



# SPOTLIGHT

## MARCH 2026

# Our Reach (March 2026)

## Call Center

Via our Legal Aid Helpline, we provided legal aid to **39** (**22** male, **17** female) individuals,

## Legal Representation

**5** women were presented in court.

## Walk-ins

We provided legal assistance to **12** (**6** women, **6** men) individuals who came to our offices seeking support,

## Community-Based Paralegals

Our community-based paralegals assisted **395** (**248** women, **147** men) individuals.

## ADR Center

We handled **13** cases (**3** women and **10** men) at the ADR Center, providing mediation services to community members.

## Legal Awareness

Community-based paralegals provided legal education to (**5,572**) individuals through community outreach campaigns on family law, land law, and gender-based violence, while Interactive Voice Response (IVR) reached **95** (**45** women, **50** male) individuals with pre-recorded legal education messages,

## 2026 ANNUAL DIALOGUE ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE WITH LEGAL AID SERVICE PROVIDERS

On 4 March, we convened the 2026 Annual Dialogue on Access to Justice with Legal Aid Service Providers, marking 20 years of advancing Access to Justice in Rwanda.

For two decades, legal aid service providers have worked to ensure that justice is not only a principle enshrined in law, but a service accessible in people's daily lives. Through legal representation, legal advice, legal awareness, and mediation, they have supported hundreds of thousands of individuals particularly those facing financial, social, and informational barriers in navigating the justice system.

Despite this progress, significant challenges remain. Many vulnerable individuals continue to face financial constraints, limited legal awareness, geographic barriers, and a persistent gap between the demand for legal aid services and the resources available.

The gathering brought together key legal aid actors to reflect on progress, share experiences, and strengthen coordination across Rwanda's legal aid ecosystem. It provided a platform to learn from one another and identify opportunities for deeper collaboration in expanding access to justice.



Our Executive Director highlighted our contribution over the past six years. From 2020 to 2025, our members reached over 10 million people through legal education initiatives. During the same period, they provided legal representation in 3,025 cases, offered legal advice to 187,013 individuals, and supported 115 people in accessing DNA testing demonstrating a sustained commitment to expanding access to justice through diverse legal aid services.

The Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice said that justice is not merely a concept on paper, but a mechanism that must be implemented daily.

The dialogue also featured a panel discussion on approaches to legal aid service delivery, with contributions from the Rwanda Bar Association, the University of Rwanda Centre for Legal Aid and Mediation, and Haguruka. Panelists shared practical experiences and perspectives on how different institutions are contributing to the advancement of access to justice in Rwanda.



## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON UPR RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE MEDIA SECTOR IN RWANDA

On 31 March, we convened a multi-stakeholder roundtable dialogue on Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations related to Rwanda's media sector. The dialogue brought together journalists, government representatives, civil society organizations, and development partners to reflect on progress across UPR cycles (2011–2026) in advancing media freedom, access to information, and the enabling environment for journalism. The discussion assessed how UPR recommendations have been implemented in practice, highlighting key achievements as well as persistent legal and structural challenges affecting media independence and journalists' work. It also provided a platform to identify gaps and priority actions needed to strengthen media freedom and access to information following the fourth UPR review cycle.



During the opening session, key reflections were shared by participants. Our Executive Director emphasized that media freedom and access to information are not optional, but essential pillars of human rights and democratic governance. He underscored the importance of ensuring that journalists operate in an enabling environment that allows them to effectively fulfill their role.

Michael Ngabirano, Senior Human Rights Adviser at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), noted that the UPR mechanism remains underutilized by the media fraternity and encouraged journalists to engage with it more actively as a tool for accountability and human rights advocacy.



Annonciate Ndikumasabo, representing the Embassy of Switzerland, reaffirmed the continued relevance of the UPR as a strong United Nations human rights mechanism and reiterated the Embassy's ongoing support for its implementation.

Through the presentations and panel discussion, several key insights emerged. Participants reflected on the evolution of Rwanda’s media sector, noting progress made across UPR cycles, including increased engagement with recommendations and reforms aimed at promoting media professionalism, ethics, self-regulation, and access to information.



A presentation by Mugisha Emmanuel, Executive Secretary of the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), highlighted the role of the 2011 Media Policy in shaping the sector in the post-1994 context, particularly in strengthening professionalism and self-regulation. He also noted that current challenges including digital transformation, misinformation, and sustainability pressures require a more comprehensive and updated policy framework.

Our Executive Director presented an overview of media-related UPR recommendations across Rwanda’s four review cycles, highlighting growing acceptance and engagement over time, as well as areas where implementation has progressed. He also underscored persistent gaps, including ongoing legal and regulatory constraints, emerging digital challenges, and barriers that continue to affect media freedom and access to information.



The panel discussion placed strong emphasis on these key points, particularly the urgency of adopting the revised media policy, which is expected to guide updates to media-related legislation and institutional frameworks. Panelists also highlighted the importance of continued capacity building for journalists, as well as the development of sustainable financing models for the media sector.

They further stressed that any progress must remain grounded in ethical journalism, inclusion, and the protection of media independence.

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARALEGALS TO ADVANCE HUMAN RIGHTS

On 25-26 March, our team conducted a training for community-based paralegals of our member organization ADEPE Rwanda, held under the theme “Strengthening Community Paralegals to Advance Human Rights.”

The training aimed to enhance the capacity of community paralegals to advance access to justice by reinforcing their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. It also focused on key principles of professional conduct, ethics, and confidentiality in paralegal practice, as well as strengthening practical mediation skills to support the effective resolution of disputes at the community level.

In addition, the sessions provided participants with updated knowledge on human rights frameworks in Rwanda, as well as key thematic areas including gender-based violence, child protection, and disability inclusion.



Special emphasis was placed on strengthening practical skills in case documentation, referral pathway navigation, and community legal education. These capacity-building efforts are designed to ensure that community paralegals are well equipped to respond effectively to the realities they encounter in the communities they serve. By strengthening their skills and knowledge, the training contributes to improving the quality and reach of grassroots legal aid services, ultimately advancing access to justice for vulnerable populations.

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## COMMEMORATION OF 2026 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



On 25 March, the One UN Rwanda Country Team, under the coordination of the Gender Equality, Human Rights, Diversity and Inclusion (GHRDI) Group, organized a dialogue in Kigali as part of the commemoration of International Women's Day 2026. Held under the global theme "Rights, Justice, Action: For ALL Women and Girls" and the national theme "Empowered Women, Stronger Nation," the event aligned with key outcomes of CSW70 and Rwanda's broader gender equality commitments.

Our Director of Programs participated in a panel discussion on "Normative progress and gaps in policies and laws." She brought a frontline perspective on what it takes to translate rights into tangible realities for women and girls. Drawing from the work of our network, she highlighted practical pathways that have expanded access to legal aid services, particularly for women and girls in rural areas. These include the deployment of community-based paralegals across all districts, mobile legal aid clinics that reach women where they are, and remote legal assistance through the dedicated legal aid call centre "1022."

She emphasized that these are not abstract systems, but concrete interventions that make justice accessible for many vulnerable individuals who would otherwise have no avenue for redress.

She also underscored persistent challenges, noting that barriers to justice are less about the existence of legal frameworks and more about structural and societal constraints. These include low awareness of rights and laws, entrenched patriarchal norms, financial barriers, stigma, economic dependence, and the limited resources available to legal aid providers all of which continue to hinder women from fully claiming their rights.

In her call to action, she stressed the importance of sustained funding for frontline legal aid service providers, as well as stronger coordination among stakeholders across sectors.

## REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON TRADITIONAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

On 25-26 March, our Executive Director participated in the Regional Conference on Traditional Dispute Resolution, hosted by Ethiopia's Ministry of Justice in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The conference brought together policymakers, justice actors, and practitioners to explore how traditional dispute resolution systems often the most accessible and widely used mechanisms across the African continent, particularly in underserved communities can be strengthened, formalized, and better aligned with constitutional and human rights standards.

Rwanda was featured in the programme, with established models such as Gacaca Courts and Abunzi mediation committees highlighted as practical examples of institutionalized, people-centered justice systems that enhance accessibility and promote social cohesion.



Key discussions focused on harmonizing customary and formal justice systems, addressing persistent gaps related to gender equality and due process, scaling innovations in community justice, and developing a regional roadmap for cooperation and policy reform across member states.

On the sidelines of the conference, our Executive Director also held a courtesy meeting with a fellow ACE Africa member organization, Ethiopian Lawyers Association, to strengthen collaboration and advance shared learning on people-centered justice solutions across the continent.

## COURTESY VISIT FROM OUR PARTNER



On 3 March, we were pleased to welcome Lorenzo M. Wakefield from our partner, the Mott Foundation. His visit provided an important opportunity for strategic reflection on the progress achieved over the past year, as well as meaningful discussions on priorities for the period ahead.

During his visit, he also visited the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the Judiciary, where discussions focused on the cooperation we have and the work we are doing together to bring legal aid services closer to the people. We deeply value this continued partnership and our shared commitment to advancing community-driven justice solutions.

Since 2019, the Mott Foundation has been a key partner in supporting our efforts to scale up grassroots legal empowerment in Rwanda. This collaboration has particularly focused on strengthening the capacity of community-based paralegals, who play a vital role in expanding access to justice for vulnerable communities.





## **COURTESY TO PARTNER ORGANIZATION FIDA-UGANDA**

On 12 March Our Executive Director paid a courtesy visit to our partner organization, FIDA Uganda, in Kampala. The visit provided a valuable opportunity to deepen engagement and exchange insights on advancing access to justice across the region.

Discussions focused on opportunities for cross-country learning and collaboration, particularly in addressing the legal needs of vulnerable populations. Both organizations shared experiences, best practices, and innovative approaches to legal aid service delivery, with a view to strengthening impact and expanding reach.

The engagement also underscored the importance of building synergies among legal aid actors beyond national borders. By learning from each other's experiences and aligning efforts where possible, institutions can better respond to the complex and evolving justice needs of communities.

Strengthening regional partnerships remains critical to building more responsive, inclusive, and people-centered justice systems. Through continued collaboration, we can move closer to ensuring that access to justice is not only a right in principle, but a lived reality for all.

# LEGAL AID HELPLINE



DIAL

1022



REMINDER

Call our free legal aid Helpline to get assistance from a lawyer or listen to legal aid Information