



MEETING WITH ACADEMIA AND LIKE MINDED ORGANISATIONS

11TH OCTOBER 2013

PIATO RESTAURANT, LUMUMBA AVENUE
KAMPALA UGANDA

Funded By:



Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET)
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1. BACKGROUND

The Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET) is a national member-based NGO established in 2004 to provide strategic linkages and a collaboration framework for the Legal Aid Service Providers as well as maintain a common front to relevantly interface with various actors in the Justice, Law and Order Sector in Uganda.

It targets three critical aspects of coordination:

- Bringing together different legal aid service providers for solidarity in strategizing, sharing lessons and experiences, while minimizing duplication;
- Capacitating them through collaborative research and analysis in order to link the international/regional developments on legal aid to national interventions;
- Documenting, providing needed feedback, and amplifying voice on key issues regarding access to justice/legal aid at national level.

A number of member organisations to LASPNET are national NGOs known for their commitment to action in the various service delivery fields to improve the lives of poor, marginalized, and vulnerable people through provision of legal aid.

On the other hand, Universities and academia are recognized for their commitment to evaluation of evidence. However, most of the NGOs do not necessarily utilize data generated from their work experiences to build an evidence base.

The meeting was therefore organized to determine ways of bringing the best of these cultures together in an open-learning forum and through a very dynamic knowledge network that improves the performance of both entities.

2. RATIONALE

This dialogue is an attempt to influence the move away from usual NGO tendency of focusing internally among themselves without any deliberate efforts to challenge one another through some form of external assessment.

LASPNET wishes to use the periodic dialogues with the Academia and Like-minded Organisations in answering the following key questions:

- What important access-to-justice issues and legal aid concerns exist that require evidence from academic research?
- Who will use the evidence to take action and make a difference with clear contribution to the national development agenda?
- How can the key actors and stakeholder communities collaborate in the usage of the research – from research design through to impact evaluation – to make sure that the potential benefits are realised?

3. OBJECTIVE

The periodic dialogues with Academia and Like-minded Organisations are intended to pave new ways of encouraging and improving reciprocal complementarities for more actions in evidence-based programming.

Specifically, these engagements are planned to systematically guide strategic efforts through which evidence is taken into consideration when developing legal aid programmes to address the various challenges faced by poor, marginalized, and vulnerable people. This entails:

- Generating evidence from research findings in the course of the systematic collection of field data through observation and experiment, the formulation of questions, as well as testing of hypotheses
- Making decisions about how to promote adequate living standards or provide legal, psychosocial, and other needed support by integrating the best available evidence with service provider expertise
- Identifying ways in which the decisions made can be based on characteristics, state, needs, values and preferences of those who may be affected while also considering the environmental and organizational contexts

4. ACTIVITIES

The dialogue started with registration of the participants in attendance and those who sent their regrets were made known to the meeting.

After the registration, participants were served to a luncheon. The Chairperson of the LASPNET Board, Ms. Salima Namusobya, eventually gave a brief word of welcome followed by opening remarks from the Executive Director.

The Chairperson noted that such a dialogue was long overdue. She proposed that engagements between Legal Aid Service Providers and the academia should be held more frequently in order to exploit the mutual benefits from both entities.

In addition, the Executive Director emphasized the need for improved use of evidence based programming in legal aid service provision. He drew particular attention to areas of policy advocacy, action learning, and impact evaluation.

An open discussion was held in which participants were first introduced to the three key questions that LASPNET wishes to answer during these dialogues. It was agreed that access to justice, particularly legal aid, and the field of academic research both contribute to existing efforts in the national development agenda. As such, there is need for deliberately creating synergies to nurture evidence based practices as an interdisciplinary approach to legal aid service provision.

Most of the Legal Aid Service Providers reported difficulties in conducting research but also have limited capacity for generating evidence from research findings. In fact they have made observations and experimented on certain approaches of doing work but still fail to formulate the relevant research questions. Incidentally, those few that manage to make relevant studies do not adequately conduct the process of testing hypotheses in ways that lead to making complex decisions required to promote adequate living standards beyond provision of legal, psychosocial, and other usual support yet the actual needs of the clients are enormous.

It was established that the academia can help in generating evidence from research findings and experiment with Legal Aid Service Providers (LASPs) through action learning to promote better standards of living for indigent persons. On the other hand, the experience of LASPs was deemed as valuable in contextualising the evidence generated so that it is based on characteristics, state, needs, values and preferences of those segments of society who are mostly affected.

It was observed that in terms of measuring success in the work of civil society- LASPs are particularly grappling with lack of a clear understanding of success, for instance would you say that because you managed to get so many clients into court then that is success or would success be measured at the point where the clients have eventually achieved what they wanted out of the court process?

Academic institutions are faced with the challenge of students struggling to identify research topics while the work of civil society is hampered by trying to design the most appropriate interventions in addressing the problems of their target beneficiaries. Therein lies the key linkage through which we can innovatively support each other in surmounting these challenges and positioning ourselves more relevantly.

Civil society and in particular the LASPs perceive themselves not as opponents but rather as complementary partners to Government in the development of the country. However, while that is the perception on our part, the same may not necessarily be true in the understanding of Government largely due to differences in opinion on national priorities, many of which civil society cannot defend because we lack the evidence to do so.

In the same regard, there are real difficulties in measuring the impact of LASPs in terms of legal and policy advocacy. This is largely so because as complementing partners to Government, the role of LASPs is simply to contribute to various efforts by the state and other players towards making laws and policies.

The members were of the view that the core role of any Civil Society Organization (CSO) is to empower citizens and contribute towards transforming their lives and yet the focus for most CSOs today is simply on offering basic legal counsel and court representation. Academia in this regard, should help us answer the following questions such as; what is meant by empowerment; what would be the most effective method(s) of empowerment; what are the bench markers for empowerment – academia should help us define these bench markers.

The meeting observed that many organizations are offering psychosocial support but without any visible tangible effects amongst their beneficiaries. The discussion suggested that there is need to tap into available expertise and tangible models amongst the academia and like-minded organizations in order to provide real psychosocial support and legal aid.

During the discussion on Monitoring and evaluating the impact of the work of civil society, the meeting acknowledged that this has remained a challenge fundamentally because the work of most CSOs is project based. These projects usually have a time frame of 2 years, which implies that after the project, even the M & E processes come to a close and yet some of the project activities for instance capital offences in court take a while – so you really cannot assess the impact. The members proposed that it is important to tap into the technical expertise of the academia to execute baseline surveys for CSOs in order to make a case for longer projects with the donors.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of suggestions were made by the participants as summarised below:

- The LASPs should collaborate with the academia in order to explore ways of translating existing models and the myths around them into potential research studies that can inform more effective and innovative interventions and achieve tangible results in terms of transforming lives.
- There is urgent need for a Justice Survey; this has not been conducted since 2004 - therefore we are not in position to evaluate how well the courts are operating, how many people are accessing justice or even how long it takes on average to conclude a matter in the Justice System among other key components of the operations of the Judiciary.
- We should be encouraged as CSOs to start conducting baseline surveys before implementation of activities as this would help in assessing the impact of our interventions
- We should institute mechanisms for receiving and evaluating feedback and levels of satisfaction for both staff and clients.
- CSOs should engage more of local academia in baselines and consultancies because they have a better understanding of the local context
- Data collected from CSOs' field activities should contribute to curricula for teaching university students and should be aligned to the skills needed in the civil society sector
- In a bid to reap the best out of this partnership, engagements should be properly focused on one access to justice issue at a time, for example structural access, information access among others.

6. KEY ACTION POINTS

The following actions were identified as the most critical for implementation within the short and the intermediary term:

- Map out all legal aid service providing organizations across the country in terms of geographical location, thematic area of focus, institutional capacity, objectives, values, beneficiaries and legal status among other critical features that could help in highlighting areas for mutual engagement [LASPNET]
- Academia should start by building the research capacity of CSOs with emphasis on action research which is impact focused [Academia]
- Set up a resource centre where all information gathered from the academia and or LASPs can be placed or accessed from for reference purposes. [LASPNET]

7. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

These strategic engagements are of mutual interest both to Civil Society (especially the LASPs) and the Academia and it is anticipated that they will result into changes in policy, practice and Access to Justice Outcomes among marginalised populations

LASPNET, the Academia, and Like-minded Organisations will engage with one another through dialogue and learning in order to support each other in the development of innovative access to justice interventions.

It is hoped that this engagement will lead to the production of publications, stories of best practice, proposals, and models derived from practice. It will establish innovative practices, educational programmes and models, and collaborative networks for sharing knowledge.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

S/N	NAME	ORGANISATION	DESIGNATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
1.	Salima Namusobya	ISER	Executive Director	snamusobya@gmail.com
2.	Lenah Naddunga	Muslim Center for Justice and Law	Programmes Manager	nadlenkibohe88@yahoo.com
3.	Dorah Mafabi	Public Interest Law Clinic - MUK		
4.	Walulya Fredrick	Micro Justice Uganda	Executive Director	Fredrick.walulya@microjusticeuganda.org
5.	Gard Benda Ntegyereize	World Voices Uganda	Executive Director	gardbenda@yahoo.com
6.	Richard Muganzi	LASPNET	Executive Director	richard.muganzi@gmail.com
7.	Naimah Bukenya	Avocats Sans Frontiere	Programme Officer	OUG-asf2@asf.be
8.	Fred Kahwa	AHURIO	Programme Coordinator	ahuriorwenzori@gmail.com
9.	Jolly Mukooyo	LASPNET	Research and Advocacy Officer	jtmukooyo@gmail.com
10.	Juliana Musaazi	LASPNET	Accounts and Administration Officer	jmusaazi@yahoo.com
11.	Sandra Oryema	Public Interest Law Clinic - MUK		soryema@gmail.com
12.	Henry Nsubuga	Counseling and Guidance Center - MUK	Manager	hnsbuga@cgc.mak.ac.ug

PROGRAMME

DATE: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11th, 2013 VENUE: PIATO RESTURANT, KAMPALA

TIME: 02:00 – 05:00 PM

TIME	SESSION	PRESENTER	CHAIR
02:00 - 02:10 pm	Registration of Participants		LASPNET
02:10 – 02: 30 pm	Welcome And Opening Remarks	LASPNET National Coordinator	
02:30 – 04: 50 pm	<u>Key Guiding Questions</u>	Open Discussion	
	1. What important access-to-justice issues and legal aid concerns exist that require evidence from academic research?	All Participants	
	2. Who will use the evidence to take action and make a difference with clear contribution to the national development plan?	All Participants	

	3. How can the key actors and stakeholder communities collaborate in the usage of the research – from research design through to impact evaluation – to make sure that the potential benefits are realised?	All Participants	
	Way Forward		LASPNET
04:50 – 05:00 pm	Group Photograph		LASPNET
	Closure and Departure		