

NEWSLETTER

July 2021



The month of July, from beginning to end, found Uganda in a total lockdown, which was imposed to curb the spread of the second wave of COVID-19. This meant that FIDA Uganda's work was focused on responding to the emerging human rights concerns which both the pandemic and lockdown brought about and adapting our working methods in order to carry out our mandate while adhering to official guidelines.

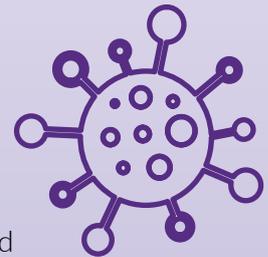
ENHANCING ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

Case Statistics

During the month of July, a total of **1,281 cases** were handled at our **15 field offices**. Out of these, a total of **812 clients were female** and **469 were male**. The majority of cases handled during the month concerned issues of **child maintenance and custody, domestic violence and land matters**.



Providing legal aid services during a total lockdown



The 42-day lockdown imposed from 18th June 2021 had a significant impact on FIDA's operation since our clients and staff were not able to travel using public or private vehicles, the police officers that we work with were occupied with the enforcement of lockdown provisions and courts were operating at only 10% of their capacity. At the same time, the lockdown caused an upsurge in human rights violations and family issues for FIDA's targeted populations. We were therefore determined to ensure that vulnerable women and children in our areas of operation could access justice, regardless of the lockdown measures.

Equipped with our experiences and lessons from the 2020 lockdown, we took immediate steps to make online services available. We circulated our toll-free number and the telephone numbers of our offices across the 19 districts of operation on social media so that our clients would know that we were available during the lockdown and how they could reach us. An [article](#) was published in the New Vision setting out concrete steps which women facing domestic violence in a closed setting could take in order to get help. An experienced counsellor joined

the FIDA team at the beginning of July in order to provide tele-counselling to our clients across the country.

FIDA lawyers conducted tele-mediations which involved setting up a meeting between conflicting parties over the phone and guiding the process to help them resolve the issues at hand and agree on a way forward. This method enabled us to provide legal aid to our clients without physically meeting together. We registered various successful tele-mediations during this period. In one such case, a police officer based in Kotido refused to contribute to the maintenance of his child and the mother of the child phoned the Kotido office in order to receive legal aid. The said police officer, along with the Officer in Charge of the Police Station, were engaged in a conference call organized by the FIDA lawyer in the district. By the end of the

tele-mediation, the police officer agreed to make monthly payments toward the upkeep of his child.

Local Council leaders, cultural leaders and Community Legal Volunteers associated with FIDA have been active within communities during this period and have supported clients, resolved cases and referred matters as appropriate. In some districts, our officers were able to obtain permits which allowed them to keep using their vehicles during the lockdown, thereby enabling us to continue carrying out rescues, moving to clients who lived too far away to walk to our offices or did not have their own phones and connecting with other justice institutions and service providers. Where necessary and possible, we conducted locus mediation in person, while adhering to the required SOPs.

A locus mediation carried out in Lwengo district on 28th July 2021, while adhering to SOPs.



Through our innovative legal aid service delivery during the lockdown period, FIDA Uganda made an impact in the lives of our clients and overcame the barriers and restrictions in order to enhance access to justice to vulnerable women and children.■

ADVOCACY



The human rights implications of COVID-19 and lockdown measures on women

FIDA Uganda have joined the district task forces on COVID-19 in Kabale, Napak and Iganga in order to advocate for a gender-sensitive response to the pandemic. Due to FIDA's participation on these task forces, working relationships with justice actors and partner organizations have been strengthened in order to overcome the limitations which the lockdown season imposes and provide a united response to reach out to vulnerable people in emergency situations in particular.

On 9th July 2021, FIDA hosted a Tweet Chat entitled *State-Society Relations: Assessment of the Covid-19 response in the 1st and 2nd lockdowns*. The Tweet Chat was moderated by the well-known journalist Josephine Karungi and presented the views of journalist Angelo Izama, Economic Development Analyst Olga Nakato Mugerwa and OSIEA Deputy Director Sarah Mukasa. Members of the public actively engaged in discussions and brought the point across that the government had not incorporated learning from the first lockdown when imposing the second lockdown, as far as women's rights are concerned. The Tweet Chat had a reach of 823,650. The points raised during the chat will be presented to the National Covid-19 Task Force in order to guide their future handling of the pandemic. ■

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons

FIDA Uganda ran a social media awareness campaign on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons on 30th July 2021. The organization has been working with Police in order to intercept cases of domestic trafficking from the Karamoja sub-region and have made various recommendations to government on the basis of this experience, including the prioritization of investigation and prosecution of traffickers who exploits children and expanding resource allocation and support to NGO that provide protective services to victims. A commentary echoing these recommendations in respect of domestic trafficking in persons was published in the New Vision newspaper and was also shared during a pan-African [webinar](#) organized by Webina Impact and the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). A FIDA

Officer also featured on Power FM in order to discuss FIDA's experiences with trafficking in persons in Uganda, the legal framework combating trafficking, the risk factors and what can be done in a practical sense within communities. ■



STRATEGIC LITIGATION

Amicus curiae observations in case of The Prosecutor v Dominic Ongwen (ICC)

During the month of July, FIDA Uganda has been granted leave to submit amicus curiae observations to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in order to support the fair and expeditious conduct of reparations proceedings in favour of victims of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in Northern Uganda. The Trial Chamber IX of the ICC convicted the Brigade Commander of the senior brigade of the LRA, Dominic Ongwen on 61 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including forced marriage, rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and the recruitment of children to participate in hostilities. This conviction recognizes the right to reparations for LRA victims in Northern Uganda, which will be made available through the ICC Trust Fund for Victims. FIDA Uganda has been granted leave to file observations in support of the reparations proceedings on the basis of our long-term engagement in transitional justice processes in Northern Uganda, including through provision of legal aid services, economic empowerment, strategic interest litigation, advocacy and legal education. FIDA Uganda's amicus observations will address victim participation in the reparation process as well as suggested types of reparations, in the hope of contributing significantly to the reparations proceedings and ensuring that the unique needs of the LRA war victims are finally met. ■



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Photo: Anadolou Agency



Plot 4, Robert Mugabe Road.
Off Chwa 11, Mbuya.
P. O. Box 2157. Kampala-Uganda



Tel: +256-414-697-067
Toll free: 0800-111-511



Email: fida@fidauganda.org
www.fidauganda.org