internal regulations and good practices. This assessment thus recommends: establishing a National Legal Aid Steering Committee, ensuring to draft all relevant legislation under this policy, establishing the Legal Aid Fund and allocation of a budget to the fund, developing a comprehensive Legal Aid Guide, setting up Operational and Quality Standards for Legal Aid Provision, and strengthening the delivery of legal aid services.

2.2.3. Research III: Situational Analysis of Teenage Pregnancy & Teen Mothers in Gatsibo, Rulindo, Musanze, Muhanga, and Rubavu

This project, conducted by AJPRODHO-JIUKIRWA in partnership with the Legal Aid Forum (LAF), aims at providing a situational analysis of teenage pregnancy and teen mothers in four provinces of Rwanda by (1) investigating the causes of teenage pregnancy, (2) analysing the effects of teenage pregnancy, and (3) assessing the access to justice needs of the teenage mothers. Qualitative data was collected through questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews with key informants, as well as through the observation technique. Secondary data was gathered through various national and international policy and legal documents.

The findings highlight that the leading cause of teenage pregnancy is defilement (49%), followed by peer influence (33%), though other factors such as technology development, the quest, and ring for material needs, lack of parenting and knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, were presented. Data collected indicates that the main effects of teenage pregnancy are dropping out of school (34%), poverty (32%), and stigma (25%). In relation to access to justice, this study revealed that only 15% of suspects' cases were taken to courts due to financial support from the suspect (46%), the prospect to get married (17%), and emotional attachment to male partners (16%). This study recommends that schools put much emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and consider it an important issue at primary and secondary school levels. In the same vein, policy makers should design programs, which encourage sex talk between parents and children to be disseminated to the community level while faith-based organizations (FBOs) design different ways of communicating the effects of teenage pregnancy and how it could be prevented.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND PROTECTION

With aim of actively engaging with the government on the protection of human rights, The Legal Aid Forum ensured its actions promoted the rights and freedom of the poor and vulnerable people based on the commitment to the international human rights standards and obligations.

In 2020, under this strategic objective, LAF used different interventions like assessing the implementation of the UPR recommendations submitting shadow reports in the enforcement of these recommendation, researching specific rights especially freedom of expression as well as other initiatives meant to promote and protect human rights.

3.1. Universal Periodic Review 2020

As part of its Human rights promotion and protection strategic intervention, The Legal Aid Forum is the convener of the Rwanda Civil Society Coalition on UPR². With the support secured from Swiss Cooperation through UNDP to conduct the monitoring of the implementation of UPR recommendations given to Rwanda for its review in 2020, LAF and members of the coalition conducted an assessment of the UPR recommendations.

The 2020 UPR project produced an assessment report³ by the coalition that focuses on the implementation of the recommendations made to Rwanda during the second review on 4 November 2015. In total, 229 recommendations were made. Out of the 229 recommendations, 50 enjoyed the support of Rwanda. 103 enjoyed the support of Rwanda but Rwanda considered some to have been implemented or in the process of being implemented while 75 did not enjoy the support of Rwanda and they were thus noted by Rwanda.

² Members of the coalition are as of today: CHRD (Center for Human Rights and Development), CERULAR (Center for Rule of Law Rwanda), FIYO (Fight Illiteracy Youth Organization), Strive Foundation Rwanda, Rwanda NGO Forum on HIV/AIDS, Never Again Rwanda (NAR), National Union of Disability Organizations of Rwanda (NUDOR), Faith Victory Association (FVA), Hope for Community Development Organization (HCDO), IMRO (Ihorere Munyarwanda Organization), LAF (Legal Aid Forum) Secretariat and some members of LAF namely : AJAR (Association des Jeunes Avocats du Rwanda), ADEPE (Action pour le Développement du Peuple), ADL (Association Rwandaise pour la Défense des Droits de la Personne et des Libertés Publiques), AJPRODHO-JIJUKIRWA (Association de la Jeunesse pour la Promotion des Droits de l'Homme et du développement), ARDHO (Association Rwandaise pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme), COPORWA (Communauté des Potiers du Rwanda), HRFRA (Human Rights First Rwanda Association), INALAS (Inara Legal Aid Services), INILAK-LAC (Independent Institute of Lay Adventists of Kigali- Legal Aid Clinic), LIPRODHOR (Ligue Rwandaise pour la Promotion et la Défense des Droits de l'Homme), LOH (The Network of Lawyers of Hope Rwanda), MPEDH (Mouvement des Peuples pour l'Education aux Droits Humains) and NCR (Non Crime Rwanda); Newspaper publications and Media Associations namely; UMUSANZU, IMPAMO, IMANZI, RUGALI, AMAHORO Newspaper, PAX PRESSE, MPH and Media Press House.

³ The Assessment Report is available here: https://www.legalaidrwanda.org/IMG/pdf/upr_assessment_report_2020_rwanda_cso_coalition.pdf



A cover page of the final assessment report on the implementation of 2015 UPR recommendations produced by the Civil society coalition on UPR convened by LAF.

The coalition hosted by LAF assessed all the recommendations that enjoyed the support of Rwanda, including those that the government considered to have been implemented or in the process of being implemented. The report is a product of information and data gathered by Coalition members from responsible Government institutions as indicated in the roadmap for UPR implementation, interviews with civil society organizations, and literature review from various institutional and country reports.

3.2. Promoting freedom of expression and its favorable legal framework in Rwanda

Since January 2020, with the funding from the European Union Delegation in Rwanda, LAF is implementing a two-year action titled “Promoting freedom of expression and its favorable legal framework in Rwanda – NDISANZUYE MU GUTANGA IBITEKEREZO”. The action’s overall objective is to improve the status of freedom of expression in Rwanda, specifically: 1) to advance freedom of expression and access to information through awareness, capacity building, and provision of legal aid, and 2) to improve regulatory and legal framework relating to freedom of expression and access to information through monitoring and advocacy. These objectives fall under the human rights promotion and protection strategic objective of LAF.

Despite the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic just two months after the kick-off of the project activities, the implementation of the action activities went smoothly. For this to happen, LAF had to adapt new ways of implementing the action activities during lockdowns.

To attain its specific objective, journalists and youth properly understand concepts of freedom of expression; several activities have led to this, such as organizing an awareness campaign targeting youth



During the training of journalists on Human Rights and judicial reporting, HE Ambassador of EU Delegation to Rwanda is delivering his opening remarks.

in local communities and the Rwandan population in general. Radio and TV talk shows and consultative meetings bringing together journalists and other relevant stakeholders on freedom of expression have also been conducted.

A series of similar sessions have brought together media practitioners, Rwanda Investigative Bureau (RIB), and other government stakeholders.



At least 60 Rwandan journalists benefited from the training.

Another category of activities concerning the provision of legal aid services (including representation before a court of law) to journalists and persons suspected of crimes related to freedom of expression continues to be done. Under this activity, the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), which is one of the project beneficiaries, has been and is being empowered to monitor freedom of expression.

Geared to promote respect for the right to information by building capacities and advocating for legal reforms. An analytical study on the implementation of the relevant international legal framework and the law relating to access to information has been conducted. This study assessed legislation, sought responses from its users, and assessed the legal framework of freedom of expression and access to information. In addition, citizens have acquired knowledge of the law relating to access to information in Rwanda.

For citizens to acquire knowledge, LAF was to organize an awareness campaign on access to information targeting youth, CSOs, public institutions, and private sector actors. Given the measures that were in place to stop the spread of COVID-19, this has been achieved merely by the use of Radio, Television, social media platforms as well as the LAF ICT platform, as known as the 845 service.





Legal experts from LAF stakeholders during the Freedom of Expression content development workshop in February 2020. To date, freedom of expression-related laws are uploaded and accessible by the citizen by calling 845 / *845# free of charge.

In regards to advocacy, where identified access to information issues are discussed with decision-makers, LAF intervened in different forums. These activities have contributed to resolving challenges of access to information and they have produced results on improved freedom of expression, were a step close to improved status of access to information, and freedom of expression in Rwanda, which is an expected impact of this action.

3.3. Promoting freedom of expression and safety of journalists through capacity building of justice actors in Rwanda

Aiming at promoting freedom of expression as a human right, with the support from The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The Legal Aid Forum (LAF) organized a series of capacity building sessions for justice sector actors namely judges, prosecutors and Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) officers on freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

The trainings focused especially on provisions of freedom of expression, access to information, and safety of journalists in regards to international and local legal frameworks.

These activities were under the UNESCO project: “Strengthening capacities of judicial actors in Africa on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists” aiming to foster freedom of expression, public access to information, and safety of journalists by reinforcing the capacities of judges and other actors of judicial systems on these issues, through hybrid trainings.

The trainings were designed for judicial officers in Rwanda, as they are essential partners in the development, interpretation, implementation, and enforcement of laws related to freedom of expression, press freedom, and the safety of journalists. It was especially important to involve the judiciary in the process of enhancing freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and to enhance their capacities and knowledge on related issues as they can furthermore contribute to ensuring a safe environment for journalists, good governance, and

more transparency through improving access to public information. The implementation of these activities was led by LAF and fully financed by UNESCO through the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

Under this project, the following activities were conducted: Development of a training manual, Training of trainers on the national and international legal framework on freedom of expression and safety of journalists, training for judges from Intermediate courts, High Court, and Court of Appeal and follow up workshops for justice chain actors on freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

Also, LAF conducted workshops for judicial actors namely judges, prosecutors, and investigators (RIB) staff on the regional/provincial level to facilitate them to discuss on the international and national frameworks on freedom of expression, the safety of journalists, and access to information.

These workshops have been organized at the provincial level and in the city of Kigali from 3 to 9 December 2020. In total, 95 participants attended that were made up of 32 women and 63 men.

In the 5 workshops organized, participants from judicial institutions attended as shown in the table above.

In the discussion sessions, the participants highlighted several issues and concerns. These included:

- Contempt by journalists of guidelines set by law enforcement on crime scenes to preserve it;
- Lack of collaboration and communication between the law enforcement organs and journalists, which hinders access to information for journalists;

- Lack of knowledge on some guidelines that are followed by certain judicial institutions such as court with regard to the provision of information; and
- Difficulty accessing information because journalists can only get it from the spokespersons of institutions, who are not always available.

Nonetheless, participants agreed that good work relationships and a smooth information-sharing framework would facilitate the performance of their duties as well as promote good governance and the rule of law. Representatives from the judicial institutions further commended journalists and the media at large on the progress made in the recent year. Similarly, they were happy with the progress they have made with regard to providing information and in terms of collaboration, which show an increase in appreciation and respect of the media in Rwanda.

From the five workshops, several recommendations were suggested:

- Similar workshops should be conducted regularly and should extend to local government officials;
- All judicial institutions to provide information to journalists in a timely manner;
- All judicial actors should be trained on access to information laws and freedom of expression;
- To enhance open justice, the rule of law, and the prevention of crimes; it was recommended that experts in judicial services and lawyers should liaise with main community-based radios to regularly hold discussions meant to enlighten the public

on laws and the working of the judiciary through radio specific programs;

- To educate journalists on how to respect crime scenes by abiding by law enforcement organs' rules; and
- To educate journalists on how to cover judicial stories professionally and smartly. They have to keep in mind the principle of presumption of innocence when collecting and broadcasting information.

3.4. Advocacy: Position papers

The research reports produced by The Legal Aid Forum form the basis for evidence-based advocacy. The credibility, professionalism, and quality of LAF research gave LAF a strong voice within the Justice, Reconciliation, Law and Order Sector (JRLLOS), and ensured that most of the recommendations are considered and acted upon.

In this regard, LAF produced and submitted a position paper on the draft law to the Parliament of Rwanda in 2020, which determines the organization of insurance business in Rwanda and indicates the provisions that have to be improved, to promote the respect of human rights in Rwanda. In addition, LAF participated in meetings of the Commission within the Parliament to discuss this draft law.

This year, LAF has also submitted to the Parliament a position paper on the draft law related to consumer protection. The position paper detailed some articles to be changed, added, or removed from the draft law to have a law protecting all citizens.

4. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to reinforce the LAF secretariat and its members' capacities to generate, allocate and use their human, technical and financial resources, LAF works to strengthen the relationship between the secretariat and the membership. LAF does this by building their capacities, up scaling their involvement in decision-making, in advising strategy design and in their technical functions of legal aid provision at the local and national level. In 2020, this was mainly done through provision of sub-grants to enhance organization and financial sustainability.

4.1. The Legal Aid Civil Society Fund (LACSF)

The Legal Aid Civil Society Fund (LACSF) is a grant making initiative of the Legal Aid Forum that started in 2008 and is supported by the Embassy of the Dutch in Rwanda. Projects are implemented by member organizations to provide legal aid services to indigent/poor and vulnerable Rwandans including legal representation in courts, legal assistance, legal advice, mediation, and legal information/education. In collaboration with the same donor, the Embassy of the Dutch in Rwanda, this program was resumed from 2018 to 2021. It is important to note that there is sufficient funding for a limited number of projects only. However, other members of the Legal Aid Forum with no funding will keep benefiting from other initiatives

such as capacity building, joint research projects, referrals, coaching on strategic NGO management, etc. The fund promotes the principle of diversified access to it by encouraging small, medium, and big organizations within the LAF network to apply.

The LACSF program consists of one-year rounds and each of them constitutes a whole project cycle. The steps in the cycle include the launching of the call for application, selection of projects by an Independent Selection and Monitoring Committee (ISMC), implementation phase, and project closure phase.

The LACSF has implemented 32 projects and benefited **126,326** people since 2008. From 2008 to 2013, twenty-seven (27) separate projects implemented by member organizations have been funded and **60,132** indigent/poor and vulnerable Rwandans directly benefited from services offered by LAF members countrywide. Since the fund was reinstated in 2018, the first round (Round I – 2019) implemented 5 additional projects that benefited a total of **66, 194** people.

This section highlights key elements of Round II of the program i.e. the round of projects that were implemented in 2020-2021. The report covers the processes of selection, the kick-off of selected projects, their performance, and as well as challenges faced.

4.1.1. Call for applications and Selection process

Fifteen applications were submitted to LAF by 14/10/2019. The nine (9) applications were considered for the next step i.e. full application process as follows. The nine (9) applications were considered for the full application process and six (6) applications were not considered. A capacity assessment was organized for the selected applicant organizations.

The assessment was conducted by UT CPA Ltd and the same audit firm is contracted to coach and audit those selected for implementation. Among the 9 assessed organizations, four (4) were ranked 'Low risk', three (3) of them were rated 'Medium risk' and the remaining two (2) were ranked as 'High risk'. Of the nine (9) full applications, the ISMC selected six (6) projects for funding based on the quality of their applications and the organizational capacity assessment.

A total of FRW 183,982,802 was allocated to the six projects as follows:

	Implementing Partner	Project budget
1	CESTRAR	30,396,700
2	COPORWA	27,144,500
3	UNILAK	35,823,808
4	AVEGA	33,765,500
5	ARDHO	30,206,719
6	ADEPE	26,645,575
Total		183,982,802

4.1.2. Signing of Cooperation Agreement and the start of project implementation

The Cooperation Agreements were signed on 4/2/2021 by legal representatives of the six (6) organizations of LAF together with the Executive Director of The Legal Aid Forum. This implementation period for those projects is between ten (10) and twelve (12) months i.e. from February 2020 to January 2021.

4.1.3. Implementation process and projects' performance

The Partners have implemented their projects and submitted to LAF the quarterly financial and narrative progress reports as required. This section briefly describes support for implementation by LAF, the performance of projects, and challenges.

4.1.4. Support for implementation and financial verification

The team of LAF continuously provided support whenever needed. The Grants Manager has been in contact with the implementing partners (IPs) on daily basis for support and the finance department team conducted a financial verification after 6 months of implementation. With regard to financial verification, the finance team assessed expenses and supporting documentation for each IPs. The financial verification reports were shared with respective organizations separately to comment on the findings and for the implementation of recommendations.

4.1.5. LACSF Project performance in 2020

The projects were meant to provide legal aid to citizens including legal education, legal advice, and orientation as well as legal representation. The following chart summarized the projects' targets and level of performance as of December 2020.

4.1.5.1. Legal representation

Performance indicator	Target (#)	Performance (#) as of December 2020	comment
# of civil cases	72	47	The general performance is 70.5% comparing targets and enrolled cases.
# of criminal cases	74	56	
Total	146	103	

4.1.5.2. Legal assistance (out-of-court)

Indicator	IP	Target	Performance	Comment
# of people provided with legal advice	ADEPE	550	293	The general performance is at 37.8%.
# of prisoners/detainees provided with various legal services	ARDHO	1,020	818	
# of wills, power of attorneys, directives	AVEGA	180	152	
# workers' issues resolved	CESTRAR	1,260	391	
# of people provided with legal aid services by paralegals and legal aid clinics	COPORWA	300	104	
# of people provided with various legal aid services	UNILAK/HRFR	1,500	59	
Total	Total	4,810	1,817	

Again, by December 2020, the number of beneficiaries reached by awareness-raising/sensitization activities was 11,965 people.

4.1.5.3. Financial performance

IP	Budget	Q 1- Q 3 Budget Consumption	Consumption Rate (%)
ADEPE	26,645,575	15,572,000	58.4
ARDHO	30,206,719	23,861,250	79.0
AVEGA	33,765,500	20,059,160	59.4
CESTRAR	30,396,700	17,021,004	56.0
COPORWA	27,144,500	19,355,385	71.3
UNILAK	35,823,808	21,339,770	59.6
Total	183,982,802	117,208,569	63.7

All together, the IPs have spent 63.7% of their budget in nine (9) months of implementation i.e. From February to the end of October 2020.

4.1.5.4. Implementation challenges and mitigation measures taken by implementers

The implementation process of this round experienced a challenge related to measures that were geared to curve the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This caused delays in the implementation of activities in general.

To respond to those challenges, the following measures were adopted or will be adopted:

- a) **Change in implementation techniques:** Activities that were initially planned to bring together a big number of people were adjusted to other strategies. These activities were mostly related to legal education and techniques such as radio talk shows were used;
- b) **Amendments to include non-cost extension:** adjustments were requested and accepted

to facilitate adaptation of activities to the context and this will be envisaged whenever necessary; and

- c) **Adjustment of the action plan of the whole program:** The process of the last round of the projects did not start in September 2020 as initially planned and adjustment will be needed.

4.2. Strengthening capacity of LAF Secretariat

4.2.1. Human Resource Management

Human resource management includes recruitment activities; drafting contracts and staff files management, monitoring of work time, absence and leave management, payment of remuneration, capacity development of staff, provision of health insurance, and Staff evaluation. All the above-cited activities were implemented for 96 LAF Staff in 2020.

In 2020, the work time (From Monday to Friday: from 8:00 until 12:30 and from 1:30 until 5:00 pm) was generally respected but some irregularities were noticed. From March 2020, the use of fingerprint Machines to manage the work time was stopped to avoid the spread of Covid-19 among Staff.

In 2020, five (5) contracts were drafted for the 5 new staff; 11 contracts were renewed for staff and 10 contracts were renewed for lawyers, and 45 contracts for Paralegals. In addition, a big number of staff were reminded to bring the remaining documents in their files.

In 2020, different types of leave requests were assessed by the operations department and given to staff.

4.3. Strategic communication and public relations

The rapid development in Information Technology (IT) has enabled Legal Aid Forum to exploit IT as a tool to obtain competitive advantages and conduct strategic communication. In 2020, the LAF IT department managed to upgrade our network infrastructure by purchasing our Cyber roam firewall license for one year upgrading our server antivirus.

In addition, a management information system (MIS) was designed by LAF to serve as the backbone of an organization's operations specifically in legal aid services.

This MIS gathers information from the beneficiary, analyzes the beneficiary information, and generates a report. In other words, it is a centralized system of Legal Aid cases in the institution, so far it is still in its 5 months testing/trail phase and we hope to launch it after that period. It is when we shall be confirming its completion after acknowledging feedbacks from users in charge.

LAF secretariat has been working very closely with communication officer to get new content to upload on the website; we also managed to upgrade our hosting space from 80GB to 160GB.

In addition, the IT team with the staff in charge of communications managed to design a new website structure and connected all pages. The team is still gathering all accurate data to be uploaded in the new structure and then publish it officially. The new structure is expected to have updated functionality and will accommodate more information compared to the previous one.

4.4. Financial highlights

The financial statements of the Legal Aid Forum for the year 2020 have been prepared in accordance with internal finance and administration regulations of LAF and they have been subject to an external audit. These financial highlights indicate: Consolidated budget, consolidated expenses, Balance, and percentages of variance.

4.5. Consolidated financial report

No	Items	Consolidated budget	Consolidated expenses	Balance	% of variance
1	Office running costs	96,091,586	84,350,022	11,741,564	88%
2	Personnel	319,792,743	303,702,768	16,089,975	95%
3	Financial Cost	6,167,152	1,464,153	4,702,999	24%
	Activities			-	
4	Research	125,896,569	125,800,000	96,569	100%
5	Training, meetings and retreats	68,846,240	47,367,004	21,479,236	69%
	Legal assistance costs			-	
6	Legal officers	106,860,984	106,860,980	4	100%
7	LACSF	186,220,000	208,599,392	(22,379,392)	112%
8	Lawyers' costs	92,700,000	92,100,000	600,000	99%
9	Bailiff	2,000,000	2,000,000	-	100%
10	Paralegals	125,243,303	102,354,398	22,888,905	82%
11	Legal docs including Legal Aid week	39,247,869	38,023,971	1,223,898	97%
12	Human rights	63,813,166	60,260,228	3,552,938	94%
13	Transport for detainees	508,750	543,500	(34,750)	107%
14	Visibility	4,500,000	4,593,931	(93,931)	102%
15	Awareness	2,700,000	2,116,600	583,400	78%
16	Advocacy	30,246,187	30,246,187	-	100%
17	Monitoring visit	5,435,233	2,777,500	2,657,733	51%
18	Call center set up	236,973,672	200,607,987	36,365,685	85%
TOTAL BUDGET		1,513,243,454	1,413,768,621	99,474,833	

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