



UGANET LEGAL AID MODEL

A RIGHTS BASED, COMMUNITY CENTERED FRAMEWORK FOR ACCESS
TO JUSTICE FOR HEALTH, HIV AND GENDER.



Table of contents

List of Acronyms	3
Foreword	4
Executive Summary	5
Background and Introduction	6
Objectives of the Legal Aid Model.....	7
Service Areas / Legal Issues Covered	7
Target Groups and Eligibility for Legal Aid Services	8
Scope of Legal Aid Services	8
b) Legal Advice and Counselling.....	9
c). Shelter Home for safety and psychosocial support services.	9
d) Legal Education and Awareness	11
f) SASA! Together: Embedding Social Norm Change within UGANET’s Legal Aid Model 11	
f) Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).....	14
Medical–Legal Integrated Approach.....	15
The UGANET Beam Light Model	18
a) Legal Aid Service Delivery and Mobile Litigation Support.....	18
b) Community Empowerment	19
c) Early Detection of Violations	20
d) Integrated Response System.....	21
e) Accountability and Follow-Up.....	21
Strategic Litigation	21
a) Purpose of Strategic Litigation	21
b) Priority Areas of Focus	21
c) Litigation Process.....	22
d) Expected Outcomes	22
Legal Aid Service Delivery Approaches	22
a) In-House Staff Model.....	22
b) Mobile Legal Aid Clinics	22
c) Community-Based Paralegal Model	24
d) Referral Partnerships	25
e) Hotline Services	25

Women and Girls: A Special Focus	27
Safeguarding and Confidentiality Assurances	28
Community Referral Pathway	28
Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning.	30
References.....	31
Gallery of UGANET work under the beam light model and medical Legal Approach	32

List of Acronyms

1. **ADR** – Alternative Dispute Resolution
2. **AGYW** – Adolescent Girls and Young Women
3. **ART** – Antiretroviral Therapy
4. **CDOs** – Community Development Officers
5. **GBV** – Gender-Based Violence
6. **HIV** – Human Immunodeficiency Virus
7. **IEC** – Information, Education and Communication
8. **LACJ** – Legal Aid and Community Justice.
9. **LASPNET** – Legal Aid Service Providers Network
10. **NGO** – Non-Governmental Organization
11. **PLHIV** – Persons Living with HIV
12. **PWDs** – Persons with Disabilities
13. **SRHR** – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
14. **ULS** – Uganda Law Society
15. **UGANET** – Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS
16. **ANC** - Antenatal Care Services
17. **OPD** - Outpatient Departments
18. **ADR** - Alternative Dispute Resolution
19. **MEAL** - Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning

Foreword

On behalf of the Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET), I am pleased to present this Legal Aid Programme Framework, which articulates our commitment to advancing access to justice as a cornerstone of health, dignity, and human rights in Uganda.

For over three decades, UGANET has worked at the intersection of Law, Health, Gender equality, and Human Rights, guided by the understanding that legal and structural barriers often undermine health outcomes and perpetuate vulnerability among marginalized populations. Women and girls, persons living with HIV, persons with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, refugees, and other indigent communities continue to face systemic injustices that require integrated, people-centred responses.

I wish to particularly acknowledge the invaluable contribution of UGANET's community paralegals, Stop GBV Champions, and UGANET community activists, who serve as the frontline defenders of human rights within their communities.

We further recognize and appreciate the critical role played by district and community-level structures, including Persons Living with HIV (PLHIV) coordinators, Community Development Officers (CDOs), health facility staff, and local leaders. Their collaboration strengthens referral pathways, promotes accountability, and reinforces community trust in both health and justice systems.

This publication outlines UGANET's legal aid model, including our community-driven Beam Light Model, Medical–Legal Integration, strategic litigation, and survivor-centred referral systems. Together, these approaches reflect our belief that justice must be accessible, responsive, and rooted within communities, while remaining firmly connected to formal justice and health systems.

We remain grateful to our partners, supporters, justice sector institutions, health facilities, community structures, and staff whose dedication makes this work possible.

Grace Nayiga – Executive Director (UGANET)

Executive Summary

The Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS Legal Aid Programme is designed to address the legal and Human Rights barriers that undermine access to health, justice, and social protection for vulnerable and marginalised populations in Uganda. Anchored in a rights-based and community-centred approach, the programme integrates legal services into community and health systems to ensure equitable, timely, and effective access to justice.

UGANET delivers free legal aid through a hybrid model that combines in-house legal expertise, community-based paralegals, mobile legal aid camps & clinics, a toll-free emergency hotline, and strategic partnerships with justice and health sector institutions. Central to this framework is the Beam Light Model, which bridges gaps created by project-based implementation and limited physical presence by anchoring justice services within community structures while maintaining strong technical oversight from the Secretariat.

The programme further adopts a Medical–Legal Integrated Approach that embeds legal aid services within health care platforms, including ART clinics, OPD, ANC spaces, palliative care programmes, and adolescent and disability-focused services. This integration enables early identification and resolution of legal issues that negatively affect health outcomes, treatment adherence, and wellbeing.

Through strategic litigation, alternative dispute resolution, legal education, and survivor-centred referral pathways, UGANET contributes to improved health outcomes, strengthened accountability, progressive jurisprudence, and enhanced protection of rights for women, children, persons living with HIV, persons with disabilities, refugees, and other indigent populations.

This framework provides a comprehensive overview of UGANET’s legal aid model, service delivery approaches, referral pathways, target populations, and monitoring mechanisms, and serves as a reference document for partners, donors, and stakeholders committed to advancing access to justice and social inclusion in Uganda.

Background and Introduction

The Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS is a national non-governmental organization established to convene institutions and individuals committed to advocating for the development, strengthening, and enforcement of appropriate legal, human rights, ethical, and policy responses to health and HIV-related challenges in Uganda. For over thirty (30) years, UGANET has remained steadfast in its mission to promote access to justice, dignity, and equity for vulnerable and marginalized populations across the country, including women, children, persons living with HIV, survivors of gender-based violence, persons with disabilities, refugees, and host communities.

UGANET's mandate is grounded in the firm conviction that law, human rights, and progressive legal and policy frameworks are indispensable enablers of effective public health outcomes, gender equality, and sustainable HIV responses. Guided by this mandate, the organization works proactively to prevent human rights violations, dismantle systemic and structural barriers, and mitigate the social harm and suffering arising from gender inequality, HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and other health-related injustices.

The Legal Aid Programme is a core pillar of UGANET's work and operationalizes this mandate by addressing persistent barriers to justice faced by vulnerable and indigent populations. Through an integrated approach that combines legal advice, mediation and alternative dispute resolution, referrals, and strategic legal representation, the programme delivers services through static legal aid clinics, mobile legal aid outreaches, and a nationwide network of trained community paralegals across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. By integrating rights awareness, community empowerment, and case-based interventions, UGANET's legal aid work addresses violations such as discrimination, property and inheritance rights abuses, domestic violence, and denial of health-related rights, while generating evidence to inform advocacy and policy reform and strengthen access to justice nationwide.

Objectives of the Legal Aid Model

The Legal Aid Model is guided by the following objectives:

- a) To provide free, quality legal advice, ADR, legal support, and court representation to vulnerable individuals and marginalized individuals.
- b) To enhance legal literacy and rights awareness, thereby empowering communities to understand, claim, and defend their rights.
- c) To support survivors of GBV and other human rights violations through integrated legal, psychosocial, and referral services.
- d) To promote the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms as a means of strengthening to Access to Justice.
- e) To contribute to legal and policy reforms that strengthen the protection and promotion of the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups through advocacy and strategic litigation.

Service Areas / Legal Issues Covered

- Health Justice
- HIV-related stigma, discrimination, and denial of services
- Palliative care
- Succession and Inheritance
- Family law (including child custody and maintenance, separation, and divorce)
- Land and property disputes
- Gender-based violence and related offenses
- Employment and labour rights
- Criminal defence for indigent persons

Target Groups and Eligibility for Legal Aid Services

UGANET's legal aid services are prioritized for the following categories of clients:

- a) Persons living with HIV who experience stigma, discrimination, criminalisation, or denial of health and social services.
- b) Women and girls at risk of, or surviving, Gender-Based Violence.
- c) Children in conflict with the law, as well as those in need of care and protection.
- d) Persons with disabilities requiring legal assistance and protection of their rights.
- e) Refugees and internally displaced persons facing legal vulnerabilities.
- f) Any indigent individual facing civil, criminal, or family law-related challenges.

Scope of Legal Aid Services

a) Legal Representation



UGANET provides direct legal representation in both criminal and civil matters, including: - Criminal defence for indigent accused persons in capital and non-capital offences. - Civil litigation in family law, land and property disputes, estate administration, and GBV-related cases. - Support with filing complaints, drafting pleadings, court processes, and engagement with justice sector institutions.

b) Legal Advice and Counselling

- Walk-in legal aid clinics at UGANET offices in Kampala, Lamwo, Kasese, Tororo, Yumbe, Adjumani, Kiryandongo, Obongi and Kyegegwa districts.
- Mobile legal aid camps conducted through scheduled community outreaches to reach underserved and hard-to-reach populations.
- Confidential legal counselling for survivors of GBV, Protection clients, persons living with HIV, and other vulnerable clients.

c). Shelter Home for safety and psychosocial support services.

UGANET's Rising Woman GBV Shelter and Wellness Centre is a core response facility operated by the Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET). It provides temporary safe refuge, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, and skills training for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), violence against women and girls, and human trafficking.

Overview of the Shelter

The Rising Woman Shelter and Wellness Centre (also referred to as the Rising Woman GBV Shelter Home) opened in 2020 in Kampala during the COVID-19 lockdown, when domestic violence surged. It was established with support from UN Women and operates as one of the shelters in Kampala. The facility is a confidential, undisclosed safe house designed for approximately 25 survivors (though it has housed more during peak periods). Access is primarily through referrals from police, local leaders, other organisations, or UGANET's 24/7 toll-free helpline (0800 333 123).

Services include:

- Immediate safety and basic needs (shelter, food, clothing, medical attention).
- Psychosocial support, counselling (including specialised rape counselling), and wellness activities (e.g., yoga).
- Skills training for economic empowerment and reduced dependency, such as soap-making, beadwork, baking, cooking, backyard farming/gardening, liquid soap production, and Vaseline-making. These programmes target survivors and persons with disabilities.

- Support for diverse cases: domestic violence, defilement, rape, sexual violence, and trafficking (including survivors from Uganda, Burundi, Congo, South Sudan, and elsewhere).
- Mediation with willing perpetrators (conducted off-site) and resettlement support with follow-up.
- Inclusion measures, such as sign-language support for survivors with disabilities.

UGANET is expanding related wellness and economic empowerment capacity through its Ziobwe Home initiative. The shelter also serves as a central hub that hosts clients referred across UGANET's programmes.

Connection to UGANET's Legal Aid Model

UGANET is a registered Legal Aid Service Provider. Its **Legal Aid and Community Justice (LACJ) Department** delivers free legal services focused on access to justice for persons living with HIV (PLHIV), GBV survivors, women and girls, refugees, and other vulnerable groups. Services include legal advice, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), legal representation, linkages to safety services, and referrals.

The shelter is tightly integrated into this model as the primary safety and response component:

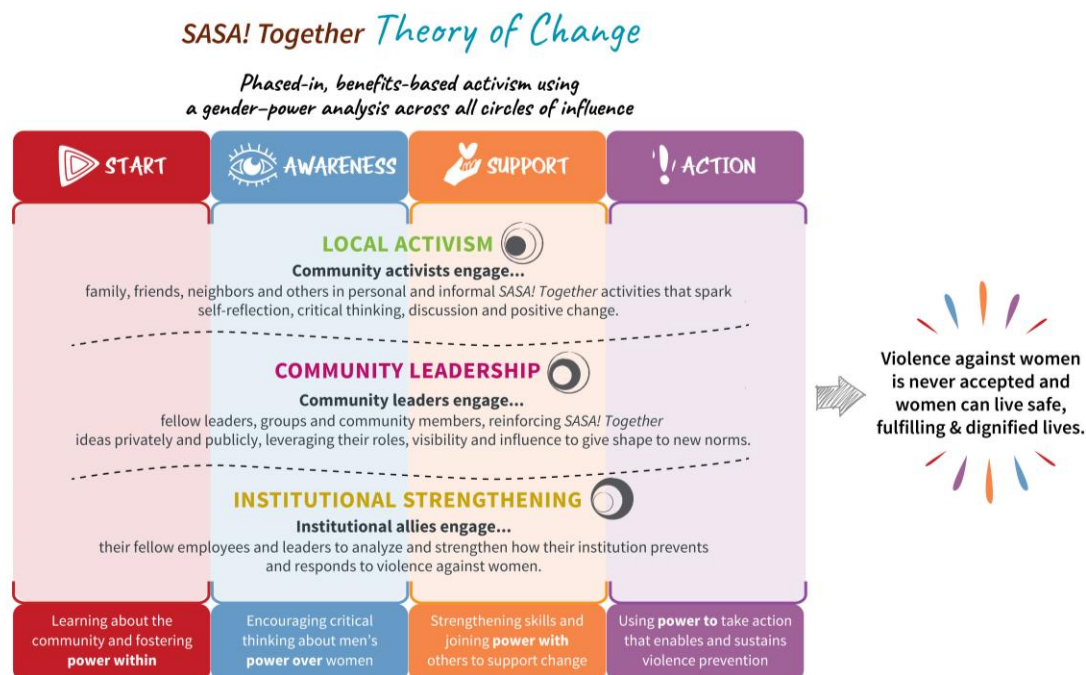
- **Direct linkage during stay** — While survivors are admitted to the shelter, UGANET's legal team actively addresses their legal issues. This creates a seamless pathway from immediate physical safety to justice-seeking (e.g., case management, representation, or mediation).
- **Referral and intake pathways** — The 24/7 call centre (shared across programmes) enables rapid rescue (often coordinated with police), assessment, and placement. The shelter acts as a central response point that receives clients from UGANET's various departments and external partners, then channels them into legal support.
- **Holistic, survivor-centred approach** — Safety (shelter) + psychosocial recovery + legal aid + economic skills form an integrated package. This addresses both immediate protection needs and longer-term barriers to justice and independence. Dependency on abusers is a recognised driver of ongoing violence; skills training aims to reduce it.

- **Community structures** — UGANET’s “Beam Light” model uses community paralegals (over 130 across dozens of districts), supported by legal officers, for grassroots access to justice. The shelter complements this by providing a specialised facility for high-risk or complex cases that require temporary removal from the community environment.
- **Broader GBV strategy** — The Gender Equality and VAW/G Prevention department frames response (shelter + legal services) alongside prevention work (e.g., SASA! Together methodology for community mobilisation and norm change). The shelter thus bridges prevention and response while reinforcing access-to-justice goals.

d) Legal Education and Awareness

- Community sensitization sessions on rights, legal procedures, and available remedies.
- Regular radio talk shows in local languages addressing GBV, HIV-related rights, land rights, and access to justice.
- Development and dissemination of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials, including pamphlets, brochures, posters, social media content, and website publications.

f) SASA! Together: Embedding Social Norm Change within UGANET’s Legal Aid Model



SASA! Together (meaning “Now” in Kiswahili) is a structured, four-phase community mobilisation methodology—Start (building power within), Awareness (analysing power over and harmful norms), Support (fostering power with others), and Action (exercising power to create change)—that addresses the root causes of gender-based violence, HIV-related stigma and discrimination, unequal power dynamics, and related rights violations.

Within UGANET’s Legal Aid Programme, SASA! Together is not a standalone prevention activity. It is deliberately embedded as a foundational and complementary component of the access-to-justice continuum. By transforming the social norms and power imbalances that drive violations, SASA! creates an enabling environment in which legal aid services become more effective, demand-driven, and sustainable.

How SASA! Together is integrated into the Legal Aid Model

- **Early detection and prevention of legal needs:** Community Activists, Community Leaders, and Community-Based Volunteers trained under SASA! work alongside UGANET community paralegals. Through participatory dialogues, power analyses, and community conversations, they identify emerging risks (e.g., intimate partner violence, property grabbing, denial of inheritance, or stigma that blocks health-seeking) at an early stage. This feeds directly into the Beam Light Model’s early-detection function and generates timely referrals into the legal aid pathway.
- **Strengthening community-level justice structures:** SASA! builds the capacity of the same community actors who serve as the first “beam of light.” Activists and leaders are equipped to facilitate non-violent conflict resolution, promote shared decision-making in households, and encourage survivors to seek help. This reduces the volume of preventable disputes while increasing the quality and volume of appropriate referrals to paralegals, the hotline, mobile legal aid clinics, and the Rising Woman GBV Shelter and Wellness Centre.
- **Linking norm change to formal justice processes:** When survivors are ready to pursue legal remedies (mediation, ADR, court representation, or strategic litigation), the supportive community environment created by SASA! increases willingness to report, cooperate with investigations, and follow through on cases. Legal officers and paralegals in turn reinforce SASA! messages during legal education sessions, mobile clinics, and

shelter-based counselling, creating a two-way reinforcement between social change and legal empowerment.

- **Complementing Medical–Legal Integration and the Shelter:** In health facilities (ART clinics, ANC, OPD) and at the Rising Woman Shelter, SASA!-informed approaches help address the underlying power dynamics that contribute to GBV, treatment interruption, and discrimination. Skills-building and wellness activities at the shelter are reinforced by community-level norm change work that supports safer reintegration and economic independence.
- **Amplifying legal education and awareness:** UGANET integrates SASA! principles into radio programmes, IEC materials, and community sensitisation sessions conducted under the Legal Aid Programme. Messages on consent, non-violent relationships, shared power, and rights are disseminated in local languages, reaching audiences beyond face-to-face sessions and increasing legal literacy in ways that make formal justice services more accessible and relevant.

Contribution to Access to Justice

By addressing the social and structural drivers of rights violations, SASA! Together:

- Increases reporting and help-seeking behaviour among survivors and communities.
- Reduces secondary victimisation and community-level resistance to justice processes.
- Strengthens the effectiveness of community paralegals, ADR mechanisms, and referral pathways.
- Generates community-owned evidence and demand that informs strategic litigation and policy advocacy.
- Ensures that legal aid interventions are not merely reactive but are embedded within a broader process of social transformation that sustains gains in access to justice beyond individual case resolution.

UGANET’s multi-year experience implementing SASA! Together—supported by partnerships with Raising Voices, UN Women, the Spotlight Initiative, and others—has produced documented shifts in attitudes, improved family relationships, increased joint decision-making, reduced

acceptance of intimate partner violence, higher reporting of abuse, and stronger linkages to legal and protection services. These outcomes directly enhance the reach, quality, and impact of UGANET's Legal Aid Programme.

In this way, SASA! Together functions as both a prevention strategy and an essential enabler of the Beam Light Model, Medical–Legal Integration, survivor-centred shelter services, and overall access to justice for women, girls, persons living with HIV, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations

f) Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)



- Mediation and negotiation support in family, land, and community disputes.
- Village-level dispute resolution forums facilitated by trained community paralegals.
- Documentation of settlement agreements and follow-up to ensure compliance.
- Accompanied referrals to police, courts, Community Development Officers (CDOs), and other relevant service providers.
- Identification and referral of complex or high-risk cases requiring specialized legal representation, psychosocial support, or emergency protection services.

- Promotion of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms as a means of reducing case backlogs, fostering peaceful coexistence, and improving access to justice at the community level.

Medical–Legal Integrated Approach



UGANET implements a Medical–Legal integrated approach that embeds legal aid services within health care delivery systems. This approach recognises that many health-related challenges faced by vulnerable populations—particularly people living with HIV (PLHIV), women, girls, and other marginalized groups—have underlying legal and human rights dimensions that directly affect health outcomes, such as stigma, discrimination, property rights violations, inheritance disputes, and barriers to accessing services.

Pioneered by UGANET with support from the Open Society Foundations (OSF), this innovative model was developed as UGANET positioned itself as a key linkage organization between HIV actors and legal practitioners. Established in 1995, UGANET has long championed the integration of law, ethics, and human rights into the HIV response. Lawyers “took their robes to health facilities,” embedding legal services directly where vulnerable clients seek care—through legal aid outreaches, mobile clinics at health centers, collaboration with health workers, and on-site support for issues like disclosure, treatment adherence, GBV, and succession planning.

This holistic integration improves health outcomes by addressing social and legal determinants: it reduces barriers to care, mitigates discrimination, supports treatment continuity, and empowers clients through timely legal interventions alongside medical services. UGANET continues to build on this foundation through partnerships with health facilities, paralegals, and justice actors, ensuring comprehensive, client-centered support.

This pioneering experience strengthens UGANET's capacity to deliver impactful, sustainable interventions that bridge health and justice systems.

Through partnerships with health facilities and health-focused programmes, UGANET takes advantage of routine health service platforms to provide free, on-site legal aid services. Legal officers and trained paralegals work alongside health workers to identify, respond to, and resolve legal issues that act as barriers to access to care, treatment adherence, dignity, and social protection.

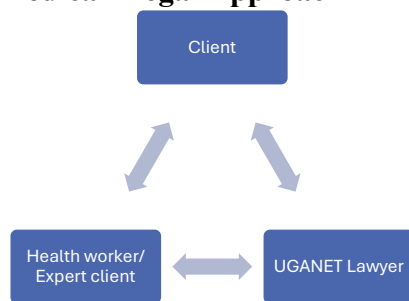
Under this approach, UGANET specifically provides legal support to:

- **Persons Living with HIV (PLHIV)**, with a strong emphasis on integrated services delivered directly **during Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) clinic days** at health facilities. UGANET lawyers and paralegals address critical issues such as stigma and discrimination, criminalization risks, denial of services, disclosure concerns, treatment adherence barriers, property/inheritance rights, and other rights violations that impact health outcomes. This on-site presence in ART clinics ensures timely, accessible legal aid where clients are already receiving care, reinforcing the medical-legal linkage.
- **Women and girls**, including GBV survivors, who face intersecting legal, social, and health barriers.
- **Persons with disabilities (PWDs)** encountering legal, social, and structural barriers to accessing justice and essential services.
- **Palliative care patients** facing neglect, inheritance disputes, discrimination, or access-to-care challenges. (Note: PLHIV qualify for this specific palliative support primarily in cases of advanced AIDS.)

- TB survivors, who often face stigma, discrimination, workplace exclusion, property and inheritance disputes, and barriers to care or social protection linked to their TB history or co-infection with HIV.
- **Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW)**, particularly those at risk of or experiencing gender-based violence (GBV), early marriage, or denial of education and health services.
- **Persons with disabilities (PWDs)** encountering legal, social, and structural barriers to accessing justice and essential services.

This targeted support leverages UGANET’s pioneering medical-legal model to deliver holistic, rights-based interventions that improve both legal protection and health outcomes for the most vulnerable.

The Medical–Legal Approach



The approach strengthens referral pathways between health facilities, community structures, and formal justice institutions, ensuring holistic, client-centred support. By integrating legal aid into health programmes, UGANET enhances health outcomes,

promotes treatment adherence, and advances the realization of health-related human rights for vulnerable populations.

Results and Impact

Through the Medical–Legal integrated approach and the Beam Light Model, UGANET contributes to measurable improvements in both health and justice outcomes. Clients who receive timely legal support alongside health services experience reduced stigma and discrimination, improved access to essential health care, and increased adherence to treatment, particularly among persons living with HIV, palliative care patients, adolescent girls and young women, and persons with disabilities. Early identification and resolution of legal barriers—such as denial of services, violence, property dispossession, or neglect—reduces stress, improves psychosocial wellbeing, and supports positive health-seeking behaviour.

From a justice perspective, the approach leads to earlier reporting of violations, faster case resolution through ADR and coordinated litigation, and increased accountability of duty bearers. By addressing legal needs at the point of care and within communities, UGANET reduces delays, costs, and geographical barriers to justice, while strengthening trust in both health and justice systems. Collectively, these outcomes contribute to strengthened protection of rights, improved quality of life for vulnerable populations, and more responsive, people-centred health and justice systems.

The UGANET Beam Light Model



The Beam Light Model is UGANET’s community-centred justice approach, designed to illuminate human rights violations, amplify community voices, and strengthen access to justice at the grassroots level. Although continuously evolving, the model is anchored in the following core components:

a) Legal Aid Service Delivery and Mobile Litigation Support

Under the Beam Light Model, legal aid services are centrally coordinated through UGANET’s Secretariat, where qualified lawyers are based and provide technical oversight, case management, strategic litigation, and quality assurance. While the lawyers are not permanently stationed in every district, the model enables them to travel periodically to districts to support litigation, mediation, and complex case follow-up.

To maximise efficiency and overcome limitations related to physical presence, UGANET has, in the past, worked closely with the Judiciary and other justice sector actors to coordinate the scheduling of multiple client cases within the same district around similar dates. This deliberate clustering of cases allows UGANET lawyers to litigate and advance several matters during a single field visit, reducing costs, minimising delays, and ensuring timely access to justice for clients.

This approach ensures that clients in districts without a permanent UGANET office are not disadvantaged, and that legal representation remains responsive, flexible, and accessible, regardless of geographical location.

b) Community Empowerment



The model prioritises strengthening community-based structures, including paralegals, Human Rights committees, peer educators, and health facility staff, to identify, document, and respond to human rights violations. While UGANET's direct programme implementation in districts is often guided by project-specific funding and timelines, the Beam Light Model is deliberately designed to bridge gaps arising from limited or non-continuous physical presence in some districts.

Through this decentralised approach, UGANET maintains sustained community-level engagement even in districts where it does not have a permanent office or active project at a given time. UGANET currently works with 131 trained community paralegals across more than 43 districts, who serve as trusted focal points and first responders for justice-related concerns. These paralegals

are continuously mentored and technically supported by five legal officers based at the Secretariat, ensuring consistency, quality, and responsiveness.

By anchoring access to justice within community structures, the Beam Light Model significantly reduces geographical, financial, and institutional barriers, enabling vulnerable groups to access legal support regardless of UGANET’s physical footprint in a district, and ensuring continuity of justice services beyond project cycles.

c) Early Detection of Violations

Community actors — primarily **UGANET-trained community paralegals**, alongside Community Activists (CAs), Community-Based Volunteers (CBVs), and local leaders — serve as the first line of response. They act as the initial “beam of light” by detecting early signs of abuse, discrimination, and legal vulnerability, particularly among women, persons living with HIV (PLHIV), and other at-risk populations.

These actors form a vital **tripartite linkage** that strengthens the entire justice ecosystem:

- **To communities:** They live and work within the communities they serve, conducting door-to-door visits, community dialogues, sensitization sessions, and mediation. This builds trust, raises awareness of rights (e.g., on GBV, HIV-related discrimination, property/inheritance issues), provides basic legal first aid, and empowers individuals to recognize and report violations early.
- **To duty bearers:** They interface directly with local authorities, health workers, police (e.g., Child and Family Protection Unit), probation officers, Community Development Officers (CDOs), and cultural leaders. This facilitates timely referrals, case follow-up, coordinated responses, and accountability, bridging grassroots realities with formal systems.
- **To UGANET:** Paralegals and activists are trained, mentored, and supported by UGANET lawyers and staff. They refer complex cases for professional legal aid, participate in joint outreaches and legal aid camps, and feed insights back into UGANET’s programming for advocacy, policy influence, and continuous capacity building. This creates a seamless referral pathway under the “Beam Light Model.”

Through this interconnected role, community paralegals and activists ensure responsive, sustainable, and community-owned access to justice.

d) Integrated Response System

The model links community-level detection to UGANET's legal team, public institutions, and referral partners, creating a coordinated continuum of care and support from the grassroots to formal justice mechanisms.

e) Accountability and Follow-Up

The model incorporates regular community dialogues, reflection meetings, systematic documentation, and data-driven advocacy to address root causes and systemic drivers of human rights violations.

Strategic Litigation

Strategic litigation is a deliberate and targeted use of legal processes to generate broader social impact by influencing jurisprudence, public policy, and societal norms. UGANET employs strategic litigation to address structural and systemic injustices affecting vulnerable and marginalised populations.

a) Purpose of Strategic Litigation

- To challenge discriminatory laws, policies, and harmful practices.
- To establish legal precedents that expand and protect fundamental rights.
- To strengthen state accountability in responding to GBV, HIV-related violations, and health rights abuses.

b) Priority Areas of Focus

- HIV criminalisation and discrimination.
- Gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices.
- Access to essential health services, including antiretroviral therapy (ART) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- Land and property rights for widows, orphans, and persons living in informal settlements.

c) Litigation Process

- Identification of potential cases through community paralegals, hotlines, legal clinics, and outreach activities.
- Selection of cases with strong public interest value or potential to advance legal and policy reform.
- Collaboration with strategic partners, including the Uganda Law Society (ULS), the Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET), and public interest litigators.
- Media engagement and community sensitisation to enhance public awareness and impact.

d) Expected Outcomes

- Development of progressive and rights-affirming jurisprudence.
- Strengthened legal and institutional protection mechanisms.
- Improved access to justice for marginalised populations.
- Increased national and regional visibility of human rights concerns.

Legal Aid Service Delivery Approaches

a) In-House Staff Model

UGANET employs salaried lawyers based at the Secretariat and field offices who provide court representation, legal counselling, legal awareness sessions, and legal advice to walk-in and call-in clients. The legal team also manages a toll-free call centre through which community members can access free legal support and guidance.

b) Mobile Legal Aid Clinics

UGANET conducts regular mobile legal aid clinics (typically quarterly) across its districts of operation. These clinics form a cornerstone of our Beam Light Model, bringing justice directly to communities in a structured, multi-phase approach that ensures accessibility, coordination, and follow-through.

The process includes:

Pre-Visit Phase: Courtesy calls and coordination meetings with district leadership (e.g., Resident District Commissioner, District Health Officer, Probation Office, and Police), local stakeholders, and community paralegals. This phase secures district ownership, identifies priority issues, and leverages paralegals as gateways who mobilize communities and pre-identify cases.

Legal Aid Camp Phase: Intensive, multi-day community and health facility-based services delivered by UGANET legal officers, supported by community paralegals, Community Activists, and invited actors from the Justice, Law and Order (JLO) sector (police, magistrates, probation officers, etc.). Services cover legal advice, mediation, case registration, referrals, and on-the-spot support for issues such as GBV, property rights, HIV-related discrimination, inheritance, and child protection. Clinics are often held at health centers (including during ART days) and community venues to maximize reach.

Post-Camp Phase: Follow-up activities including feedback and closure meetings with district stakeholders, ongoing mediation, case referrals to courts or other duty bearers, police engagement for investigations, and execution of settlement agreements. Community paralegals play a central role in monitoring and supporting clients during this phase.

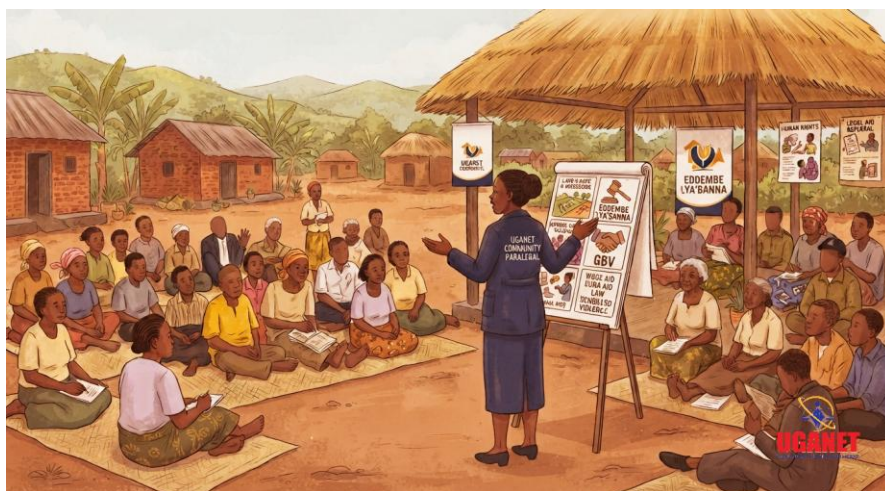
What makes UGANET's mobile clinics unique is their strong district ownership, deep integration with the Community Justice department and trained community paralegals (who serve as the vital link between communities and formal systems), and active involvement of JLO actors. This collaborative, end-to-end model ensures not only immediate access to justice but also sustainable local capacity and accountability. It bridges the gap between communities and duty bearers while embedding legal services within health and social support structures.

Through this approach, UGANET reaches hundreds of clients per camp, strengthens referral networks, and contributes to systemic change at the grassroots level.

c) Community-Based Paralegal Model



UGANET works with 131 trained community paralegals recruited from over 52 districts, and trained to offer basic services at community level. Community Paralegals provide first-line legal advice, conduct community awareness sessions, mediate minor disputes, and make effective referrals. They receive periodic refresher trainings to ensure quality service delivery and alignment with programme objectives.



Community paralegals submit monthly reports to their supervising lawyers. These reports support quality control, case tracking, and monitoring of community-level interventions.

UGANET's community paralegals are assigned to specific lawyers for technical backstopping while remaining closely connected to the Community Justice department. Through continuous

training, mentorship, and the use of UGANET's **Community Paralegal Manual** (a practical resource covering key areas such as human rights, HIV and the law, GBV, family law, land and property rights, and mediation), they are equipped to serve effectively.

They act as the essential link between communities and duty bearers (including local leaders, health facilities, police, and other justice actors). With ongoing monitoring and support, their activities are facilitated through modest stipends, airtime, and transport reimbursements to cover operational costs. This structure ensures sustained, high-quality grassroots engagement and effective referral pathways.

This robust support system enables community paralegals to function as the frontline “beam of light” in detecting and responding to rights violations while maintaining strong accountability and professional linkages.

d) Referral Partnerships

UGANET collaborates with the Uganda Law Society Pro Bono Project, LASPNET, the Uganda Human Rights Commission, District Human Rights Committees, and other justice sector actors. District Human Rights Committees are supported through capacity-building initiatives and submit periodic reports to the UGANET legal team for follow-up on cases requiring advanced legal intervention.

e) Hotline Services

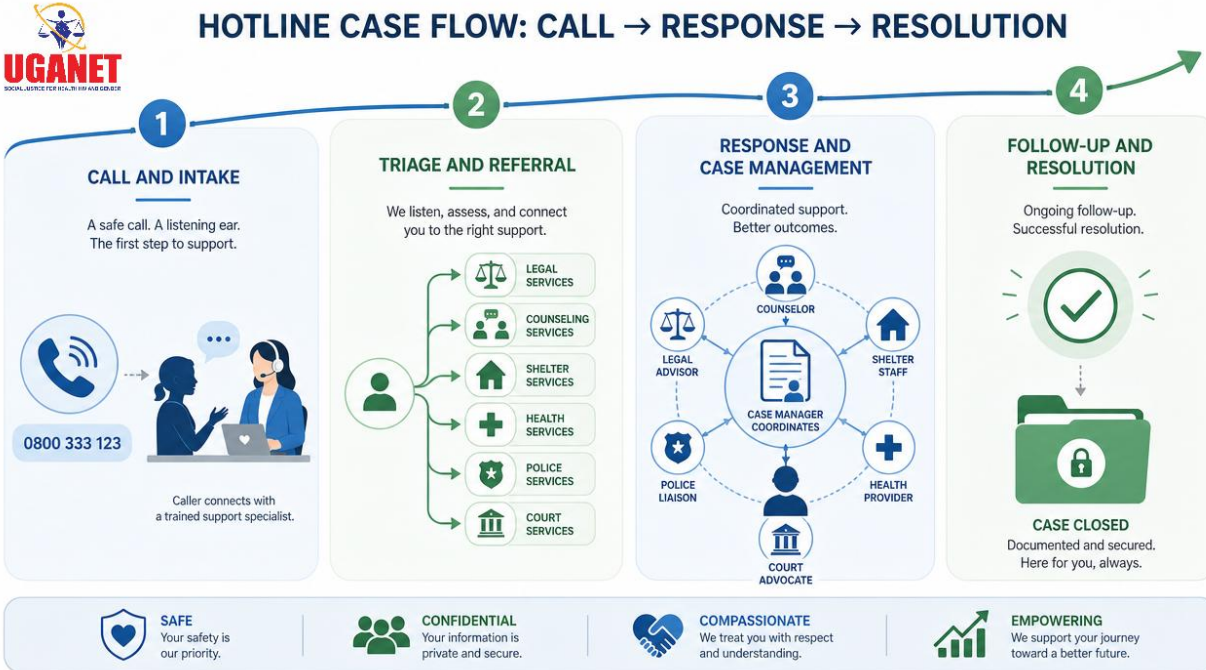
UGANET operates a toll-free hotline (0800-333-123) established to provide rapid and emergency response to human rights violations, particularly those involving gender-based violence, HIV-related discrimination, and other urgent protection concerns.

The hotline serves as a central entry point for receiving, documenting, and responding to reported violations. Calls are handled by trained staff who conduct initial intake, risk assessment, and documentation, and then trigger coordinated responses through UGANET's legal team, in-house counsellors, the Rising Woman GBV Shelter and Wellness Centre, and established referral partners.

Through this integrated response mechanism, the hotline facilitates immediate legal advice, psychosocial support, safe shelter where necessary, and timely referrals to police, health facilities, and other protection and justice sector actors. This approach ensures survivor-centred, confidential, and timely interventions, while strengthening accountability and follow-up on reported human rights violations.

Hotline Case Flow: Call → Response → Resolution

1. **Call and Intake:** A client or third party places a call to the toll-free hotline. Trained staff receive the call, conduct initial intake, assess urgency and risk, and document the alleged human rights violation.
2. **Triage and Referral:** Based on the nature of the case, the hotline team refers the case through UGANET's Community Referral Pathway to the appropriate response points, including legal officers, counsellors, the Rising Woman GBV Shelter and Wellness Centre, health facilities, police, courts, and other service providers.
3. **Response and Case Management:** Assigned service providers act through legal, psychosocial, protection, or medical interventions, while the case is tracked and coordinated by UGANET's legal team.
4. **Follow-Up and Resolution:** Continuous follow-up is conducted to ensure client safety, compliance with referrals, and achievement of agreed outcomes. Cases are closed upon resolution or completion of referrals, with documentation retained for accountability and programme learning.



Women and Girls: A Special Focus

Women and girls remain at the center of UGANET’s work, reflecting our core mandate and identity as a gender equality organization. We address the disproportionate impact of HIV, GBV, harmful norms, property dispossession, and other rights violations on women and girls through comprehensive, holistic interventions that combine legal aid, social support, and empowerment.

Key elements of our gender-responsive approach include:

- **Specialized legal aid** tailored to the unique needs of women and girls, including cases of domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child marriage, denial of education and health services, inheritance and property grabbing, and discrimination linked to HIV status.
- **Holistic support at the shelter home**, where legal aid forms an integral part of a comprehensive package. Survivors receive safe temporary accommodation alongside legal counseling, case management, psychosocial support, and linkages to medical care, economic empowerment opportunities, and reintegration services. This integrated model ensures immediate protection while addressing long-term justice and recovery needs.

- **Community-level interventions** through SASA! Together programming, community paralegals, and awareness activities that challenge harmful gender norms, promote shared power in relationships, and prevent violence while empowering women and girls to claim their rights.
- **Strategic partnerships and advocacy** as a gender equality organization, working with donors, government, and civil society to advance policy reforms, improve access to justice, and reduce structural barriers that perpetuate vulnerability.

This women-and-girls-centered approach ensures that our medical-legal integration, community mobilization, and access to justice initiatives deliver transformative impact, aligning with our vision of a Uganda free from human rights abuses in the context of health, HIV, and gender inequality.

Safeguarding and Confidentiality Assurances

UGANET applies strict safeguarding, confidentiality, and data protection standards across all hotline and referral processes. All staff and volunteers handling cases are trained on survivor-centred approaches, informed consent, confidentiality, and do-no-harm principles.

Client information is securely stored and only shared on a need-to-know basis with authorized personnel and referral partners, subject to client consent and legal requirements. Survivors are informed of their rights, available options, and referral pathways, and no action is taken without their informed consent, except where there is an immediate risk to life or a legal obligation to report.

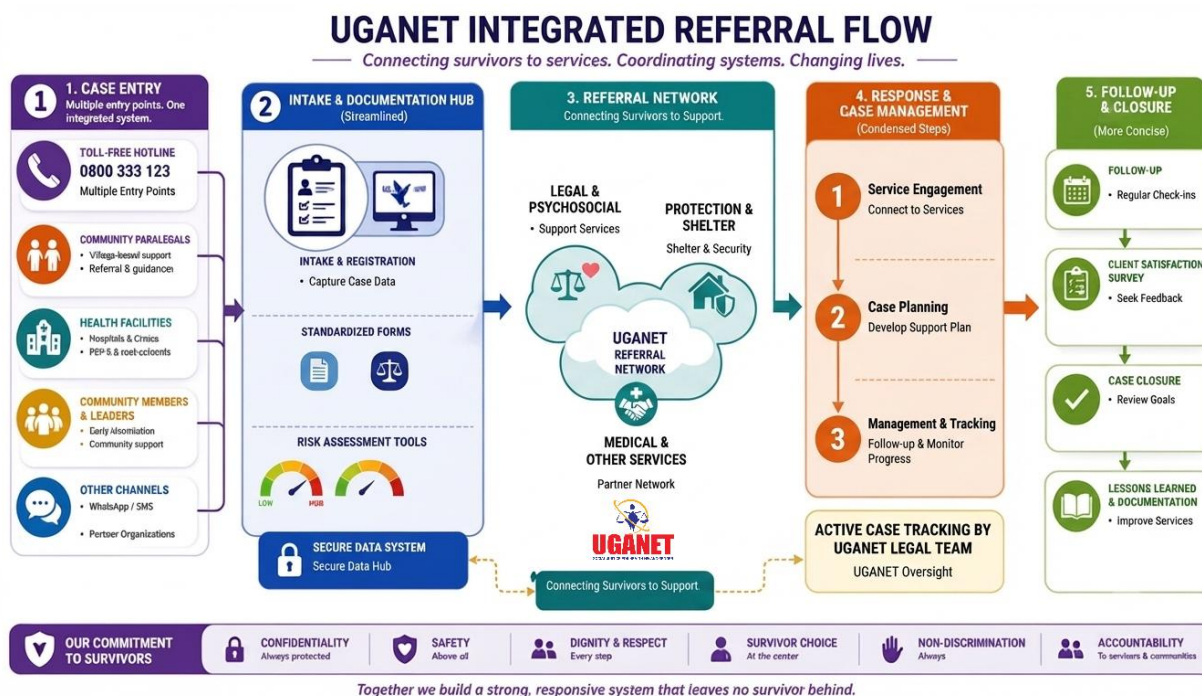
These safeguards ensure compliance with donor safeguarding requirements, protection standards, and ethical obligations, while prioritizing the dignity, safety, and autonomy of all clients.

Community Referral Pathway

UGANET's Community Referral Pathway provides a harmonised framework that links hotline reporting, community-level identification of cases, and institutional response mechanisms to ensure timely, coordinated, and survivor-centred support.

Integrated Referral Flow (Hotline and Community Systems):

1. **Entry Points:** Cases enter the system through multiple channels, including the toll-free hotline, community paralegals, health facilities, District Human Rights Committees, Mobile Legal Aid clinics, referrals from stakeholders such as Police and Legal Aid service providers and walk-in clients.
2. **Intake and Documentation:** All cases are documented using standardised intake and case management tools (case registration form, case tracking tool, referral form and outreach form,). Initial risk assessment is conducted to determine urgency, safety concerns, and appropriate response pathways.
3. **Referral:** Based on case type urgency and the appropriate response point , cases are referred to the appropriate response points, including UGANET legal officers, in-house counsellor, the Rising Woman GBV Shelter and Wellness Centre, health facilities, police, courts, Community Development Officers (CDOs), District Human Rights Committees, Trained Legal Aid Service Providers and lawyers in Private practice with passion for Legal Aid, Stop GBV Champions, Court Mediators, Trained Local leaders, GBV Responders , Community Leaders and Activists and other specialized service providers.
4. **Response and Case Management:** Assigned service providers act through interviewing to understand the client's needs to determine the appropriate intervention including counselling, mediation, shelter for safety & psychosocial support, referral to the appropriate response point, legal representation. Cases are actively tracked and coordinated by the UGANET legal team to ensure continuity and avoid duplication.
5. **Follow-Up and Closure:** Continuous follow-up is conducted to ensure client safety, service uptake, and progression toward resolution. Client satisfaction surveys are conducted by the Monitoring and Evaluation Team. Cases are closed upon resolution, completion of referrals, or achievement of agreed outcomes, with lessons documented for accountability and learning.



This harmonized pathway ensures seamless movement of cases from community and hotline reporting to appropriate legal, protection, and support services.

Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning.

Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) is the backbone of effective policy and program implementation

Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) is an integral component of UGANET's legal aid programming and serves as the foundation for effective programme implementation, accountability, continuous improvement, and evidence-based decision-making. UGANET over the years has built a robust functional MEAL system through harnessing the staffing, budgets, databases, tools, partnerships and work plans that guide implementation, monitoring, Learning and evaluation for improved accountability and evidence based decision making. UGANET continuously tracks different indicators that aid legal programming. Some examples of the tracked indicators include;

Key Indicators Tracked:

- Number of clients served, dis-aggregated by gender, age, and case type.

- Number of cases, nature of interventions supported through court processes and ADR mechanisms.
- Number of legal awareness sessions and the category of participants reached.
- legal Awareness sessions on the communities reached.
- Client satisfaction levels and follow-up outcomes.
- Paralegal support for continued community support in case follow up, case management, community sensitizations, etc.

Reporting Mechanisms:

- Activity- specific reports upon completion of each intervention.
- Departmental weekly updated reports on interventions.
- Monthly internal programme reports.
- Quarterly donor reports.
- Annual programme review and learning meetings with key stakeholders.

Implementation and results shared often guide programming in terms of districts for interventions, scale up of paralegals, legal awareness sessions, measure of vulnerabilities by gender or status enabling UGANET tailor legal sessions to fit target audiences and address community needs.

References.

To read more about our work, please visit <https://uganet.org/>

Gallery of UGANET work under the beam light model and medical Legal Approach



Above : A police officer sensitizing patients at Kamuli general hospital.



Above: A UGANET community paralegal supporting a community member in Mbarara district



Above: A UGANET Legal officer sensitising members of the community in Lamwo district.



Above: A mobile court supported by UGANET in Northern Uganda.