



LAGOS DECLARATION ON COMMUNITY-DRIVEN JUSTICE

Lagos, Nigeria, 25 March 2022



Preamble

We, the participants of the regional meeting on legal empowerment held in Lagos, Nigeria on 21-25 March 2022, believe that legal empowerment – in its many forms – is key to solving the significant justice and development challenges that persist in our countries and regionally most especially for the poor.

Recognizing the power of exchange, we have come together in various forums both virtually and in person to learn from one another, build solidarity, and strategize around our collective challenges, including at the [Inaugural West Africa Legal Empowerment Summit in 2020](#), and on numerous occasions since then.¹

In Lagos we prioritized deep learning on legal empowerment strategies to tackle sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and land and environmental justice (LEJ) as two cross-cutting challenges central to the work of many of the organizations present. We equally reflected on our case management systems and strategies as well as participatory action research as a means of deepening learning to advance our legal empowerment work.

We thank the staff and paralegals of Justice & Empowerment Initiatives for hosting us, and in particular the residents of Makoko and Ago Egun Bariga for welcoming us into their communities to see firsthand how they are using various legal empowerment strategies to tackle the justice and development challenges they face. We also thank the Legal Empowerment Network for supporting us all to come together.

At the conclusion of the regional meeting, we made the following commitments to ourselves, each other, and the communities with which we work towards advancing our local, national and regional legal empowerment priorities as follows:

Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative (Nigeria)

“Building on our national ‘minimum paralegal training curriculum’ and ‘paralegal ethics’ we commit to continue to push for greater recognition of community paralegals in Nigeria together with Justice & Empowerment Initiatives, and our partners at the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria. We also commit to carrying the learnings and outcomes from this regional meeting back to the grassroots community paralegals we work with.”

Legal Empowerment Fund (Fund for Global Human Rights):

“We commit to using our social media reach to highlight the important legal empowerment work of the organizations present, and also commit to exploring the possibility of funding grassroots legal empowerment organizations using participatory action research as a strategy.”

Natural Justice (West Africa):

“We commit to training paralegals working on challenges of climate change and land and environmental justice, as well as to establish a fund to support paralegal work. We are ready to work with other organizations present to formalize a regional network towards greater collaborations.”

¹Regional virtual anglophone conversations focused on [Structure of Paralegal Programs in West Africa](#), [Paralegal Support and Training Methods](#), and [‘Supervising Paralegals’](#) while Francophone conversations focused on [matière foncière](#), [la gouvernance des ressources naturelles](#) et les engagements avec [les parajuristes communautaires](#)

Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (Nigeria and Benin):

"We commit to continue to share learnings from our participatory action research focused on increasing security of tenure for the urban poor in cities across West Africa. To strengthen the knowledge base of legal empowerment in the urban context, we also commit to developing city-level documents describing the poverty and justice trap challenges faced by the urban poor, and opportunities that exist to overcome them. We will also continue to collaborate with other partners towards building stronger collaborations across the region – by organizing and leading regular learning exchanges."

Mêmes Droits pour Tous (Guinea):

"We commit to carrying learnings from this convening back to our teams, and advocate for recognition of paralegals in Guinea."

Lady Ellen Women's Aid Foundation (Sierra Leone):

"We commit to bringing more women into our legal empowerment work. We invite two organizations to come to Sierra Leone for a learning exchange which we will host and cover their local costs. We also commit to creating a database of different case management systems that we can collectively learn from."

FSH/UrbaSEN (Senegal)

"We commit to formalizing the process of paralegal training within our organization and to ensure that we train majority women paralegals and focus on issues of gender. We also commit to continue raising awareness in our communities about how to advance security of tenure for the poor. To add to our collective learning, we will create a context document that describes the urban justice challenges we face in Dakar, Senegal."

Protector of Sentiments Foundation (POS), Ghana:

"We commit to continue and expand our scope of legal empowerment and assistance to vulnerable groups such as prisoners and women in Ghana and the West Africa sub region. Specifically, within the West Africa Legal Empowerment Network, we commit to taking lead in the thematic area of criminal justice."

National Coalition of Community Legal Empowerment (Sierra Leone):

"We commit to collecting case studies of best practices from across the region to celebrate the important work that organizations are doing at the grassroots. We will invite other partners in the region to come to Sierra Leone to continue opportunities for in person learning and exchange."

Terre des Hommes (Burkina Faso):

"We commit to continuing to offer legal assistance to poor and vulnerable communities, including local level training on relevant laws in Burkina Faso."

Women in Law and Development in Africa (Mali):

“We commit to continuing to raise awareness about laws that protect women and children, and to strengthen the capacity of paralegals to tackle challenges that come up for them. We also commit to share the learnings and outcomes of this convening with our colleagues in Mali.”

Accountability Lab (Liberia):

“We commit to sharing the outcome of this convening across all 13 countries in which Accountability Lab is active. We will also organize two upcoming webinars focused on legal empowerment and try to draw more Liberian organizations into the network and collaborations in West Africa. We will also produce a podcast focused on legal empowerment and invite the organizations present to speak on it as guests.”

Autopromotion Rural pour un Développement Durable (Togo):

“We commit to sharing the learnings from this workshop with other organizations in Togo and to set up a national network for legal empowerment organizations to support more work in this area. We will create a context document for Togo that explains the key challenges and opportunities for community paralegals in our country.”

Legal Empowerment Network (Global) and Namati (Sierra Leone):

“We commit to continue to facilitate communication across the region and increase translation in multiple languages to ensure stronger integration between Anglophone and Francophone West Africa in particular. We will create spaces for further learning both in person and virtual. We will also share the outcomes from this convening with other regions.”

As the West Africa Legal Empowerment Network we will work together on:

1. Centering communities and community-based paralegals in all of our work (“nothing about us without us”), and ensuring their meaningful participation in all regional initiatives
2. Co-creating a joint participatory action research project aimed at tackling land and environmental justice challenges in both rural and urban contexts in West Africa
3. Jointly tackling common land and environmental justice challenges at the regional level
4. Ensuring stronger participation of women at all levels of our work
5. Developing common principles and guidelines that underpin our legal empowerment work and our collaborations in the region

6. Promoting national and regional recognition of community-based paralegals as essential actors in tackling the diverse justice and development challenges we face
7. Strengthening our legal empowerment work by deepening our learning and creating spaces for collective action through regular exchanges (both in-person and virtual)