PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN UGANDA
OUR MISSION

Inspired by the Jewish commitment to justice, American Jewish World Service (AJWS) works to realize human rights and end poverty in the developing world. We pursue lasting change by supporting grassroots and global human rights organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and by advocating for U.S. and international policies to achieve justice and equality worldwide.

FRONT COVER AJWS grantee GWED-G has enabled women like Pamela Acrico to generate income through collective farming. As a result, her children can stay in school and have a brighter future. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik
INTRODUCTION

With diverse wildlife, breathtaking scenery and vibrant cultures, Uganda is known as the “Pearl of Africa.” Ranked the “most entrepreneurial country in the world” in 2015, it has one of the fastest-growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, a growing middle class and a poverty rate that has dropped from over 30 to less than 20 percent in the last decade. Yet despite Uganda’s natural beauty and economic progress, millions of its citizens still suffer from deep poverty, oppression and the devastating effects of decades of violence.

Uganda is still grappling with the legacies of British colonialism, two brutal dictatorships, a five-year civil war, and the horrors of the conflict between the Ugandan military and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA)—a notorious rebel group that wreaked havoc on the north, massacring entire communities, raping countless women and girls, and abducting tens of thousands of children and forcing many to serve as child soldiers or sex slaves.

In addition to its difficult history, Uganda faces a host of contemporary human rights challenges. Across the country, rural communities are fighting to defend their land from powerful forces that seek to develop it—including the government and large-scale industrial agriculture, oil and mining companies. Meanwhile, people whose identities differ from accepted social norms—especially LGBTI people and adult sex workers—are subject to a litany of abuses, including arrests, beatings and discrimination. And although LRA attacks have ceased, communities in the north are still recovering from the damage they wrought—a process hindered by the woeful inadequacy of education, health care, livelihoods and infrastructure in the region. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable, as they face high rates of violence, unplanned pregnancy and HIV infection, yet lack access to vital health and education services. Compounding these problems, the government has increasingly cracked down on activists and civil society organizations in recent years.

To aid their struggle in pursuit of a more just society for all, AJWS has supported human rights groups seeking social change in Uganda since 2001. Today, we fund more than 28 organizations promoting the rights of the country’s most vulnerable people—particularly those living in rural communities, women and girls, LGBTI people and sex workers. These grantees are pushing to overturn unjust laws while helping their fellow Ugandans learn about their rights, organize to promote and defend them, and seek justice for abuses—all with the goal of securing a better future.

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1 https://www.good.is/articles/why-uganda-is-the-worlds-most-entrepreneurial-nation
4 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
OUR GRANTEEES IN UGANDA

Bullisa Initiative for Rural Development Organization (BIRUDO)
Bunyoro Albertine Petroleum Network on Environmental Conservation (BAPENECO)
Centre for Economic Social Cultural Rights in Africa (CESCRA)
Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL)
Chapter Four Uganda
Civic Response on Environment and Development (CRED)
Crested Crane Lighters (CCL)
Defenders Protection Initiative (DPI)
Gulu Early Childhood Development Support Organization (GECDSO)
Gulu Union for Women with Disabilities in Uganda (GUWODU)
Gulu Women’s Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G)
Hearts for a Safe Harbor (HFSH)
Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF)
International Community of Women Living with HIV- Eastern Africa (ICWEA)
Kakindo Orphans Care (KOC)
Kwataniza Women Farmer’s Group (KWG)
Lake Albert Children Women Advocacy and Development Organization (LACWADO)
Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPROW)
National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)
Navigators of Development Association (NAVODA)
Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment – West Nile (RICE-RN)
Straight Talk Foundation
Support Initiative for People with Congenital Disorders (SIPD)
Uganda Women’s Action Programme (UWAP)
Women’s Health Support Initiative
Women’s Organization Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA)

Some grantees are not listed due to security considerations.
Uganda’s long history is punctuated by the rise and fall of various kingdoms, decades of British colonial rule and a tumultuous post-colonial era marked by waves of civil war, dictatorships, brutal rebellion and terror. This complex past has given rise to many of the nation’s present challenges, and has inspired growing movements of activists and organizations determined to defend human rights.

THE RISE OF BUGANDA

As early as 1000 B.C.E., Bantu-speaking peoples from west and central Africa arrived in the territory now known as Uganda. The centuries that followed, migration into the area continued, bringing Nilotic-speaking peoples from the north and east. By 1500 C.E., several of these groups had settled in the area and established kingdoms. The most powerful of these kingdoms was the Bantu-speaking Buganda, which controlled most of southwestern Uganda by the 19th century.

The people of Buganda—the “Baganda”—were ruled by a Kabaka (traditional king) who worked through a hierarchy of clan chiefs to govern his realm. Among the most famous of these kings was Kabaka Mutesa I. In power from 1856 to 1884, Mutesa was a savvy leader who fostered strong ties between his kingdom and Arab traders, with whom he exchanged slaves and ivory for firearms and other goods. Combined with a large standing army and well-developed system of agriculture, these trade links made Buganda a formidable political and economic force in the region.

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1 http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/2chapters.shtml
3 http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/uganda/history
4 http://www.britannica.com/place/Buganda
5 http://www.monitor.co.ug/SpecialReports/ugandaat50/-/1370466/1361764/-/uk9lprz/-/index.html

**BACKGROUND:**

**HISTORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN UGANDA**

Young women collect water in Buseruka village. AJWS grantee KWG has defended their right to be compensated if their land is appropriated for development.

Photo by Evan Abramson
Less than a decade into Mutesa’s rule, in 1862, British explorers arrived in Buganda, and King Mutesa agreed to allow Christian missionaries from Great Britain and France into his kingdom.\(^\text{10}\) His successor went a step further, allowing the Imperial British East Africa Company to set up operations and, in 1894, the kingdom became a British protectorate.\(^\text{11}\)

**THE BRITISH COLONIAL ERA**

The British quickly expanded their control in the region during the 1890s to encompass all of modern-day Uganda, including the rest of the Bantu-speaking kingdoms in the south and the Nilotic-speaking groups in the north.\(^\text{12}\) Favoring Buganda, the British granted it privileged status as an autonomous, constitutional monarchy\(^\text{13}\) and assigned Baganda chiefs to administer the colony on their behalf.\(^\text{14}\)

To solidify their control over Uganda, the British passed and imposed various laws on the local people—even though most Ugandans had no voting rights or representation in the colonial government. For example, the Crown imposed legislation that undermined women’s rights by giving heads of households—who were predominantly male—full ownership of land.\(^\text{15}\) It also passed legislation outlawing same-sex relations, stoking increased discrimination and stigma. More than 100 years later, Ugandans still suffer the harmful repercussions of these laws.

Seeking to benefit from Uganda’s fertile land and ample resources, the British designated the south as a production zone and the north as a source of labor. Northerners constructed roads, schools and clinics; and established cotton, sugar and coffee plantations in southern Uganda, while their hometowns in the north languished without infrastructure or vital services.\(^\text{16}\) Great Britain’s preferential treatment of Buganda and economic focus on the south stoked tensions between the Bantu- and Nilotic-speaking peoples and created sharp class divisions between the north and south.

**INDEPENDENCE**

In the early 1920s, the British began transferring more and more power to the local Ugandan elite. In the years following World War II, the British empire saw a period of consolidation and retreat as costs grew to administer the colonies. After the British granted independence to India in 1947, many African countries aspired to independence.

In 1962, the Crown granted the country independence.\(^\text{17}\) The new nation was led by a coalition government in which the south was represented by the Kabaka Yekka party of Buganda, and the north was represented by Milton Obote and his Uganda People’s Congress (UPC). This power-sharing continued after the first general elections, when Obote became prime minister and Parliament elected Buganda Kabaka Mutesa II as the president. For a moment, Uganda seemed to be firmly on the path to democracy—but, in 1964, it took an abrupt turn for the worse.

**A TUMULTUOUS TRANSITION TO TERROR**

Faced with rising opposition from within his UPC party and rival political groups, Obote suspended the Ugandan constitution in 1964 and deposed Kabaka Mutesa II from the presidency. In the years that followed, he abolished the kingdoms that had survived the colonial era, promoted himself to president, rewrote the constitution so that Uganda was a unitary republic and eliminated all opposition parties.\(^\text{18}\)

While Obote was busy consolidating his grip on power, one of his top military commanders, Idi Amin, was growing increasingly dissatisfied. When Obote travelled to Singapore in 1971, Amin seized power in a military coup that was welcomed by many Ugandans—relief that soon turned to terror.\(^\text{19}\)

Now remembered as one of the world’s most ruthless dictators, Amin was responsible for the murder of up to 500,000 civilians during his bloody eight-year rule. He also expelled Ugandans of Indian descent overnight, rendering them stateless. Upon taking power, he ordered hundreds of army officers and soldiers killed. Amin was paranoid, believing that officers and soldiers might turn against him, and created new security organizations tasked with silencing—and often murdering—suspected dissidents. Most of Amin’s victims were innocent Ugandans targeted for their ethnic or personal affiliations—or for simply looking at the self-proclaimed “President for Life” the wrong way.\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^{11}\)http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/uganda/history  
\(^{12}\)https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/uganda/Uganweb-06.htm  
\(^{14}\)https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/uganda/Uganweb-06.htm  
\(^{17}\)http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/uganda/history  
\(^{18}\)https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/uganda/Uganweb-06.htm  
\(^{19}\)ibid  
\(^{20}\)ibid
The situation worsened in 1978 as Amin ordered his army to invade Tanzania’s northern territories, which he planned to annex. Threatened, the Tanzanian president dispatched his own forces into Uganda.21 Together with a militia group led by the rising rebel leader Yoweri Museveni,22 the Tanzanian soldiers toppled Amin’s government in 1979. Amin fled to Saudi Arabia, where, despite his crimes and transgressions, he lived as a free man until his death in 2003.23

**CIVIL WAR AND THE RISE OF MUSEVENI**

In the months after Amin’s defeat, several leaders ascended to the presidency—only to be ousted and replaced. In 1980, former President Milton Obote and his UPC won elections, but many questioned the legitimacy of their victory, and Obote struggled to consolidate his power. In 1981, Yoweri Museveni and Professor Yusufu Lule—a politician who served briefly as president in 1979—launched a rebellion from their base in the south.24 Five years of civil war ensued, during which Obote’s government army slaughtered hundreds of thousands of southern civilians in an attempt to put down the opposition.25

Museveni and Lule’s National Resistance Army (NRA) finally took Kampala in 1986, and Museveni subsequently declared himself president.26

**JOSEPH KONY AND THE LRA INSURGENCY**

Though Museveni’s victory in 1986 brought an end to the Ugandan civil war, up until 2006, fighting between Museveni’s forces and anti-government rebels opposed to Museveni’s rule continued in the north. The most notorious of these rebel groups is the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Established in 1986 by the now infamous rebel leader Joseph Kony—who alleges that spirits visited him in his dreams and ordered him to attack villages and rape and kill civilians27—the LRA’s singular military strategy has been to terrorize civilians in Uganda and beyond. Between 1986 and 2006, LRA troops attacked hundreds of communities in northern Uganda, brutally murdered thousands of villagers, burned their houses to the ground, and abducted tens of thousands of their children for use as soldiers or sex slaves.

For years, the Ugandan government struggled to get a handle on the LRA insurgency and failed, in part due to the severe lack of infrastructure and development in the north—a legacy of Great Britain’s colonial policies. Seeking to better protect civilians in the region, the government relocated roughly 1.8 million people to “protection camps” or “protection villages” that could be easily defended from the LRA by the Ugandan military. But these sites were overcrowded and plagued by poverty, disease and crime.

The tide began to turn on the LRA in 2002, when Museveni and the Sudanese government pledged to work together to put down the rebels, who had set up bases in southern Sudan. In 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for five LRA leaders, including Kony. The same year, Kony ordered his forces to retreat across the Ugandan border into eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since then, the diminished but not destroyed LRA has been spotted—and in some cases launched attacks—in DRC, Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan and South Sudan.

According to the United Nations, since 1986, the LRA has caused the deaths of an estimated 100,000 people; abducted 60,000 to 100,000 children; and displaced about 2.5 million people in Uganda, South Sudan, DRC and CAR.28 Although the LRA’s attacks in northern Uganda ceased in 2006, the destruction it left behind continues to haunt communities as they seek to rebuild.

**HUMAN RIGHTS IN UGANDA TODAY**

In the 30 years since Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in 1986, they have won five rounds of national elections—many of which have been hotly contested, with allegations of fraud, vote rigging, and attacks on opposition parties and candidates.

During this period, Uganda has enjoyed a measure of political stability and economic growth, due in part to the influx of U.S. and European aid over the last two decades. Today, poverty levels are at an all-time low, the middle class is growing and foreign investment is on the rise.

But these indicators of progress are somewhat misleading. Although the official poverty rate has dropped precipitously, 63 percent of Ugandans29 still make less than $2.40 a day,30 meaning that a majority of the country is either trapped in poverty or is prone to poverty. Meanwhile, the gap between the very rich and the very poor is growing, and the north remains especially impoverished. Museveni’s regime has also smothered civil liberties and repressed the rights of rural people, women and minorities. Many of the “advances” he has championed failed to

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http://www.britannica.com/biography/Yoweri-Kaguta-Museveni
http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/uganda/Uganweb-06.htm
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3155925.stm
http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/uganda/history
benefit the country’s most vulnerable people—and some were thin veils for underlying corruption. For example, during their decades-long rule, Museveni and his NRM have restored the traditional kings, but failed to vest them with any political power that would allow local governance. The NRM endorsed a referendum that reestablished multi-party politics, but at the same time, it clamped down on any emerging opposition parties and supported amendments to the constitution eliminating presidential term limits. And though they made progress in curbing the spread of HIV and AIDS in the early 1990s, their approach—which emphasized abstinence—has ultimately failed, and HIV rates are again on the rise.

The Ugandan government has also routinely undermined the rights of people whose sexual orientation or gender identity or expression fall outside what is considered acceptable by Ugandan society—especially LGBTI people and sex workers, who face hostility and abuse at the hands of the state, their families and communities, and society at large. These abuses are often fueled, enabled or worsened by harmful legislation. For example, in 2014, after five years of intense debate, the Museveni government adopted a law that made same-sex relations punishable by life imprisonment. The law was overturned thanks to a swell of grassroots activism and the outrage in the international community; but same-sex relations remain illegal in Uganda, and threats and acts of hate against LGBTI people—including harassment, arbitrary arrests, violence and denial of vital services like health care—have continued unabated. In many cases, these abuses have been made worse by newspapers, which have publicly “outed” LGBTI people and launched character attacks on them and their allies, including feminists and lawyers.

Intersex people—individuals born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t fit the typical definitions of female or male—face high rates of stigma and abuse in Uganda. Many intersex people are forced to undergo unnecessary medical treatment or surgeries. Some are accused of witchcraft or of being “cursed.” Almost all are ostracized by their communities and discriminated against by government agencies, health care providers and employers—denying them access to official identity papers, medical treatment, education and jobs. The families of intersex people also often fall victim to such discrimination and abuse.

As in many countries, limited economic options lead some people in Uganda—particularly LGBTI people and women—
to choose sex work as a means of earning a living—a livelihood that comes with certain risks and challenges. Sex workers (consenting adults who sell sexual services) face high rates of violence at the hands of abusive clients, the police and the public, and are frequently denied access to health care and legal aid. Yet because sex work is illegal and police are often the perpetrators of violence against them, sex workers rarely report abuses, leaving them unprotected and incredibly vulnerable.

Another volatile issue in Uganda today is natural resource rights. Many Ugandans who subsist below or near the poverty line live in regions containing the most valuable natural resources, such as arable land, oil, and minerals. Conflicts over who owns and has the right to develop and profit from these riches have flared in recent years, with the government and multinational corporations launching large-scale economic development projects in areas without consulting the local people who traditionally own these lands and depend on them for survival.

Land conflict is especially acute in the Albertine region, a western expanse that borders the DRC. Since the discovery of oil in Albertine in 2006, unscrupulous investors and speculators—including foreigners and members of the Ugandan elite—have grabbed land from local communities, dug oil wells that pollute local farms and forests, and sometimes displaced rural people to areas where they struggle to survive. In addition to robbing local communities of key sources of food, water and livelihoods, oil exploration is also threatening the Albertine’s delicate ecosystem—especially as extraction begins and the potential for oil spills escalates.

Those seeking to launch oil operations in the Albertine are emboldened by the fact that few residents there hold legal titles to their land. To defend themselves from land grabs, local people often point to “customary” land rights enshrined in Uganda’s constitution. Such rights grant families and communities ownership of the land upon which they have lived for generations, even if they lack legal documents substantiating their claims. But the Ugandan government has done little to uphold such rights, nor has it adequately ensured that communities in which drilling for oil takes place are fairly compensated for land and oil or relocated when their original land is no longer habitable or available.

Since the late 1990s, civil society organizations and activists have been pushing for land reform that would recognize, protect and reinforce the land rights of all citizens. Women’s rights activists have been at the center of this struggle, demanding greater equality for women under the law in terms of their rights to own, inherit and sell land. But despite this robust and active movement, struggles over land persist.

### COURAGE IN THE FACE OF INCREASING REPRESSION

Uganda is under increasing domestic and international scrutiny for corruption, restrictions on civil and political rights, and discrimination against LGBTI people—in large part thanks to civil society organizations that have brought injustices in their country to the world’s attention. In spite of these efforts, the government has enacted several laws that limit internal dissent. The Public Order Management Act of 2013 allows police to break up rallies and protests and requires civil society groups and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) in certain places to obtain permission to simply hold a meeting. More recently, the NGO Act of 2016 has barred NGOs from engaging in any activities that the government believes undermine “the dignity of Ugandans,” and has increased the government’s ability to prevent civil society organizations from registering and to deregister them if their work is deemed to be “against national interest.”

A number of Ugandan civil society organizations—including groups supported by AJWS—have bravely spoken out against these repressive laws. For example, when the NGO Act was pending before Parliament, several AJWS grantees advocated for—and successfully achieved—several improvements to the act, such as the addition of oversight structures for the board that governed NGO activities. Despite this progress, Ugandan civil society organizations continue to operate in a repressive and dangerous landscape. Many groups are forced to operate covertly or risk being shut down or worse, as violent attacks on Ugandan activists are on the rise.

Even in the face of these obstacles, the nation’s activists have refused to back down in their fight for human rights, buoyed by their long history of organizing and by true hope that progress is possible. AJWS is supporting these courageous changemakers as they pursue their vision of a more just society.

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Northern Uganda boasts the highest poverty rates in the country, fueled by decades of conflict and the legacy of neglect of the north during the colonial era. The situation is sustained by a debilitating lack of schools, roads and clinics.

Women and girls have borne the brunt of the violence and poverty in the north. In the aftermath of the LRA’s rape-and-pillage campaign, most are unable to access health, education or legal services and experience heightened rates of sexual assault, domestic violence and unplanned pregnancies.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people and sex workers face stigma, harassment, discrimination, beatings—and even murder—for not conforming to the traditional gender and sexual norms that prevail in Uganda.

Uganda’s traditional farming communities are struggling to make a living as oil, industrial agricultural and mining companies backed by the government expand onto their territory. In some areas, entire communities are being evicted to places where resources are scarce—often throwing them into dire poverty.

In recent years, the Ugandan government has used the law to restrict the activities of activists, shut down NGOs and stop peaceful demonstrations for social justice.

http://www.wri.org/sites/default/files/map4.jpg

Women at a KWG meeting discuss community decisions that will shape their future. Photo by Evan Abramson

SNAPSHOT OF UGANDA’S CHALLENGES

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From the systematic neglect and subjugation of the north during the colonial era, to the brutal dictatorships of Milton Obote and Idi Amin, to Joseph Kony’s reign of terror, to the increasing repression of the current Ugandan government—lack of respect for human rights has been a key factor holding Ugandans back from the prosperity they deserve.

Fortunately, Uganda is home to a growing number of brave civil society organizations and activists striving to overcome its human rights challenges and build a more just and equal society. AJWS is investing heavily in these groups, with a focus on those that support rural communities struggling mightily against injustice: villages under threat by oil and industrial agricultural companies; young women and adolescent girls suffering from poverty, violence, and lack of access to health care and education in Uganda’s severely underdeveloped north; and LGBTI people and sex workers who are derided and abused nationwide for venturing outside accepted social norms.

**DEFENDING LAND, WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

AJWS’s work to protect the land and water rights of rural communities is largely focused on the oil-rich Albertine region of western Uganda, where investors are buying, developing and drilling for oil on land customarily owned by families or local communities. Although Ugandan law protects customary land rights and calls for compensation or relocation for communities affected by development operations, these laws have until recently been rarely enforced. When the government does compensate communities, it directs funds to male heads of households (who often spend these funds without consulting their wives) and often doesn’t compensate women farmers at all.

AJWS grantees are educating communities about their rights, stopping illegal land grabs and empowering local people—especially women—to insist that they be consulted on how their land and resources are used and compensated fairly for any losses they incur. Many of these groups are also teaching communities about
the sustainable use of natural resources such as forests, farmland and lakes; and the negative effects of climate change and how to combat them.

For example:

The National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) supports fishermen of the Albertine region who are seeing precious aquatic life they depend on for their livelihoods disappear as a result of pollution from oil drilling, mining and deforestation by large companies. NAPE educates the fisherman about the devastating effects of oil and broadcasts their stories on a local radio show that advocates for the sustainable and equitable use of the environment to benefit all Ugandan people. NAPE has also been at the forefront of demanding government accountability for the damage to Uganda’s natural resources and pushing back against land grabs. In some cases, it has enabled communities to reclaim land that was illegally seized.

AJWS grantees Kakindo Orphans Care (KOC) and Kwataniza Women Farmer’s Group (KWG) have challenged sexism in Uganda’s land customs and pushed the government to enact new requirements that compensation owed to affected families be deposited into joint bank accounts. These groups encourage women to speak out when they are denied compensation owed to them or barred from participating in decisions that affect their land and lives.

EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE NORTH

In northern Uganda, where people are impoverished and traumatized by the years of conflict, women and adolescent girls are suffering deeply in the aftermath of LRA atrocities. High rates of HIV infection, unwanted pregnancies and violence are all-too-common, and people lack access to roads, clinics and a justice system that would help heal their wounds and mend the torn social fabric of their society. To address these challenges, AJWS grantees are connecting young women and girls in northern Uganda to key health services, and empowering them to take greater control of their sexual and reproductive health.

For example:

Gulu Women’s Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G) reaches thousands of girls in northern Uganda through debate clubs, mentoring programs and discussion groups. These programs help keep girls in school, reduce the incidence of unplanned pregnancies and early marriage, educate communities about the importance of women’s and girls’ sexual health and enable girls to make decisions about their own bodies. GWED-G gives its members the knowledge and confidence they need to live healthy lives and pursue their aspirations.

ENDING VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTI PEOPLE AND SEX WORKERS

AJWS funds grantees working to ensure that LGBTI people and sex workers can live free from violence and exercise the full range of their human rights—regardless of their gender, sexual orientation or choice of work.

For example:

Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) documents violence and other abuses experienced by LGBTI people, sex workers and those living with HIV and AIDS—and helps survivors bring their cases to justice. They provide free legal services to LGBTI Ugandans and train members from within local communities to become paralegals—making sure that all who suffer such crimes know their rights and have the support they need to defend them. HRAPF entered the international spotlight in 2014 when it successfully dismantled the Anti-Homosexuality Act. Its director, Adrian Jjuuko, and fellow human rights attorney Nicholas Opiyo challenged the law in court—and won.
AJWS is committed to helping Ugandans implement local solutions to the complex challenges they face. We focus on supporting grassroots and national organizations representing people who experience the most severe inequality in society—particularly rural farming communities, women and girls, LGBTI people and sex workers.

**Defending natural resource rights**
- Documenting land rights violations in rural communities
- Mobilizing rural communities to conduct advocacy and take action against land sales conducted illegally or without their consent
- Helping families and communities who have had their land seized pursue justice in the courts
- Empowering women’s groups in rural communities to press for the enforcement of laws that protect the rights of women to own, inherit or sell land
- Training small-scale farmers to increase their crop yields and boost their household incomes using effective organic farming practices
- Educating rural communities about the need to protect the farmland, forests and waterways upon which they depend for survival, through the sustainable use of natural resources

**Promoting sexual health and rights**
- Empowering women, girls, LGBTI people and sex workers to protect themselves from violence through workshops on understanding their rights under the law
- Educating the public about LGBTI people and sex workers, speaking out against discrimination and abuse, and advocating for full protection and equality of sex workers as citizens under the law
- Connecting women, girls, sex workers and LGBTI people to sexual and reproductive health services to enable them to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancy and make informed choices about their bodies and health

**Building movements**
- Linking activists to local, national and international media to raise awareness of human rights violations throughout Uganda
- Forging coalitions and alliances with other grassroots groups in Uganda and across East Africa to create stronger movements for human rights—both nationally and in the region

**AJWS GRANTEES ARE:**

**AJWS FUNDING IN UGANDA OVER THE PAST 12 YEARS**

$7.7 MILLION
invested in Uganda since 2005
In Hoima, Precious hosts a radio show run by NAPE, which educates local communities about their land rights, enabling them to push back against land grabs. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik

BEYOND GRANTMAKING: HOW DOES AJWS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

AJWS provides financial support and more to strengthen social change organizations and larger movements. To accomplish this we:

- Support grantees for multiple years, because sustainable change takes time
- Invest in nascent organizations and help them grow bigger and stronger
- Address the root causes of human rights abuses
- Bring clusters of similar and complementary groups together, enabling them to learn from each other and build strong, united movements
- Promote our grantees in the media and foster their leadership on the international stage
- Ensure that women, indigenous people, LGBTI people, religious and ethnic minorities, and other groups remain at the center of our social change efforts
- Conduct research and share our findings with grantees and fellow funders, advancing the field of human rights and development
The social change organizations we support in Uganda are making progress against tremendous odds. Their stories show how grassroots activists are empowering local people to bring about change in the country.
No Land, No Future

Florence Muzogo, the mother of five children, had never worried about her future. She lived on two acres of land in the village of Kijayo, where she grew coffee, bananas, pineapples, maize and beans to earn an income and feed her family.

But in February 2015, a foreign investor illegally acquired her land to establish a sugar cane plantation. One night, without any warning, police showed up at Florence’s doorstep and forcefully evicted her and her family from their home at gunpoint. They were not alone. Authorities forced 5,000 other villagers from their homes and destroyed the farmland that their families had lived on for generations.

An enormous sugar cane factory now sits at the site where an entire community once lived and worked. Florence, her children and their bereft neighbors are living under tents in decrepit camps that lack clean drinking water, food and sanitation. Thousands are suffering from malnutrition and disease.

“I have no land here,” Florence explained. “There is no food for me to harvest. My children fall ill frequently, and there are no health centers for us to receive medical care. Many children die.”

In the aftermath of any disaster—including the forced displacement of residents in Kijayo—women and girls are especially vulnerable to violence.

“It is dangerous for the girls to go out into the field alone,” Florence shared. “When they search for food, they must walk together as a team. And they cannot go out when it gets dark. Too many girls have been raped or abused here.”

Helping Families Rebuild Their Lives

Innocent people like Florence have been robbed of their livelihoods and their futures. Fortunately, AJWS’s grantee Navigators of Development Association (NAVODA) is helping pay for legal fees so the community can sue the sugar cane company that stole her home and is offering legal services to ensure that Florence and her family—and thousands of others—are compensated for their losses and can begin their lives anew.

Founded in 2005, NAVODA supports communities in the Hoima district of Uganda to protect their right to land and water, prevent forced evictions, and promote transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources. To achieve this, NAVODA educates communities about their rights and seeks to resolve land-related conflicts. The organization also uses community organizing and local radio programming to spread the word about land grabs like the one affecting Florence and enable communities to advocate for themselves.

“When we first learned about this crisis, the situation seemed hopeless,” said Benon Tusingwire, the founder and executive director of NAVODA. “But now that we have lawyers who are working to build a strong case to bring to the high court, we believe progress is possible. We know we can empower the people who have been victimized to help them build a better life.”
Witnessing Horrors

In the 1980s, when the civil war broke out in northern Uganda, Pamela Mwech was a child. The youngest of seven children, Pamela did not expect to get an education. Conflict raged between the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government, claiming thousands of lives and displacing entire communities. Rape was used as a weapon of war and the LRA abducted thousands of girls, using schools as a hunting ground.

Pamela was lucky: She narrowly escaped being abducted herself. For years, her head of school hid her at night under the school’s floorboards so the rebels wouldn’t find her. As a young adult, Pamela managed food distribution programs in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps that were overcrowded with people whose lives had been ravaged by violence and abuse. She saw how women and girls were especially vulnerable and struggled to get the rations to feed their families.

“I watched a woman stand in line in an IDP camp with a baby tied to her back for over four hours,” Pamela shared. “I walked over to her and helped untie her baby so that she could breastfeed, only to discover that the baby had suffocated and died. That level of despair and suffering was a turning point for me.”

Transforming Lives

From that moment forward, Pamela dedicated her life to advancing the rights and dignity of women and girls. In 2011, she became the executive director of Gulu Women’s Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G), an organization established in 2004 to promote the rights of women and girls in northern Uganda whose families suffered...
Girls practice their debate skills with help from GWED-G, which works to keep girls in school (opposite). Through such programs, GWED-G enables girls to live with confidence so they can pursue their aspirations (above).

Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik
the impact of the 22-year armed conflict. Supported by AJWS, GWED-G works to keep girls in school, educate communities about the importance of girls’ and women’s sexual health, advocate for girls’ right to make decisions about their own bodies, and reduce the incidence of unplanned pregnancies and early marriage.

In the past decade, GWED-G has worked with over 750,000 women, men, youth, local leaders, government officials and international organizations to promote peace, development and the rights of women and girls. They are reaching communities in districts of the broader Acholi sub-region, including Gulu, Amuru, Nwoya, Omoro, Pader, Kitgum and Lamwo.

Pamela’s efforts at social change with GWED-G began by bringing women together for informal discussions under a tree to talk about the problems they faced in their lives. What she heard was harrowing: girls were dropping out of school, some were raped, others were battered by fathers and husbands, and many were forced to marry soldiers because of a dominant perception that soldiers could offer them a secure future.

As these women continued to talk with each other, they understood the importance of investing in their daughters’ futures. Enabling their daughters to stay in school and advocating for their right to make decisions about their own bodies was essential to their health and wellbeing.

“We need to influence women’s leadership, and that starts with keeping girls in school,” Pamela said. Through debate clubs, mentoring and coaching programs, and discussion groups about bodily integrity and hygiene, GWED-G is transforming the lives of thousands of girls who are gaining the confidence to build a better world for themselves and their communities.
Jovana (12 years old) is thriving in GWED-G’s empowerment program and recently won a regional debate competition about the importance of saving money. She is making the five-hour journey to the capital, Kampala, to compete nationally, and wants to be an accountant and a farmer when she grows up.

Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik

Kevin (14 years old) is a classmate of Jovana and has been a participant in GWED-G’s program for five months. She loves learning and believes GWED-G is equipping her with skills to pursue her education and prevent marrying against her will. When she grows up, she wants to be a nurse to support women and girls and help deliver sanitary pads for girls who do not have access to personal hygiene products.

Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik
HUMAN RIGHTS AWARENESS AND PROMOTION FORUM (HRAPF)
Fighting the Tide of Anti-LGBTI Hate: Babu Ramadhan’s Story

Disowned and Alone
Growing up in central Uganda, the messages Babu, now 28 years old, received about gay people were filled with shame and hatred. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex was viewed as a curse and a sin. When Babu, who grew up in a Muslim household, became aware that he was sexually attracted to men, he stayed in the closet for fear of being disowned by his mother and siblings. He sought the advice of a doctor for how to repress his feelings, but his personal struggle continued. “I had an internal war with my sexuality for almost four years,” he shared. “I felt completely alone and believed I was the only one who had these feelings.”

At age 22, Babu left home and moved to Entebbe to live with his aunt. He tried to live quietly and keep his sexual orientation a secret, but when his aunt walked in on him with another man, she threw him out of her house. Soon after, his relatives found out that he was gay, and the consequences were devastating. His brother beat him and called him a disgrace. His mother refused to speak with him and denied his very existence.

Finding Hope in a Climate of Hate
Tragically, Babu’s experience was not an isolated incident. LGBTI Ugandans have long faced rejection from their families and communities, eviction and harassment. But following the Ugandan Parliament’s introduction of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill—a draconian piece of legislation that further criminalized homosexuality and threatened LGBTI people with imprisonment and the death penalty—anti-gay hatred intensified. The bill, which was first introduced in 2009 and became law in 2014, also required people to report others whom they suspected to be LGBTI and put a chokehold on organizations working to help this population.

Desperate for support and protection, Babu began educating himself about the array of abuses faced by LGBTI people in the country. He became a peer educator, helping health workers understand the varied challenges that LGBTI Ugandans experience in school, healthcare, employment and beyond.

Babu was soon introduced to the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), an organization supported by AJWS that provides free legal aid and training to LGBTI Ugandans. Founded in 2008 by a group of young law school graduates who wanted to improve the lives of vulnerable Ugandans, HRAPF documents abuses experienced by LGBTI people, those living with HIV and AIDS, sex workers and others. By training individuals from local communities to become paralegals who can serve as effective advocates and educators, and providing free legal aid, HRAPF supports individuals who would otherwise not be able to access legal services in times of crisis.

HRAPF entered the international spotlight in 2014 when it successfully dismantled the Anti-Homosexuality Act. Its director, Adrian Jjuuko, and fellow human rights attorney Nicholas Opiyo led a team of human rights activists and lawyers to challenge the Anti-Homosexuality Act in the Ugandan constitutional court—and they won.

A Champion for Others
Inspired by HRAPF’s work and remarkable success at using the law to uphold human rights, Babu trained to become a paralegal so he could work directly on this cause. Today, in partnership with HRAPF, he is trying to establish a support group for the parents of LGBTI people.

LOCATION: Nationwide
WEBSITE: www.hrapf.org
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/hrapf.uganda
2016 ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET: $614,373
AJWS FUNDING HISTORY: AJWS has awarded 14 grants since 2010, totaling $260,284
Rejected by his family, Babu Ramadhan became an advocate for other LGBTI people. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik
“Too many parents threaten their children who come out,” he said. “LGBT kids are forced to marry and are shunned by their families. Lesbians are often victims of ‘corrective rape.’ These destructive practices must stop, but it all begins with education.”

Babu is also educating religious leaders about preaching love instead of hate. “My beliefs as a Muslim are deep inside of me and not in conflict with being a gay man. I believe that all people are created in God’s image. Everyone must live with respect and human dignity, and our religious leaders have the power to make that possible.”
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UGANDAN ANTI-HOMOSEXUALITY ACT

Efforts to further discriminate against and criminalize LGBTI people intensified in 2009, after a group of Christian preachers from the United States went to Uganda for an anti-gay conference and then worked with Ugandan legislators to draft a bill that called for putting gay people to death. While the bill was being debated, attacks against gay Ugandans began to increase.

In early 2011, David Kato, one of the country’s most outspoken gay rights activists, was beaten to death with a hammer. Kato was one of several people outing by a local newspaper in 2010, when his photo was placed under the headline “Hang them.” Kato’s murder and the situation for the LGBTI community in Uganda drew significant international attention.

As international criticism grew, and Western countries prepared to cut millions of dollars in foreign aid, the Ugandan government modified the bill to make “aggravated homosexuality” punishable by life in prison, though that hardly placated Western donors.

Parliament passed the bill in December 2013, with the Speaker of Parliament calling it an “early Christmas gift” to the Ugandan people. Despite extensive local and international pressure against it, Mr. Museveni publicly signed the bill into law in February 2014.

The Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and the World Bank swiftly reacted, cutting or postponing some of their aid to Uganda. In June, the United States announced that it was suspending some aid, imposing visa restrictions and canceling a regional military exercise as a message to “reinforce our support for human rights of all Ugandans, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

AJWS, which had been supporting local Ugandan partners in their fight for equality in the country, also took immediate steps to respond to this hateful legislation. We funded a Ugandan coalition of 51 local organizations from across the human rights spectrum that worked to overturn the legislation. We also convened a Jewish coalition against the bill in the United States and were instrumental in recruiting members of Congress to sign letters to President Obama and President Museveni, among other advocacy efforts.

In August 2014, the Ugandan court struck down the Anti-Homosexuality Act, thanks in large part to the legal efforts by human rights attorneys Nicholas Opiyo and Adrian Jjuuko—representing AJWS grantees Chapter Four Uganda and Human Rights Awareness Promotion Forum (HRAPF).

It is possible that the Ugandan Parliament will introduce new anti-homosexuality legislation, and our grantees remain vigilant in their advocacy.

In the meantime, violence and discrimination continue. For example, in August 2016, Ugandan police disrupted Ugandan Pride festivities in Kampala and imposed a lockdown, detaining more than 200 people, many of whom were reportedly beaten, forcibly photographed and sexually assaulted by the police. Many people, including 16 Ugandan LGBTI rights leaders and allies, were arrested and detained by the police.
TRAVEL AND ACTIVISM

AJWS organizes trips to the developing world for individuals and groups of community leaders, activists and philanthropists who are interested in meeting our grantees and learning about the challenges people face in the developing world. After these visits, participants join AJWS through tzedakah (giving financial support), education, advocacy and activism to build a more just and equitable world.

For more information about opportunities to travel with us, visit www.ajws.org/travel.
This publication was written by Carolyn Ziv (Communications Officer) and Jordan Namerow (Director of Digital Communications); edited by Leah Kaplan Robins (Director of Publications and Messaging) and Sumit Galhotra (Communications Officer); and designed by Kristen Kendrick (Graphic Designer) and Elizabeth Leih (Creative Director); with support from Payal Patel (Senior Program Officer), Caroline Kouassiaman (Senior Program Officer) and AJWS’s Uganda Country Consultant.

ABOVE  Women supported by AJWS grantee NAPE cultivate their farm, where they grow fruit to generate income. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik

BACK COVER Through training from KWG, Judith was able to purchase land, sustainably grow crops and raise livestock to provide for herself. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik
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