



**Women's  
Probono  
Initiative**

Your rights, Your life



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

## THE YEAR IN A SNAPSHOT

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**546** Number of students reached



**416** Number of people supported with legal aid services



**17** Number of media engagements



**08** Number of ongoing public interest litigation (PIL) cases



**06** Number of publications



**05** Number of Conferences attended



**02** Number of public interest litigation (PIL) cases filed

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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AHA	Anti-homosexuality Act, 2023
AGYW	Adolescent Girls and Young Women
CATIP-U	Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons Uganda
CRVPF	Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSMMUA	Coalition to Stop Maternal Mortality Due to Unsafe Abortion
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
ED	Executive Director
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GNBU	Girls Not Brides Alliance Uganda
HC	High Court
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
KPs	Key Populations
LC	Local Council
MHM	Menstrual Health Management
MHU	Mental Health Uganda
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development
MOH	Ministry of Health
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PLHIV	Persons Living with HIV
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defender
WPI	Women's Probono Initiative

## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

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The year 2023 reflected incredible growth for WPI. Through our direct support to women and girls who have no access to legal representation, we hope to see a change in the way society views the girl child.

I am very grateful to the WPI staff for the excellent work done to advocate for a Uganda free of violence and discrimination against women and girls. Through a variety of physical and online advocacy campaigns and legal aid, WPI has indirectly reached over 5 million people and directly provided legal aid to 416 women and girls. Our commitment to serve the most vulnerable women in society remains strong and in 2024, we shall raise our efforts a notch higher.

In the face of the growing anti-rights and anti-gender groups coupled with global challenges, such as climate change, war and gender-based violence, we have come to realize engaging and empowering women to be at the fore front of claiming their own rights is central to us maintaining ground gained, whether it is through providing basic services or providing legal services or delivering healthcare solutions or creating climate technologies, women are driving innovation and are crucial to making sustainable progress.

Since its founding in 2018, WPI has fully embraced its mandate, ensuring that women and girls in Uganda have platforms to achieve and acquire justice.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to our partners and beneficiaries for their remarkable contribution to the success of 2023 without whom none of this work would be possible. On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend my appreciation to WPI's management and staff for their continued dedication to the organization and its important mission.

Thank you.

**Agnes Igoye**  
**BOARD CHAIRPERSON**



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our partners, Board of Directors, friends and all the WPI staff for the dedication to our shared mission and vision. I am proud to affirm that our commitment to advance gender justice through promoting autonomy and voice for women and girls in legislation, policy and practice is resolute and unwavering.

We hope to push forward the principles of equity, diversity, and equality for a better Uganda. Our tireless efforts to advance gender justice have not only endured but thrived in the face of challenges. Women and girls learned more about their autonomy through our mentorship programs and community sensitizations. We roll-out our Strategic Plan for the next five years (2023-2027), which will not only guide implementation of our objectives but will also act as a guiding light to our partners on what we intend to do over the planning period.

Our accomplishments this year are explained in detail in this annual report. From impactful advocacy campaigns, to empowering community initiatives through legal aid, each success is a testament to the dedication of our team and the support of our invaluable partners.

Together with our Legatum partners, we provided legal advice and representation to 150 women in prisons, while promoting self-representation and arming incarcerated women with skills to advocate for themselves when in court. We elevated the voices of women and pursued gender justice and the influence of women and girls in legislation, policy, and practice. The Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) was passed but we soldiered on, advocating for the rights of women in all their diversities.

In this report, we share the lives we touched, the voices we amplified, and the barriers we shattered. I invite each one of you to join us in the chapters yet to be written. Our commitment to feminist principles and women's rights is an unyielding force, and together, we shall continue to rewrite the narrative of equality and justice for all women and girls.

Thank you.

**Primah Kwagala**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

# ABOUT WOMEN'S PROBONO INITIATIVE

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## WHO WE ARE

Women's Probono Initiative is a feminist, not-for-profit organization based in Kampala, Uganda, with a reputation of boldly advancing equity, and challenging discrimination and violence against women and girls, through advocacy and creative lawyering.

Established in 2018, WPI was formed partly out of the recognition that there were hardly any female lawyers that were actively engaged in public interest litigation (PIL), even for cases that addressed the rights of women and girls. The absence of female litigators meant that male lawyers, could articulate the facts, but not necessarily communicate them from a position of experience of the lived realities of women and girls.

In addition to providing legal representation, in its quest to challenge patriarchy in all its forms and at its root, WPI has delved into research, engaged with communities, policymakers and other organizations in the women's movement to re-assess the meaning of gender equality, to highlight the centrality of SRHR to the empowerment of women and girls, to challenge the sense of complacency that has come with increased numbers of women in various positions, and to lead the call for efforts towards a new feminist agenda that champions full autonomy for women and girls.



## OUR VISION

A just and equitable society where women and girls are free from ALL forms of discrimination and violence.



## OUR MISSION

To advance gender justice through promoting autonomy, voice and influence of women and girls in legislation, policy, and practice.



## OUR VALUES

- **Accountability:** We are accountable to our clients, the communities we work with and to our partners.
- **Non-discrimination:** We believe in the equality of all persons and demonstrate this through our active implementation of diversity and inclusion in our clients and networks. As a feminist organization, we deliberately and consistently work to be an organization that values equity, celebrates diversity, and challenges all forms of discrimination.



- **Dignity:** We believe in, and uphold the dignity of all people, and strive to create a workplace that will provide an environment in which all who encounter us are left feeling respected and treated in a dignified manner.
- **Transparency and Integrity:** We are open and transparent in all we do, and in our communication. We are particularly keen to be transparent stewards of resources that are entrusted to us for our work. We also strive to build relationships based on trust and mutual respect.



## OUR OBJECTIVES

1. Build supportive communities that work collectively to promote gender equity and protect the rights of women and girls.
2. Promote adoption of policies and legislation that address inequalities and the persistent violence against women and girls.
3. Capacitate and mentor young female lawyers and activists to champion autonomy for women and girls, individually and as part of collective efforts of the women's movement in Uganda.
4. Support women to be free from violence and exploitation.



## APPROACHES TO OUR WORK

### a. Legal Representation

Our lawyers have the skills and expertise to provide:

- Direct legal representation.
- Offer legal advice to walk-in clients.
- Assess community needs and identify potential legal challenges.
- Develop and pursue advocacy goals and litigation strategies to reform practices that target and penalize women and girls we serve.

### b. Human Rights Awareness Creation

Our team has the expertise to:

- Train communities on their rights and responsibilities and in turn equip community members with knowledge and skills on how to seek redress for violations.
- Develop community-based mediation mechanisms that can be utilized outside court.
- Document community practices that inform impact litigations and national advocacy campaigns.

### c. Research and Knowledge Sharing

Our team has the expertise to:

- Analyze laws, practices and policies that have an impact on women and girls to inform PIL and cutting-edge advocacy initiatives.
- Document experiences of women and girls suffering human rights violations.





## OVERVIEW OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023

**OUTCOME 1:** Supportive Communities that work collectively to promote gender equity and protect the rights of women and girls

### 1. Community dialogues

This year WPI conducted several community dialogues to engage communities on upholding and promoting the autonomy and voice of women and girls key among these were:

#### a) **Public school engagement on the role of the boy child in ending child marriage and teenage pregnancy**

This was held at Matugga Hills Secondary School on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2023 where we had a dialogue with students and teachers on their obligation to report cases of sexual abuse to law enforcement and not to take part in acts that will lead to the vice by rejecting being intermediaries between the abusers and the victims.

#### b) **Butambala Community Outreach**

During the 16 Days of Activism, WPI held a community outreach in Butambala aimed at sensitizing women and girls about their role to combat gender-based violence. There are many barriers faced by women and girls in communities such as societal norms, deeply entrenched in a patriarchal society which perpetuate gender-based violence while also silencing victims and preventing them from reporting GBV cases. The session was attended by local government officials, the probation and welfare officer, the Mayor and LC Chairpersons who emphasized their role in ending violence against women and girls.



*Program Officer Patrick Murungi engaging students at Matugga Hills Secondary School*



*Participants at the sex workers' healing space pose for a group photo*

### c) **Convening of Sex Workers' Healing Space**

Led by AWAC we organized a safe space for female sex workers with AWAC aimed at addressing the various human rights violations that they face. The dire need for a safe space stemmed from the recognition that grassroots female sex work leaders are continually subjected to various forms of violence due to their commitment to challenging societal norms and advocating for justice for sex workers. This space allowed them to share their experiences with the support of a psychologist who provided psychosocial support, necessary to overcome the trauma they were enduring.

### 2. **Observing international days**

We commemorated several international days to highlight and amplify the impact of human rights violations on women and girls, key among these was:

a) **The international Women's Day** on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023 where we partnered with Female Lawyers Committee of Uganda Law Society on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, 2023 to host a Breakfast meeting to celebrate and recognize women's achievements

in advancing women's rights, among the speakers was Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga who shared her experience in women's rights activism with those present.

b) We also commemorated the **International Day Against Trafficking** were as a member of the CATIP-U we joined the United Nations office on drugs to raise awareness of the plight of human trafficking victims and promote accountability by the governments and stakeholders on this issue.

c) We commemorated **Menstrual Health Day** in collaboration with Together Alive Health Initiative (TAHI), Dash for Girls, Imagine Her, Twekonyere Foundation, Womena, Amani Initiative, Raising Teenagers Uganda, Wezeshe Girls and Slum Youth Rehabilitation and Development Organisation. We organized a three-day series of events as a pre-event for Menstrual Health Day 2023 in Napak District, in Karamoja. In what is known as the *MH fest*, we addressed MHM issues faced by girls and women in Napak District.



*A group photo during Women's Day*

d) We observed the **16 Days of Activism** in a series of activities culminating in a session of healing for sex workers conducted in collaboration with AWAC on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023 where we facilitated the provision of psychosocial support to sex workers who have suffered SGBV and created a sisterhood to foster coping mechanisms.

### 3. Media engagements

Throughout the year we engaged the public through both mainstream and social media by conducting press conferences, X spaces, webinars, radio talk shows, TV talk shows and writing newspaper articles. Some of the more successful engagements include:

#### a) Press conferences

- We participated in a conference to launch the MH Fest as a precursor to Menstrual Hygiene Day. See our press statement here: <https://womenprobono.org/press-statement-menstrual-hygiene-day-2023/>

- WPI joined other mental health activists during a press conference organized by Mental Health Uganda (MHU) following various media publications against mental health facilities on allegations of forced hospitalization and treatment, seclusion, chemical and physical restraint, sexual exploitation, overcrowding, and quality of meals among others on people living with mental health challenges, we were asking the Government to conduct a thorough investigation of the allegations and provide redress.

- We conducted a press conference denouncing the 18% tax on adult diapers under the Value-Added Amendment Act of 2023 on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2023 as imposing a further burden on women that use the adult diapers as well as their care takers, this press conference also served to announce the filing of a PIL case challenging this law. See our press statement here: <https://womenprobono.org/unburdening-the-lives-of-millions-advocating-for-the-exemption-of-adult-diapers-from-taxes/>



*Program Manager  
Rahom Bukirwa  
addressing viewers  
of NTV*

### **b) Webinars**

- i. We conducted a webinar discussion on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023 on the Employment Amendment Act highlighting its implications on the economic rights of women in the formal and informal sectors. We analyzed the proposed amendments and advocated for greater transparency and public involvement in advancing a better status for women and girls. This was attended by over 50 participants.
- ii. On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023, we conducted a webinar on the implications of the VAT (Amendment) Act of 2023. 76 people joined us in discussing the rights of women under the *#RejectAdultDiaper-Tax* Campaign and called for its repeal. The Act was passed anyway, with no consideration to the needs of persons and children with multiple disabling conditions, women with fistula and other complications.

### **c) Radio Talk shows**

WPI participated in 4 radio talk shows at Radio Akaboozi FM, Radio One and Mama FM, where we discussed topical issues affecting women, addressing human trafficking, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and Menstrual Health Management (MHM).

### **d) TV talk shows**

WPI engaged the public through 6 TV talk shows and appearances with TV stations like Family TV, Delta TV, Civic Space TV, NTV and UBC TV discussing issues like SGBV, Human trafficking, women's rights generally, employment rights, economic rights, and domestic violence.

### **e) X spaces**

On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023, WPI co-organized an X space with Elle Parle as a pre-debate tournament activity and attracted over 50 participants. We discussed the need to widen the participation of young women in debate, not only at school level but also in public spaces. We interrogated the significance of debate in state building, policy formulation and legislative reform.

### **f) Newspaper articles**

We published an article on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023 in the *Daily Monitor* newspaper reflecting on SRHR in 2023. We questioned the insistence of Government on laws and policies that are retrogressive and commented on the impact such laws would have on the lives of women and girls recommending that government should align its law making with international human rights standards to ensure fairness.



Our Human Resource Officer Charlotte Nazziwa with the ED of Raising Teenagers during the reflection meeting for the #Hike4GirlsUg campaign

#### 4. Campaigns

We collaborated with different partners to carry out advocacy campaigns on topical issues affecting women and girls key among which were:

##### a) **Hike4GirlsUg Campaign on MHM**

We participated in the #Hike4GirlsUg campaign organized by Raising Teenagers to destigmatize conversations on menstrual hygiene. The event attracted about 145 participants from different organizations. Proceeds went to buying menstrual hygiene products for girls in Kisoro. We used the opportunity to pass on information on menstrual hygiene for girls and period shaming. We also hosted a reflection meeting with collaborators on the campaign to pick lessons for next year.

##### b) **Street campaign against domestic violence**

WPI joined Cavendish University in a street campaign against domestic violence. In this campaign, officers from WPI were available to provide free legal advice to the community and educate them about the various forms of domestic violence and the legal remedies available.



### OUTCOME 2: Policies and legislation that address inequalities and the persistent violence against women and girls

To amplify the voices of women in civic spaces, we called for legislation and policies that uphold women’s rights and address those that permeate and maintain inequalities and violence against women. We analyzed policies and laws and engaged policy makers, calling for their alignment with human rights standards. We pursued PIL as a tool to advocate for gender sensitive laws and policies.

#### 1. Research and publications

- **Case brief on abortion case before EACJ:** A case brief was developed summarizing EACJ Reference No. 22 of 2022 that was filed by WPI to challenge the withdraw of the abortion guidelines. <https://womenprobono.org/download/case-brief-access-to-safe-legal-abortion-services-in-uganda/>

- **Commentary on the Employment (Amendment) Bill:** The Employment Act of 2006 is undergoing a process of amendment, and a bill has been proposed. The Employment (Amendment) Bill of 2022 proposes changes that address inequalities and persistent violence against women and girls. These include mandatory sexual harassment policies in all places of work, setting up breastfeeding centers at places of work and restricting emigration of workers among others. We developed a commentary on the bill for submission to the Uganda Law Society to form part of their inputs to the law.

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- **Report documenting challenges faced by women with disabilities in Uganda and Kenya:** Together with A48 Initiative, we developed a report titled, “*Documenting the experiences of women with disabilities during Covid-19 in Uganda and Kenya*”, highlighting issues of women with multiple disabilities. We identified challenges they face during this period and made recommendations to be incorporated into the Covid-19 recovery plans. <https://womenprobono.org/download/perfect-10th-wagiri-gia-speaks/>
  - **Case digest on abortion jurisprudence in Africa:** In collaboration with the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), developed a case digest of abortion jurisprudence in Africa and its impact on the reproductive rights of women in Uganda. This case digest details how different courts across the continent have handled the question of access to safe abortion and what lessons we can draw for future litigation. See the case digest here: <https://womenprobono.org/download/case-brief-on-access-to-safe-and-legal-abortion-services-in-uganda/>
  - **Information brief on the impact of the shrinking civic space on Women Human Rights Defenders:** We documented the experiences of WHRDs focusing on sexual and gender minorities with the intension to pushback on shrinking civic space challenges that affect WHRDs. By advancing agency and voice autonomy for women and girls directly involved in as WHRDs, WPI seeks to create a platform where women take charge of their life stories. See the information brief here: <https://womenprobono.org/download/the-shrinking-civic-space-for-women-girls-and-women-human-rights-defenders-in-uganda/>
  - **Saviour Complex HBO docuseries:** Our PIL case challenging the actions of a white missionary, Renee Bach who set up a medical facility and started treating malnourished children in Busoga Region, through her organisation serving his children, without a medical license or training leading to the death of many, was featured in a 3 part docuseries titled ‘Savior Complex’ on HBO max highlighting the impact of colonial aid on the population: <https://www.hulu.com/series/savior-complex-9482f50c-5295-4eb8-9e00-17e5b50a6a3f>
2. **Public Interest Litigation cases**
- **Trafficking case:** On 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023, we filed a human rights enforcement case against Horeb Services Uganda Limited and Ezra Mugisha before the High court of Uganda vide Miscellaneous Cause No. 21 Of 2023 challenging the exportation of Namutamba Milly to Saudi Arabia where she died after only five months of her stay. The labor company did not inform her family until three years after the fact and refused to repatriate her body, this is a violation of the right to life, right to dignity and right to access information, the case is still ongoing in court.
  - **Tax on adult diapers case:** On 11<sup>th</sup> August 2023, we filed a judicial review case against the Attorney General of Uganda before the High Court challenging Parliament’s decision to impose taxes on adult diapers claiming that by removing adult diapers from the list of exempted goods, the Parliament has disregarded the hardships and financial burdens faced by many vulnerable individuals in our society especially women who suffer from incontinence and often take on a caretaking role for others in society, the case is scheduled to be heard in 2024.

### 3. Ongoing PIL cases

We currently have 8 ongoing Public Interest Cases, three of which are challenging the Government's failure to provide psychosocial support and community mental health support services in primary health care facilities in Uganda for women with mental disabilities that have suffered sexual abuse, two challenging the withdrawal of the abortion guidelines, one challenging the practice of polygamy, and two supporting different organisations to apply and be joined as amicus in ongoing cases on access to abortion and mental health services respectively.

### 4. Representing parties to join as amicus in the AHA petitions.

WPI had the opportunity to represent 2 organisations from South Africa, that is Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC) and Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALC) in 2 separate applications to be joined as amicus curiae in the Petitions filed by various parties challenging the constitutionality of the Anti-homosexuality Act of 2023 (AHA). Even where all but one of the 5 applications to join as amicus were declined, we had the opportunity to demonstrate the capabilities of female lawyers in high profile case which often are dominated by males.



**OUTCOME 3:** Younger female lawyers and activists championing autonomy for women and girls, individually and as part of collective efforts of the women's movement in Uganda.



*The winning team of the debate at Matugga Hills Secondary School competition pose with their certificates.*

We partnered with several learning institutions to groom and mentor young women to champion autonomy and voice within their environment and reached over 546 students through a plethora of activities some of which include.

#### 1. Debate competitions

- We organized a debate at Matugga Hills Secondary School on whether Government has done enough to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

- We co-organized the Women’s Grand Debate Open and Public Speaking Tournament 2023 with Elle Parle Women at Uganda Christian University (UCU). This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of these debate series, which brought together 150 young women over the course of three days to debate the contemporary issues affecting women in the political, social, and economic spheres.
- **Brown Bag Lectures:** We launched the bi-weekly brown bag lecture series at the faculty of law exposing students to concepts that they would ideally not learn in school like access to contraception, creative lawyering, feminist justice and so many others. These brown bag lecture series have reached over 200 students.

## 2. Collaborations with universities

- **Gender Justice Award:** We partnered with Cavendish University to mentor and amplify the voices of university law students on feminist concepts and women’s rights. Key among the outcomes of this partnership was WPI introducing the Gender Justice Award going to the best female student of the year with an opportunity to intern with us for 3 months upon completion of their studies, the first award was delivered during the Cavendish University graduation ceremony of 2023.

## 3. MUK Public Debate

We collaborated with Makerere University School of Law, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) and Human Rights and Peace Center (HURIPPEC) to conduct a public debate on the right to abortion in Uganda. The debate was intended to amplify the impact of the restrictive abortion laws of Uganda on the lives on women and girls while bursting the myths and misconceptions surrounding abortion in Uganda. The event attracted 116 participants and was streamed live on the HURIPPEC YouTube channel.



## OUTCOME 4: WPI initiatives result in an increased number of women freed from violence and exploitation



*Our Program Officer Elizabeth Achola providing legal services during the Menstrual Hygiene Fest 2023 in Napak District*

This year our legal aid clinic saw us reach 416 people who benefitted from our services. We also engaged in several networks and coalitions to work collaboratively with partners to amplify different issues affecting women, girls and sexual and gender minorities lending our voice to consortium and solidarity spaces.

### 1. Legal aid services

- We followed up 2 cases of human rights violations and provided the survivors with legal aid representation.
- Our rapid response team responded to 25 community calls and rescued 10 victims of child marriages while other cases are still being worked on. These cases were registered from Pallisa, Nakaseke, Luweero, Mpigi, Mukono and





*Legal services during the Busoga Royal Wedding Health Camp*

Kumi Districts. We rescued a 14-year-old girl from child marriage and reunited her with the mother. We subsequently got the father arrested and charged with aggravated trafficking in person.

- We provided legal aid services and advice to incarcerated women at Kigo and Luzira women's prisons with the aim of ensuring that women on remand access legal aid services in both prisons to support in prison decongestion. We supported 362 women with legal aid representation and diverted 341 cases out of the prison system and had their cases finalized.

## 2. Legal aid clinics

- **Menstrual Hygiene Fest 2023:** During the MH Fest which took place in May 2023 in Napak district, we conducted an open legal aid clinic where we received 18 women seeking legal aid services.
- **Kifumbira Legal Aid Clinic:** On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2023, we partnered with the Rotaract Club of Kampala City to set up a Legal Aid Clinic in the Kifumbira Community in Kamwokya, Kampala City during which we managed to

create legal awareness on the rights of women highlighting the number of legal challenges they face and how the law protects them in that regard. This event attracted over 120 participants from the community. We also provided legal aid services to 08 women who had cases for follow up.

- **Busoga Royal Wedding Health Camp:** The Busoga Health Forum hosted the pre-royal wedding Medical camp at the Busoga Kingdom headquarters, Bugembe that ran from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2023. WPI participated and supported this event through setting up a legal aid clinic tent aimed at addressing how the communities can aid in combating issues of teenage pregnancy and Sexual Gender Based Violence within the region. WPI's legal officers also held a sensitization session at the beginning of the camp where awareness creation was done on SRHR issues such as sexual violence and how to use referral pathways to combat SGBV cases that affected majorly affected young girls and women in the region.



*Lorna Nagawa  
our Program  
Volunteer  
addressing the  
crowd during the  
girls' summit*

### 3. Collaborations and networks

- **Central girls' summit at Buikwe headquarters with GNB:** We held a panel discussion on the legal framework and experiences around ending child marriages in Buikwe district. The discussion was directed to psychological economic and health impacts of child marriages and teenage pregnancies.
- **6<sup>th</sup> National Girl's Summit:** WPI as a member of GNB convened with other members to commemorate National girls' summit 2023. The national summit brought together allies to ending child marriages and teenage pregnancies in Uganda. Here we highlighted the experiences of litigating cases of child marriages in our communities.
- **CSMMUA:** As a member of CSMMUA, being part of the legal and policy thematic group, we participated in the quarterly coalition meetings giving updates on our PIL case challenging the withdrawal of the abortion guidelines by Ministry of Health. We also participated in the development of the new CSMMUA strategic plan.
- **Girls First Fund (GFF) Grantee training:** WPI participated in GFF's four-day grantee partner's training focused on critical discussions around economic empowerment approaches and reflections on learnings the Ugandan portfolio of partners. We also hosted the GFF partner representative at our offices to share possible areas for opportunities in the coming years.
- **Female Lawyers' Committee of Uganda Law Society:** WPI engaged the female lawyers' committee of the Uganda Law Society (ULS) to maximize the potential of female lawyers in Uganda together with them we commemorated International Women's Day and conducted the annual Women in Law Dinner 2023 where distinguished



*Our program manager Rahom Maria Bukirwa making a presentation during an HIV and Law coalition meeting.*

female lawyers are recognised and awarded. Our Executive Director, Ms. Primah Kwagala was accordingly awarded the Probono Excellence and Human Rights Lawyer of the Year 2023.

- **HIV and Law Coalition:** We participated in the quarterly meetings of the HIV and Law coalition where members shared about the strong partnership built and coordination on how best to continue working together in addressing issues of HIV, the Law and SRHR. During one of these we made a presentation on SRHR advocacy work undertaken such as development of information briefs to promote knowledge sharing, use of legal tools through the provision of legal aid services and championing menstrual health management through community skilling.

- **UWONET women's week:** As a member of the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), we convened a session during the 5<sup>th</sup> National Women's Week under the theme "Women's Organising Reimagined! Thriving through Adversity." This panel discussion was fundamental in amplifying the voices of WHRDs and creating a platform where they can deliberate on ways to advance women's rights and to push back on the shrinking civic space in Uganda. By advancing agency and voice autonomy for women and girls directly involved as WHRDs, WPI created an opportunity for women in all their diversities to take charge of their life stories and challenge the culture that women, their initiatives, and their rights are defined and seen through the lens of men.

#### 4. International and regional engagements

During this year WPI attended international and regional convenings to amplify the voices of grassroots organisations, women, and girls. We also used this opportunity to share experiences and learn from other activists locally and across the globe on how to do things better. Key among these is:

- **Reproductive Health Network Conference (RHNK):** With the support of Women's Link Worldwide, WPI was honored to attend the RHNK Conference from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2023 in Mombasa, Kenya. The meeting was focused on the localization of global adolescent and youth SRHR commitments of different African countries. Here WPI was hosted on a side panel organized by Women's Link Worldwide which was centered on the adolescents' right to access treatment and comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare where we shared our experiences on SRHR for girls with 66 attendees.



*Our program officer Sam Agwero presenting at a panel during the RHNK conference.*

- **Judicial colloquium on SRHR:** With the support of Women’s Link Worldwide, we disseminated our abortion case digest at a judicial colloquium targeting 52 judges from across Africa convened by Southern Africa Litigation Center (SALC) and held in Sandton, South Africa in June. This colloquium convened judges from across the continent. Its major focus was on the discussion around SRHR especially the question of sexual and gender minorities, access to safe abortion and the anti-rights agenda.
  - **Women Deliver conference:** With support from Fos Feminista we participated in the Women Deliver conference which took place in Kigali, Rwanda from 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023 where we attended a number of events including; Gender-Responsive Health Systems for Universal Health organised by UHC 2030 and the Alliance for Gender Equity, Adolescent Girls as drivers of Change organised by UNFPA, Achieving Gender Equality - Challenging Issues, discussion on teenage pregnancy and litigating gender justice in the 21st Century, among others.
  - **Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development review meeting:** With support from Fos Feminista we were part of the Ugandan delegation that attended the pre-conference meeting on youth, CSOs and major groups held in Lusaka, Zambia in November. The Ministers of African Union member states constituted a Working Group that reviewed the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development. The meeting was organized by the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the Government of Zambia, UNFPA, and UNECA.
5. **Engagements with policy and decision makers**
- We had a meeting with the Minister of East Africa Community Affairs, Hon. Rebecca Kadaga to discuss policy and law reform pertinent to advancing women’s rights at a regional level. During the meeting we rallied support for how we can buttress the efforts of the mover of the EAC Sexual and Reproductive Health bill to see it adopted into law. From this meeting we managed to secure her support to lend her voice in some of our subsequent engagements.

*Our Senior Attorney Rose Wakikona and Program Manager Rahom Maria Bukirwa meeting Hon. Rebecca Kadaga*



- WPI disseminated the case digest on abortion jurisprudence in Africa to key policy and decision makers in different forums. This included the judicial colloquium in South Africa; a meeting of members of the bench, State Attorneys, legal practitioners, and members from the civil society.
- We equally disseminated our analysis of the draft National Family Policy to key stakeholders from government including the Commissioner of Family Affairs at Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development also the Commissioner, Child and Family Protection Unit at Uganda Police Force. Calling for the protection and recognition of all forms of families and the provision of social protection to them.
- We further engaged key stakeholders to disseminate an information brief developed to demonstrate the impact of the shrinking civic space on Women Human Rights Defenders focusing on sexual and gender minorities in a series of meeting attracting over 56 stakeholders. This was done for with the intension to pushback on civic space challenges that affect WHRDs by documenting their experiences and responses in Uganda's closing civic space. By advancing agency and voice autonomy for women and girls directly involved in as WHRDs, WPI seeks to create a platform where women take charge of their life stories.
- We presented a legal opinion to the legal and parliamentary affairs committee on the human rights implications of passing the Anti-homosexuality bill (as it was then) calling for it to be scrapped. This was part of the public hearing process where the committee gave opportunity to various stakeholders to make inputs into the bill before it is tabled before parliament for a second reading.
- We were honored to engage the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD) on the draft national family policy with recommendations on what needs to be included. It was noted that the department of family affairs was created in 2005 because government saw the importance of the family as the driving force of society and our recommendations to add to this process are welcome.



## OUTCOME 5: Institutional Development



*Our Human Resource Officer Charlotte Nazziwa attends a group session during a training by GWI.*

### 1. Capacity building sessions for staff

We organized capacity building sessions for staff to train on GBV, M&E and Research targeting women-led and local humanitarian agencies working with refugee populations, this training was facilitated by The Global Women's Institute (GWI) at Washington University. We also held an inhouse training to introduce the M&E framework system in our organizing, this was intended to give staff an overview of how the system can be used to track progress with ongoing projects and activities implemented through collecting, analyzing, and judging data.

### 2. Board meetings.

We conducted 2 board meetings in 2023, one in July and another in December. These meetings convened the board of WPI to provide oversight to the management of WPI and give strategic direction to the organisation. During these we managed to have several of our policies approved for use. Board meetings are indispensable for effective governance,

strategic planning, risk management, and maintaining trust within our organization. This aims to steer the Organization towards long-term success and sustainable growth.

### 3. Staff retreats

We held 2 staff retreats one in January and another in July 2023 to reflect on the milestones achieved, challenges faced, and lessons learnt for 2022 but also the first half of 2023. This was also an opportunity to understand the importance of incorporating wellbeing in the institutional activities, evaluate internal systems and understand the benefits of networking and fundraising through the external facilitators we had.

# CHALLENGES FACED AND LESSONS LEARNT

## Challenges

- 1. Persistent corruption in our judicial system:** Unfortunately, some judicial officers frustrate clients unable to pay money by denying them hearing dates, bail and acquittals even in the absence of legal reasons otherwise. Persistent corruption remains one of the biggest challenges towards accessing justice for people in Uganda.
- 2. Shrinking Civic Space:** We are currently facing a challenge in terms of the political and legal environment which is bent on curtailing the involvement of CSOs in civic engagement. Currently there is an increase in the legal barriers towards operating as an NGO which makes it harder for us to continue operations.
- 3. The passing of the AHA:** The passing of the AHA presented a challenge for NGOs which carry out advocacy for gender diverse persons giving it a wide interpretation. This has made CSOs fearful of advocating for the rights and dignity of all persons.

## Lessons learnt

- We have learned that it is important to have a security plan and conduct a risk assessment for every project. Collaborating with organizations doing similar work and media houses is key to amplifying advocacy messages to promote women's and girls' human rights in Uganda. This helped us mitigate the risks by ensuring that the programming approach addresses all the anticipated challenges. For instance, we work with the Coalition to Stop Maternal Mortality Due to Unsafe Abortion (CSMMUA) and have attended court during the hearing of the Public Interest case challenging the stay and withdrawal of the 2015 standards and guidelines for the reduction of mortality and morbidity due to unsafe abortion in Uganda. The coalition has also been fundamental in advocacy campaigns that advocate for abortion. This has helped to counter opposition groups that assume abortion is illegal and shouldn't be discussed in Uganda at all. WPI will have a security plan for all activities going forward.
- Consistency in what we're doing is very important for us to prove to the women that were not just recording their cases for donor reports and publicity and even if the cases are many and the lawyers are not able to physically be present at court during all the hearings, working alongside Judicial officers, the State Attorneys, and sureties/family members and friends are also very helpful and impactful to the client seeing that they have very limited access to phones.
- We learnt that sensitizing criminal justice actors fosters a supportive legal ecosystem, particularly on the challenges that frustrate women's access to justice. Some judicial officers do not sufficiently rely on social services reports to identify mitigating circumstances for women offenders. As a result, they are often not aware of women's relevant history and background and do not apply alternatives to imprisonment even when appropriate. Sensitizing other actors within the criminal justice system such as State Attorneys and Police Officers is crucial in fostering an informed and supportive legal ecosystem for women. Holding regular bar-bench engagements establishes valuable collaborative discussions to effectively address the challenges that frustrate women's access to justice.

## CONCLUSION

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**W**e are excited about this year and looking forward to reaching more milestones. We anticipate being more active and impactful this year. Therefore, we commit to continue making contributions to policy reform, and pursue justice for women and girls that have suffered violence in Ugandan.



## OUR BOARD AND STAFF



### **OUR BOARD FOR 2023**

1. Ms. Agnes Igoye  
Board Chairperson
2. Ms. Caroline Egesa  
Vice Chairperson
3. Ms. Charlotte Nalumansi,  
Secretary
4. Ms. Mercy Acham Okirya,  
Treasurer
5. Mr. Kabanda David  
Member
6. Ms. Lisa Rwaboni  
Kanyomozi, Member
7. Ms. Primah Kwagala  
Ex-officio



### **OUR STAFF FOR 2023**

1. Ms. Primah Kwagala  
Executive Director
2. Ms. Rose Wakikona  
Senior Attorney
3. Ms. Rahom Maria Bukirwa  
Program Manager
4. Ms. Elizabeth Achola  
Program Officer
5. Ms. Samantha May Agwero  
Program Officer
6. Mr. Titus Asimwe  
Program Officer
7. Mr. Patrick Murungi  
Program Officer
8. Ms. Charlotte Nazziwa  
Human Resource Officer
9. Ms. Lydia Konde  
Accounts Officer
10. Ms. Damalie Babirye  
Admin Assistant
11. Ms. Julia Kemigisha  
Volunteer
12. Ms. Murungi Vasta Flower  
Volunteer
13. Ms. Lorna Nagawa  
Volunteer
14. Mr. Solomon Kisakye  
Intern

*Group photos of the board members and staff during a board meeting.*

# OUR ADVOCACY NETWORKS AND **COALITIONS**



Coalition to Stop Maternal Mortality Due to Unsafe Abortion



Uganda Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons



Domestic Violence Act (DVA) Coalition



Period Equality Network East Africa



Uganda Women's Network



HIV Law Coalition



Girls not Brides Alliance-Uganda



Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Alliance - Uganda

## OUR PARTNERS

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women's *L I N K* worldwide



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Instagram: [wpi.uganda](https://www.instagram.com/wpi.uganda)

X: [@womenprobono](https://www.x.com/womenprobono)