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Technology:**

A Case Study from Northern Uganda

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Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the International Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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List of Acronyms

ICT	Information and Communication Technology
GSM	Global Systems for Mobile Communications
LEWUTI	Legal Empowerment of Women Using technology and Innovation
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
HiiL	The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law
LE	Legal Empowerment
A2J	Access to Justice
NGO.	Non-Governmental Organisations
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
CLEP	Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor
D4D	Digital for Development

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Abstract

Arguably, the Covid-19 pandemic has presented new opportunities for digital transformation within the justice sectors in African countries and beyond. The LEWUTI project (Legal Empowerment of Women Using Technology and Innovation), predates the pandemic, and is run by Barefoot Law, a Ugandan socio-legal NGO. As the 2020 UNDP report highlights, during the pandemic many courts were adapted to digital technologies. On-line justice was supposed to respond more rapidly to challenges in this unprecedented situation, creating new opportunities to reach more beneficiaries and scale-up justice processes. However, it is not clear that women benefit equally from digitisation of justice systems. The pandemic highlighted some risks of relying on digital means to achieve women's legal empowerment, especially for rural women. Against this background, this study examines the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation of access to justice as a means of legal empowerment of rural women in Northern Uganda. Data for the study was collected in the rural Gulu area, through focus groups discussions with selected women. The data was then analysed through the lens of Legal Empowerment (LE) and Access to Justice frameworks, to make sense of information generated. Findings suggest that digital technology can play a significant role in addressing the unmet legal needs of rural women in Uganda. Many women have reported being able to use digital interfaces to access legal help, evaluate their problems and decide whether the problems have legal solutions. These technologies have also helped women with preparation of evidence and making sense of laws and legal documentation. However, obstacles remain. These include lack of legal knowledge and awareness, poverty, lack of access to mobile phones, illiteracy, lack of telecommunication infrastructure, power inequalities and the attitudes of some lawyers. These factors still hinder some rural women from using digital technology to access justice. Some women also emphasized that introducing digital technologies to secure women's legal empowerment may put the cart before the horse, so long as corruption of Uganda's legal and court system remains pervasive.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research contributes to contemporary debates on how digital technologies can contribute in the development field, to legal empowerment. Focusing on impacts of digital transformation in Uganda's justice sector, the case study is the Legal Empowerment of Women Using Technology and Innovation project (LEWUTI), run by Barefootlaw in Northern Uganda. The research engaged in dialogic focus group discussions with rural women users of such digital solutions, bringing out rural women's mixed experiences in rural Gulu. Some obstacles to digital transformation within the justice sector were identified, and some ways digital tools can be improved to delivering gender-equitable, people-centered justice, were proposed. The study aims to inform stakeholders in the justice sector, including local NGOs, legal entrepreneurs and international organizations using digital means to contribute to achieving SDG Goal 16: "Extending Justice for all". Insights arising from discussions with rural Ugandan women can also help inform development experts and

designers of digital tools so they work in a more multi-disciplinary way, and focus on rural women's needs when promoting digital access to justice as a means to legal empowerment.

Keywords

Digital technology, LEWUTI, Access to Justice, Northern Uganda, Legal empowerment, Rural women.

Chapter 1 Background to The Study

1.1 Introduction

The transformation of the justice sector through information and communication technologies (ICT) to e-justice or digital justice, is supposed to result in an improvement of its efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, integrity, reliability and encouraging participation and citizen engagement (United Nations, 2018 cited in Jneid et al., 2019). The United Nation emphasized that technologies must be used innovatively to fulfil the far-reaching potential of the transformative 2030 agenda of sustainable development goals (UN 2018: iii). This research topic contributes to debates on the inclusive use of Digital technology in the advancement of goal 16 of SDG to provide access to justice for all.

Over the years, Africa has gained traction towards digital transformation in key sectors of its economy attributed to the increasing mobile phone usage and internet penetrations among the population. A key example is the mobile money industry that has been touted as revolutionary tool that has expanded the digital access to the financial services in low resource environments in Africa. According to GSM association (2018), over two-thirds of global mobile money transactions are driven by users in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with total value exceeding US \$27 billion. Notable successes include the use of M-PESA (Kenya's mobile money platform), Telecommunication giants such as MTN, Orange, Airtel Mobile, among others who operate mobile money service across Africa have made households with mobile money accounts able to transfer money in an easy and affordable manner between family, friends and businesses in remote locations.

Similarly, technology is making a big impact in the practice of law. It has the potential to improve access to courts and legal services (Susskind, 2019). For instance, digital tools can increase attorneys' capability to serve clients more unwaveringly, notwithstanding the clients or the lawyers' location, by harnessing the various digital platforms available for lawyers to communicate with their clients (Brescia, 2018; Smith, 2018; Kane, 2020). Indeed, "through voice-over-internet and video chat capabilities, the internet offers lawyers who have based anywhere in the world the opportunity to provide direct advice and assistance to pro se litigants, even without having a physical presence in a client's community or meeting with them face-to-face" (Brescia, 2018: 60). While the developed world is not new to the digital transformation of accessing justice, the developing countries are just waking up to the reality of the digital transformation of the judicial sector and access to legal assistance (Dublin, 2018; Hamzah, 2018; Lawson et al., 2019).

In recent years, different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government agencies have started to consider alternative ways that can help facilitate access to legal aids and justice for the poor in rural and urban areas. Some enterprise and NGOs have come up with different online projects by deploying digital tools such as apps to bring legal access to the poor in rural communities (Smith, 2018; Kane, 2020). One of the projects that have gain traction is Epoq Legal in South Africa, providing low-cost online legal documents to SMEs in partnership with a UK-based legal IT company (Hamzah, 2018). Baobab is also an innovation in South Africa where lawyers create interesting tutorial-style video-based tutorials to empower people to resolve many of their legal worries (Smith, 2018). In the Benin Republic, "HeLawyer" is a mobile app specializing in legal advice. It offers citizens legal advice and information 24hrs daily throughout the week. While Wakili Mkononi is a social enterprise in Kenya that offers legal aid and networking services on a digital platform, Lawpadi is a Nigeria online platform where people can get pro-bono legal assistance and free legal advice (Smith, 2018).

In Uganda, Justice Bot allows users to be connected with a legal expert via the Messenger chat on Facebook (Kane, 2020), while Tunga Innovations Ltd is an app that informs users about their employment rights. E.g. leave days, both annual and maternity, overtime rates and notice before resigning or being terminated (Smith, 2018). Also, there is Legal Empowerment of Women Using Technology and Innovation (LEWUTI). A project implemented by Barefootlaw in conjunction with Avocats Sans Frontieres (ASF) from 2017 to 2021 in Northern Uganda whose primary focus is on using digital means to equip women, especially the vulnerable and underserved, with legal knowledge and skills so that they uphold their rights and use it to protect themselves and properties (Barefootlaw, 2021). The project aims to increase women's access to justice through digital solutions for legal empowerment. It intends to mobilize digital solutions to overcome barriers of geography, courts' coverage, knowledge and cost (ibid)

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has presented the opportunities for digital transformation within the justice sectors in Africa countries (Whitew-Nel, 2020). It has also highlighted some of the risks of relying on digital means to achieve legal empowerment. The UNDP 2020 reported that most courts that were adapted to digital technologies and open justice responded more rapidly to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, turning a difficult situation into a set of new opportunities to reach more beneficiaries and to scale-up justice processes. (UNDP 2020). It is against the background of the discussion above that this study intend to examine the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation of access to justice towards the legal empowerment of rural women in Northern Uganda.

1.2 Nature of the Research Problem

The HiiL *justice needs reports 2016* estimates that over 90% of Ugandans experience one or more serious Justice needs. The most prevailing Justice problems are related to land disputes, family, crime, domestic violence, and property ownerships. Most people cannot resolve these justice problems due to several factors. First of all. the Justice system is complex to navigate, expensive and has a very limited number of legal professionals available to handle the legal needs of all Ugandans (HiiL 2016). Hence there has been an overwhelming increase in reported unresolved disputes, high flagrant absence of justice, and growing gender inequalities and to some extent the use of mob justice to resolve conflicts which condemns those that are innocent and making perpetrators go unpunished (Ibid: 5). There is a growing enthusiasm within development field about the far-reaching potential of digital transformation in improving service delivery and promoting the well-being of disadvantaged communities. Accordingly, looking at the recent trend in global development financing, there are several investment funds created in developed countries supporting the development of these social innovations in Africa built to resolve societal problems. Notable examples; the wehubit funds which is program by Belgian Development Cooperation (Enable) created to support digital solution innovations(Enabel 2021); The HiiL Justice accelerator fund created to provide seed funding to socio-legal start-ups using innovative means to promote access to justice (HiiL 2019). We have also seen the launch of D4D hub by the EU member states in Brussels which is seen as a shift in their development cooperation to a digital centric development cooperation (D4D Hub 2020). Consequently, we have seen so many digital innovations emerge in developing countries. These include within the justice sector using creative methods to close the access to justice gaps.

Much as these innovations have been highlighted to extend legal services to communities, the digital legal innovators are blindsided on the development, deployment and increasing their user's reach in the communities rather than understand their consequential impact

on access to justice and whether the beneficiaries are becoming legally (dis)empowered. This is coupled by pressure from donor funders who interpret the impact of successful innovations with high user engagements, huge online followings and relying on the scalability potential of these innovations in different locations. No one seems to question concretely the amount of justice needs resolved or how many cases before the courts have been adjudicated to the satisfaction of the litigants through these modern technologies. This phenomenon relates with the argument made by scholar Ivan Illich (1982: 59) in his book *Deschooling society*. In his interpretation of the transfer of modern technologies to poor countries. He intimated that some of these technologies could work to further the interest of the privileged (donors in this case) and that there is a sense of “false public utility” that comes with it. In other words, It is hard to determine whether these technological deployments are directly improving the lives of communities they serve. To enlighten this argument, the table below represents the Barefootlaw’s online engagement with their users who are seeking for legal guidance, information and support on various legal challenges they might have.

1.0 Table representing Barefootlaw’s beneficiaries reach as of 2021

Digital platforms	Beneficiaries reach
Facebook users	192,512
Direct reach (Phone calls, walk-ins, SMS)	89,000
Indirect beneficiaries (Followers of online contents)	560,000
Monthly reach	450,000

Source: wehubit.be

Barefootlaw, like many socio-legal start-ups have been set up to provide tech-enabled legal support. Much as these data shows that the online engagements are drawing communities closer to the law through tailor-made legal information, legal content provided by the lawyers, it is hard to determine whether they are reaching final outcomes for their legal challenges in the justice pathways. Beyond digital technologies and legal advice provided using these technologies, there exist complexities and obstacles within the judicial systems that limit peoples access to justice.

Therefore, this research delves deeper to question whether Legal innovators in Uganda are (re)producing digital tools that is extending market for tech giants in the west or developing local legal solutions that resolves local legal challenges of women in an easy and efficient way. Accordingly, it intends to question the idea that access to legal innovation tools, providing legal information, trainings and sensitization of women on the law directly amounts to access to justice and legal empowerment for these women as reported by most legal innovations. By providing a deep comparative analysis on the understanding of legal empowerment and access to justice at the intersection of digital technologies largely informed by feedback from the women interacting with these platforms.

1.3. Positionality

The research draws familiarity with working in socio-legal innovation in Uganda’s justice sector for over 4 years. I worked for a fast-growing socio-legal innovation start-up called Barefootlaw Uganda, before joining the ISS MA program. Barefootlaw is an NGO leveraging

digital technologies to provide free legal information and support for people who cannot afford to pay for their legal needs (Barefootlaw 2021). The research largely developed from my personal encounter witnessing my mother's struggles to resolve disputed family land, with relatives who believed she was not entitled to inherit my late father's property, because she is a woman. She later benefited from support through the project, equipping herself with the legal digital platforms we provided through LEWUTI outreach in Gulu.

Like several other women in Northern Uganda who experience daily justice problems because of the structural and cultural barriers, access to institution of justice is quite complex and expensive for low-income earners. Women like my Mum, because of high legal fees, long and strenuous court cases, and low trust in legal institution and distant courts, are precisely the women Barefootlaw was set-up to benefit. My roles included organizing legal training and sensitization for communities in the project implementations area. Specifically, I worked under the Legal Empowerment of Women Using Innovation and Technology and Innovation project (LEWUTI) project, which mobilizes digital tools to equip rural women with access to the law so they can use legal means to protect themselves and their property. We had the opportunity to train over 7000 women in Northern Uganda on their rights and on how to access legal support through the innovative platforms deployed, such as Law Voice, which utilizes an interactive voice-responsive system. Another is Law Text, which facilitates exchange of legal texts. Law online involves asking a lawyer online and using interfaces (websites and social medias) to share information. Law Radio broadcasts legal educations on local radio frequencies. These systems are all designed to re-enforce fairer access to legal information and facilitate access to justice and legal empowerment, especially for 'vulnerable' rural women. However, personally, it was a challenge to determine whether the tools I have been part of deploying in the legal fields have actually been providing better access to justice and legal empowerment for those women.

This compelled me to question the barriers faced by the women within the category of my Mum who are direct beneficiaries of the project but still struggle to resolve their justice needs despite the deployment of the digital tools by social legal startups such as Barefootlaw to extend free legal information and assistance. Importantly, this research aims to draw conversation beyond digital legal transformation by centering the disadvantaged women's ability to access legal institutions through other means, understanding their ways of resolving legal disputes and how they reach outcomes. It would also refuse the labelling of beneficiaries of these digital tools as "vulnerable women" the term often used to report stories and pain of beneficiaries by social legal start-ups when seeking for external funding from foreign donors (Tuck & Yang, 2018: 26).

Likewise, it seeks to foster dialogue between the women who utilizes the digital tools and the social legal innovators to open opportunity for learning by digital developers to avoid what Illich (1982) defined as reproducing "executive truth" where technology in turns increases the power of the privileged in the society and does not improve the life of the users (Illich 1982: 62). In this case the rural women fighting to resolve their justice needs become stories for legal start-ups in quest for funding. This research calls for the *enthusiast of technologies* in the justice sector to shift from the present technological practice that surrounds industrial bureaucracy of knowledge to a future of post-industrial conviviality where intension for actions prevails over production (Illich 1982:64). Legal innovators should be keen to learn from communities by identifying their problems, generating solutions and developing technologies that can be used and matches expectations.

1.4. Where I am speaking from: Justification and relevance

This research contributes to contemporary debates around the role of digital technologies in promoting access to justice and the legal empowerment of women. It focuses on the experience of vulnerable rural women in Northern Uganda who are legally (dis)empowered through the deployment of digital innovations by social legal innovators. I side with the argument of Illich (1984) that legal innovators should learn conviviality to “build technologies that create institutions which serves personal, creative and autonomous interactions and the emergence of values which cannot only be substantially controlled by technocrat” Illich (1984: 2). This will facilitate the development of people centered designs that shall improve the ability of communities to interact with these legal technologies to resolve their own legal needs. The research will open dialogue between women in rural areas in Northern Uganda who have encountered these digital innovations to get legal support and the social legal innovators deploying digital tools. Using the relationship between legal empowerment and access to justice as analytical framework, it will unravel the interpretation of what amounts to access to justice and legal empowerment at the intersection of digital transformation to unearth the underlying role that digital technology actually plays. The research shall examine the challenges they are facing with using these digital platforms. It will identify the obstacles to digital transformation within the Justice sector.

It appeals to digital innovators to open to learn conviviality as they interact with the beneficiaries of the digital tools to build a more people centered designs that can be used by communities because digital innovators run a risk of developing platforms that do not achieve the intended goals (access to justice and Legal empowerment) and may lead to depiction of what Illich (1982) termed as “false public utilities” (Illich 1982: 60). The research will inform recommendations to the digital innovators deploying digital tools, the Government which has recently adopted digital courts during the lockdown. The study is also intended to inform other stakeholders; Government judicial systems, local NGOs, INGOs, legal entrepreneurs, D4D Hub recently created by EU to harness digital innovations in Africa and all socio-legal funders innovations using digital means to contribute towards goal SDG 16: access to Justice for all.

1.5. Research objectives and question

The purpose of the study is to examine how digital technology interconnects with women’s access to justice and legal empowerment in rural Northern Uganda. The general objectives for the study are to;

- To explore the potential of digital technology in promoting the legal empowerment of rural women.
- To assess the factors hindering access to digital technologies as a mechanism for legal empowerment of rural women in Uganda.
- To explore the other options adopted in the experience of rural women using digital technologies to access legal justice in Uganda.

In unravelling the dynamics of digital technologies within the justice sector, the paper will try to answer the following questions:

Main question.

How do digital technologies interconnect with legal empowerment of Ugandan rural women, with respect to their access to justice?

Sub questions.

- In what ways does digital technology legally empower rural women in Northern Uganda?
- What factors hinder digital transformation of the justice sector in Uganda?
- What are the needs of Ugandan rural woman concerning digital technologies for their legal empowerment?

1.6 Outline of Chapters

This study is divided into five main chapters. Chapter one of the paper focused on discussion as regards the background of the study, research objectives, problems and questions, as well as justification for the study. The focus of the second chapter is the methodology and method of data collection, the ethics and challenges encounter during the data collection. While chapter three of the paper discusses the conceptual framework through the lens of analysing the importance and relevance of the various concepts to the study. This chapter set the theoretical background in which the data analysis in Chapter four and five of the study is founded. The nucleus of chapter four is the presentation and analysis of data collected from the field to address the research question that seek to understand the different ways digital technology legally empower women in Northern Uganda. In chapter five, the focus of discussion is the analysis of the factors that hinder the digital transformation of the justice sector in Uganda and the needs of Ugandan rural woman concerning digital technologies for legal empowerment. The last chapter is for the summary and conclusion of the study as well as the recommendation

Chapter 2: Methodology and Methods

2.1 Introduction

The methodology is an important component of any research; therefore, researchers must consider various factors prior taking decisions on the methodological approach that is suitable for their research (O'Leary, 2010: 92). First of all, the approach to be adopted must be doable and practicable and secondly, the researcher must consider if they have the requisite expertise and experience for the methods of data collection they opted for. This study methodological design was deeply rooted in the O'Leary (2010) five questions that a researcher needed to answer before taking the decision on the methodological approach.

As suggested by O'Leary (2010:98), the researcher must first answer the questions of When, What, Where, Who, and How. These questions were considered by identifying what type of data is required to address the research questions of this study, where can the data be acquired, who are those that can provide the data, how can the data be collected, and when should the data collection process take place. Having a clear methodological design is a principal factor to research credibility (O'Leary, 2010:98). Therefore, the primary objective of this chapter is to discuss in detail the methodological approach and the process of the data collection.

For the purpose of clarity, this chapter is divided into seven parts. The first part of the chapter discusses the research design, which was deep-rooted in the qualitative research method paradigm. The second part of the chapter focuses on how the COVID-19 obstacle to data collection was addressed, the third part focuses on the data collection tool and justification for the choice of the approach while the fourth part focus is on the respondent's selection process. In the fifth part of the chapter, the method adopted for data analysis is discussed, and the sixth part discussion focus is on the reliability and validity of the research which is embedded in ethics of the study. While the last part summarizes the whole chapter.

2.2 Research Designs.

During the research design process, how the researcher would acquire the needed data should be their priority focus. This can be achieved in different ways. The researcher can opt for an ethnography, experimental, discursive or any other approach to obtain the required data. As posited by Creswell (2013:11), different forms of studies require diverse specific methods. For instance, the quantitative approach is more suitable for study that seek to recognize the most appropriate predictors of outcomes or various factors that shape an outcome while a qualitative study would be more suitable for study with the objective to comprehend an occurrence or concepts, most especially when there is dearth research on the subject of research interest.

Consequently, the research design of this study is established on a qualitative design to address the research questions and problem in context using an inductive approach, a "non-statistical method of inquiry that elicits information in the field of study" (Neuman, 2000: no page). While qualitative approach is a rigorous process, it is more open to less structural which give room for flexibility in exploring the various variables that are important in shaping the understanding of the research problem. It is in this direction that O'Leary pointed out that qualitative research seeks to "gain an intimate understanding of the people, place, culture, and situations through rich engagement and even immersion in the reality being studied" (O'Leary, 2014:130). Although, the qualitative approach has been criticized as regard biases of the researcher as well as the inability to generalized the findings because perspective and views of individuals differs on subject of research interest (Denzin, 1994: 10).

However, qualitative approach puts emphasis on detailed descriptions and narratives reflecting the cognitive and affective disposition of the local people of interest. In addition to the qualitative primary data that would be collected through interviews, existing secondary data would also be explored from different public sources. These includes but not limited to IGO, NGOs, and Uganda government reports and data bases on the subject matter. Peer reviewed journals as well as media reports would also be consulted. The collection of data for this study was conducted in Gulu rural area in Northern Uganda through semi-structured interviews for selected participants.

2.3. Dealing with COVID-19 Obstacle

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the emergence of the more deadly Delta variant of the virus in Uganda, I opted out of travelling back to Uganda and decided to collect the requisite primary data through research assistants' domicile in Uganda. The research assistants were employed to assist in conducting the interviews for selected respondents that help provided the needed data to answer the research questions and help address the study objectives. However, recruiting a research assistant is not a straight forward venture, there are issues that one needs to take into consideration and as a result making the recruitment process a rigorous one.

First of all, the research assistants to be recruited are expected not only to be conversant with the basic principles of data collection process, but also must display competence in the research methodology adopted for the study. Considering the fact that I am absent from the field, as suggested by Stevano & Deane, (2017:1), the role of the research assistants has a significant unswerving effect on both the quality of data that would be collected and the study as a whole. Besides, Bujra's (2006) posited that, a researcher that is considering hiring a research assistant must prioritize the researcher's capability as a factor to the recruitment process. This is because an experienced research assistant would know how to apply emotional intelligence that would not impede the process of data collection (Bujra, 2006). Therefore, I decided to hire two young researchers with statistics background who have recently concluded their studies and have previously conducted data collection.

After scaling the hurdle of recruiting research assistants, a conference call through zoom was arranged between myself and the assistants to perfectly plan for the data collection process. We went through the guiding interview questions, selection of sample and criteria for selections as well as the method of reporting among other important details connected to the data collection process. After data collection, transcribing of the data into English language.

2.4 Methods of Data Collection

The method adopted for collecting data for this study is Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The decision to make use of FGD was because it is a feasible approach that helps address the research questions. This line of thought is consistent with the argument of O'Leary's (2010) that suggest that the first thing research must consider when choosing a research method, the researcher must be confident that the chosen method is within the researcher's ability, feasible, and most importantly, answers the research questions. Although FGD can be time-consuming and expensive, the method was considered to be appropriate because it allows the researcher to accommodate unforeseen circumstances by adjusting the designs, ask follow up questions based on the responses of the participants of the FGD or help clarify questions that were misunderstood or misinterpreted by the respondents which in most cases are not available in quantitative questionnaires survey (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, FGD questions were designed to capture the experiences, perspective, and reality of the women in

the rural areas in Gulu in using digital technologies. The designed questions help keep the participants focused on the research and not distracted with non-relevant responses to the research questions. The process of data collected lasted for 2 weeks to organize the three FGDs conducted for the study.

2.5. Selection of Respondents

The selection of respondents that were interviewed was done through the purposive sampling technique. The sampling technique was deemed appropriate for data collection for research with specific objective that requires specific responses to addressed (O'Leary 2010: 170). It is a non-probability sample that is deeply embedded in specific criteria (Guarte and Barrios,2006; Tongco,2007) and a "deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses" (Etikan et al., 2016:2). The data collection was conducted in villages where the LEWUTI project is active in Gulu. A total of 30 women were selected from the villages using criteria such as age, marital status and education background as basis for their selection to participates in the study. Three Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were organized with 10 participants each.

The first group comprises women who have undergone Barefoot law training on how to use digital tools to access justice and have used the training to access justice using digital platforms. The discussion in this group helped to generate data that helped in the understanding of how digital technology help realize/enable legal empowerment of rural women in Uganda. All the ten women that participated in the FGD1 acknowledge that since they were introduced to and received training about the Legal Empowerment of Women Using Technology and Innovation (LEWUTI) by Barefootlaw, many of their legal issues and concerns have been resolved through digital solutions. The FGD2 comprises of women that have undergone training organized by Barefootlaw on how to use digital tools to access justice but have not used the training to access justice using the digital platforms while the third FGD3 composition was made up of women that are aware of the opportunity to make use of digital tools and platforms to access justice but did not make use of it.

None of the women that participated in the FGD is less than 21 years old and for the marital status criteria, 7 women are single, 14 are married, while 9 are either divorced or widowed. Education background was also a factor, 15 of the women have one form of education or the other with the highest been senior secondary school while the rest have no form of education. The reason behind these criteria is because the experiences of women to vulnerability and oppression are not homogenous (Young 2011). The experiences of married women differ to that of a young single woman even though they are all oppressed by the patriarchal system (Moyo, 2004). The widow's experiences are even worse to those of married and single women in traditional society like Uganda (Adefemi, 2015; Wamara et al., 2021). Since several studies (Marambio, 2020; Golub, 2020, Dhar, 2020) have documented the importance of education and literacy of individuals in the realization of legal empowerment, I considered using educational level as parts of the criteria for selecting the respondents. This would allow us to have a clear understanding of the underlining factors that shaped the perspective of the respondent's decisions in making use of the LEWUTI project.

2.6 Method of Data Analysis

In analysing the collected data through interviews to address the research questions, Thematic Analytical (TA) approach was adopted. From Braun and Clarke (2006) and Terry et al (2017) arguments, TA is valuable for the analysis of qualitative data for the reason that it tries to identify patterns in themes that originated from the collected data for research. Also, it is a flexible approach, mostly in deductive and exploratory researches where the researchers

possess limited idea of the pattern they are trying to find or discover (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 78). The motivation behind the choice of TA as a method of data analysis for this study was that the TA have no explicit precondition or prerequisite concerning the sample size of a study; what is critical to TA is the nature of data collection and most importantly the research question (Terry et al., 2017). Therefore, the most important and fascinating themes were deduced from the critical review and scrutiny of the data collected from semi-structured qualitative interviews responses of the selected respondents, some of the themes derived from the analysis includes poverty, digital divide, fear of violence backlash, lack of education, and culture and religion just to mention but a few. After identifying the common themes from the respondent's responses, the identified themes were arranged along the line of the sub-research questions. These themes were subjected to analysis through the lens of legal empowerment, and access to justice.

2.7 Reliability and Validity of Research

Although the idea of reliability and validity is often used in testing or evaluating quantitative research, it is relevant to all kind of research which includes qualitative study (Brink, 1993: 35). According to Patton (2001), a researcher conducting qualitative research should consider reliability and validity because it is two important factors in both the analysis of the outcomes and quality of the study. Patton maintained that, "quantitative research only needs valid and reliable instruments to be reliable and valid, but in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2001:14). This suggest that it is incumbent on the researcher conducting qualitative research to persuade their audience why the findings of the research deserved attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 290).

However, study by Lincoln and Guba;(1985:300) show that, instead of having a fixation about reliability and validity in research which are mostly used in addressing the quality in quantitative study, concepts such as dependability, neutrality, credibility are close equivalent of reliability and validity that a researcher conducting qualitative study should address. Therefore, to achieve dependability, neutrality, and credibility, following strictly the qualitative research ethical guidelines and dealing with the researcher biases should be prioritized by the researcher. In social research, ethics can be understood as "the moral deliberation, choice, and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process" (Pardee et al., 2018:681). This implies that the primary goal of the researcher should be the integrity and responsibility. It is the researcher moral obligation to ensure that they are neutral in the presentation of the findings by not taking side in presenting one-sided story. The researcher must not be judgmental and must be honest during the transcribing of the raw data collected for the study (O'Leary, 2014: 47). The duty rest upon the researcher to capture reality, the truths, and prevent any intentional bias or errors. In carrying out the research, I was guided by the ethical obligation to do no harm or avoiding harm (Orb et al. 2001: 93). Throughout the process of the data collection (Before, during, and after the data collection) for this study, ethics was placed on top priority list. The first step was to ensure that the research assistants working with me secure the consent of the respondents, which was achieved verbally and formally from those that are educated. Since some of the responses of the respondents might exposed them to backlash or danger because some of them might have used the LEWUTI project covertly to realized legal empowerment against their abusers, the respondents were given the choice to remain anonymous if they chose to be anonymous. They were also given the assurance that they are not under any obligation to answer questions that they are not comfortable with as well as they can disengage from the interview process when the feel uncomfortable.

2.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, the importance of methodology has been established, and the process that the necessary data for the study were collected. The research design was predicated on a qualitative descriptive approach, although it is not flawless; nevertheless, it is considered the most suitable approach given the research objectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews of 30 respondents from three villages in Gulu area that have active and ongoing operation on LEWUTI project.

Chapter 3. Conceptualizing Legal Empowerment and Access to Justice

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical approaches that are adopted to analyze the research questions presented. It analyses legal empowerment and access to justice and, consequently, the relationship between legal empowerment and justice as an analytical framework. The discussion in this chapter unravels the interpretation of what amounts to access to justice and legal empowerment at the intersection of digital transformation to unearth the underlying role that digital technology plays in the lives of rural women in Uganda to fight for their rights. The discussion in this chapter is divided into four main sections, and the first section primary focus is the comprehensive analysis of the concept of legal empowerment. While the second section discusses the debate and relevance of the concept of Access to Justice to the research questions, the third section focuses on the nexus between legal empowerment and access to justice. The analysis shows that without access to justice, there can never be legal empowerment. Therefore, digital technology providing access to legal representation, courts, legal knowledge, among others, is a crucial recipe for the rural women in Uganda realization of access to justice

3.2 Legal Empowerment

This study will adopt the concept of Legal Empowerment (LE) to help make sense of the data collected for this study because the LE offers a different perceptive approach regarding access to justice (de Langen et al., 2009). Legal empowerment is a process in which the vulnerable citizens in the society use the state legal tools as a mechanism of social transformation to advance their political, economic, and social conditions (Domingo & O'Neil, 2014:4). Legal empowerment is deeply entrenched in the priorities and agency of those socially excluded in the society (de Langen & Barendrecht, 2009; Golub, 2013;). In order words, legal empowerment priority interest is the advancement of the poor welfare and well-being through legal apparatus (Boone, 2019). However, most proponents of digital legal transformation link legal empowerment to being able to use available legal information, consultation when resolving their legal challenges within the justice institution. They argue that technology have the capabilities to increase access to legal institutions; equip people with the tools to resolve their justice needs; and reduces the cost to hire lawyers and specialist providers.

As Cotula (2007) accentuated in his book "*Legal Empowerment for Local Resource Control*" that, the existence of various legal tools that can be explored to secure local individuals and groups rights in a legal system is not a given that they would be in the position to use or benefits from the legal tools. Cotula (2007) argument resonates with rural women in Northern Uganda in acquiring legal assistance using digital tools to address the recurrent violation of their fundamental human rights. The concept is relevant to the study because it is explicitly linked with a human-right based approach to development, social transformation and social accountability that help people understand and make use of the law (Miller, 2017; United Nations, 2009; Uvin, 2007).

It suffices to say that legal empowerment can be described as using legal instruments provided by the justice system by the marginalized to improve their social situation (Goodwin & Maru, 2017). Summarized in this definition are three significant themes; the agency is crucial in making use of legal instruments (ii) identifying the marginalized as the priority of legal empowerment (iii) the improvement of the social, economic, and political situation of the downtrodden (Goodwin & Maru, 2017). Legal empowerment, according to the

Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (CLEP), can be defined as "a process of systemic change through which the poor and excluded become able to use the law, the legal system, and legal services to protect and advance their rights and interests as citizens and economic actors" (CLEP & UNDP 2008: 3).

As it may, women in rural Uganda pathway to realizing their denied rights are through legal empowerment because legal empowerment is an essential strategy relevant to sustainable development (Golub, 2010). In recent decades, the ways and manners that the citizens interrelate with state authorities have been evolving with the social order in numerous societies continue to experience explicit changes that emphasize the rights and obligations of citizens (Domingo & O'Neil, 2014). These have a wide range of effects on citizens' entitlements and responsibilities and the state's obligation to the people. The changes can have impacts on the realization of the legal empowerment of the citizens. These include the transformation of power relationships supportive of the marginalized, policy transformation on the allocation of service delivery and resources with explicit reference to the poor, and the availability of tools and mechanisms to seek redress against violation of fundamental human rights (Domingo & O'Neil, 2014:5).

3.3. Access to Justice

Access to Justice (A2J) is a concept that is relevant to the analysis of data collected during the focus group discussions with rural women in Uganda. The concept helps highlight the meaning of A2J to rural women in Uganda and the steps taken to address their fundamental human rights violations. The concept of Access to Justice (A2J) first emerged in the 1970s from the work of the Italian jurist Mauro Cappelletti on "access to justice in modern societies". According to Cappelletti, A2J primary focus is on the purpose of the legal system by which individuals may resolve their disputes or justify their rights. Cappelletti maintained that there are two main issues attached to A2J, "the system must be equally accessible to all, and it must lead to results that are individually and socially just" (Cappelletti & Garth, 1977:182). When citizens, particularly those belonging to marginalized groups, dread the system and cannot access it because they have no lawyers, lack knowledge or information about their rights, and the justice system is financially unreachable, there can never be access to justice. A2J encompasses several components such as "standardizing legal protection, legal awareness, legal aid and counsel, adjudication, enforcement, and civil society oversight" (USAID, 2004:8). The realization of A2J for individuals offers the rural women in Uganda a more engaging alternative to violence in approaching different kinds of disputes in their communities.

Be that as it may, the concept of A2J goes beyond the idea of improving and ensuring individuals' access to courts or legal representation. While the concept cannot be easily defined, A2J can be described as the capability of individuals to pursue and acquire a remedy to injustices and grievances through formal or informal institutions saddled with the responsibility of addressing grievances and justice. In order to maximize A2J, there is a need to combine both formal or state justice and informal or non-state apparatuses built on firm compliance with human rights standards. This will probably entail synchronizing informal practices with international human rights law (Scheye, 2009). "Traditional adjudication mechanisms (e.g. a Council of Chiefs) can be recognized by formal law, or they may operate extralegally. It is important to emphasize at the outset that traditional justice systems should only be recognized and supported when they are consistent with the rule of law and respect for the human rights of all groups in society" (UNDP, 2004:14). It is important because about 80% of disputes and grievances in many countries, particularly in the Global South, are addressed through the non-state justice system (Kyed et al., 2011:2). Non-state justice systems are structures that "have some form of non-state authority in providing safety, security, and

accessible justice to the population and include traditional, customary, religious, and informal mechanisms" (USAID, 2019:1).

Nevertheless, the idea of promoting non-state justice systems as a panacea to access to justice has come under heavy criticism by various scholars on the ground that informal justice systems are inherently and irremediably inconsistent with women's rights and opposes fundamental human rights standards (Nyamu-Musembi, 2003; Golub, 2003; Schärff et al., 2011). Therefore, if not the only form of adjudication of disputes involving women, a formal system would be the primary form of adjudication. As a result, the informal systems need to be engaged the primary aim of transformation to conform with international standards, even though the positive features of familiarity, accessibility, and effectiveness are retained (Chopra & Isser, 2011:24).

However, for four decades since Cappelletti posited that effective access to justice is the most paramount basic requirement that guarantees legal rights access (Cappelletti & Garth, 1977:182), there has been an ongoing debate on how should the "effectiveness" of access to justice be defined? According to Albiston & Sandefur (2013), the effectiveness of legal representation goes beyond the outcome of cases adjudicated by the legal system. Albiston & Sandefur argued that evaluating effectiveness is not an easy task because several costs are attached to a legal proceeding that cannot be quantified. "These costs include lost access to properties, food support, or medical care before an eventual case outcome is reached, even if that outcome is positive. How do these losses affect claimants, their families, and their children?" (Albiston & Sandefur, 2013:11). The stress of the legal proceedings might lead to a mental health issue for many people who cannot withstand a long period of litigation even when they have lawyers on pro-bono.

Other scholars have argued that the effectiveness of access to justice is subjected to the user of the system interpretation of access to justice. For Chopra & Isser (2011), "access to justice is legally plural environments needs to be understood from the perspective of the user. Rather than examine distinct systems, formal and informal" (Chopra & Isser, 2011:24). The implication is that access to justice to rural women in Uganda means different things, allowing them to have a different opinion about the effectiveness of access to justice platforms available to them. As Farrow (2014) highlighted, access to justice to some people might be access to courts and lawyers, while some might consider access to justice as having access to information and knowledge about one's rights. Others might see it as being able to exercise these rights and obtaining a just outcome. Therefore, one can conclude that to successfully access justice is subject to the level of understanding the problem and your rights, making an informed decision on the best way of resolving the problem, and arriving at a just resolution.

3.4. Legal Empowerment and Access to Justice Nexus

The inauguration of the United Nations Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor brought to the fore of discourse concerning the fundamental human rights of the marginalized groups in the society and context of poverty eradication inclusion into the realm of law. The 2008 commission report, "Making the law work for everyone", explicitly highlighted the four main pillars or actions that need to be taken for the poor to be legally empowered and function effectively on the market. These four pillars are mainly access to justice and the rule of law, property rights, labour rights, and business rights (UN, 2008:5-6). The report shows that the realization of access to justice and the rule of law set the premise and foundation for all other rights to be realized or achieved. The implication of this is that it is impossible to achieve legal empowerment when, "de jure or de facto, poor people are denied access to a well-functioning justice system" (UN, 2008:5). Guaranteeing equitable access to justice, though vital to advancement, is tough to accomplish. Even if the legal system is technically

fair and inclusive, equal access to justice can only be attained with public and state institutions commitments (UN, 2008:5).

However, the reality is that legal empowerment is context-specific, and people need to understand and be aware of the context-specific histories that underpin the domineering systems that they wish to transform with the mechanism of legal empowerment (Cotula, 2007). It is essential to evaluate the process of legal empowerment because various societal factors can hinder or inhibit the legal empowerment of individuals or groups, which have a considerable impact on society (Goodwin & Maru, 2017). As suggested by Chopra & Isser, "most discriminatory elements are not engrained in a specific justice system, but in asymmetric power relations in society, including those between men and women" (Chopra & Isser, 2011;33). This implies that the recourse to the legal process is not entirely disconnected from society's social and political elements (Gloppen, 2008). Hence, the usage of legal tools must be cognizant of the broader social and political milieu to be effective. The implementation of legal empowerment can lead to four different proactive and practical changes for both individuals and society. These changes include changes in social accountability policy, expansion and affirmation of legal rights, personal empowerment, and the entrenchment of social justice (Domingo & O'Neil, 2014). Legal empowerment helps understand how rural women in Uganda can access justice because the inkling of legal empowerment goes beyond legal tools in the legal system. It is much more about the implementation of the law and its accessibility. Legal empowerment is explicit in its target and advances access to justice (de Langen & Barendrecht, 2009).

3.5. Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter established that the primary objective of legal empowerment is to build the capacity of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups or individuals in society to leverage the existing legal tools to fight for their rights. However, leveraging the laws would be impossible if they are in no position to access justice which entails standardizing legal protection, legal awareness, legal support and guidance, adjudication, enforcement, and civil society oversight.

Chapter 4. The emergence of digital technology: A Panacea to legal disempowerment rural women in Uganda.

4.1. Introduction

The chapter discusses the findings on the potentials of digital technology in promoting the legal empowerment of rural women and the factors hindering the use of digital technologies for rural women in Uganda to access justice. Three Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were organized with 10 participants each. The first group comprises women who have undergone Barefoot law training on how to use digital tools to access justice and have used the training to access justice using digital platforms. The discussion in this group helped to generate data that helped in the understanding of how digital technology help realize/enable legal empowerment of rural women in Uganda. All the ten women that participated in the FGD acknowledge that since they were introduced to and received training about the Legal Empowerment of Women Using Technology and Innovation (LEWUTI) by Barefootlaw, many of their legal issues and concerns have been resolved through digital solutions.

The discussion in this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discussion brought to the fore of debate what empowerment means for most women that have lost faith in accessing justice in the legal system of Uganda. The section reveals that access to justice to rural women means knowing their rights, exercising such rights, and being satisfied with the outcomes. The second section focuses on how rural women feel legally empowered after receiving fair legal knowledge and procedures that help them know which of their concerns can be addressed legally. With the confidence that they could exercise their rights through proper documentation when filling their cases in courts, they could seek redress for cases that were initially judged against them due to lack of proper documentation. The third chapter shows that when women are legally empowered, it checks abuses of women rights act of impunity. Those planning to violate women's rights because of the villages' remoteness, thinking that nobody would come to the women's aid, have started to rethink with the emergence of digital technology. The last section of the chapter is the conclusion that summarizes all the arguments of the chapter.

4.2. Ability to Understand, Exercise Rights and Obtain Just Outcomes

Access to justice means different things to different people. It can be referred to as access to lawyers and courts. It also means understanding your legal rights, exercising these rights, and obtaining a just outcome (Farrow, 2014). Therefore, one can conclude that accessing justice successfully is subject to understanding the problem and your rights, making an informed decision on the best way of resolving the problem, and arriving at a just resolution. From the findings of this study, the emergence of digital technology offered women in rural areas in Uganda the opportunity to access lawyers, understand their legal rights, exercise such rights, and obtain a just outcome. Some of the participants shared the experiences that make them feel empowered as a woman. Achan Christine, one of the participants of the FGD1, said that before she was introduced to the use of phone and SMS to report the injustices she suffered from people, she always felt depressed because she was powerless since nobody was there to hear her stories. She enunciated further that;

"Terrible things have happened to me in the past; now, I am happy that I can get help to solve many of my problems. For example, I got a man who almost killed my daughter when he

attempted to rape her on the farm convicted and jailed. I would not have gotten justice if it was before because there would be no one to contact for legal advice since we live at the end of the village. I called the toll-free number, and a lawyer spoke to me, and later they helped look for an organization that helped me pursue the case" (Achan Christine, FGD1, September 2021)

During the FGD1, it was discovered that many of the women have been able to fight for their rights on inheritance, defilement, child maintenance, assault and domestic violence, divorce, sexual violence, among other violations that are prevalent in the rural areas hidden away from the eyes of the law. Another woman who is a divorcee supported Achan Christine position on how digital technology has brought access to justice closer to many vulnerable rural women even though there is still a long way to go for rural women accessing justice. Hellen, a mother of three children, explained how she was saved from domestic violence that almost took her life and that of her children. She said that the emergence of digital tools to seek legal advice from lawyers far away from her remote village helped increase her access to justice, and she now feels legally empowered. According to her statement;

"I have been suffering domestic violence for eight years until a friend told me that I can seek help from the corner of my bedroom with my mobile phone without my abuser noticing. I was introduced to the LEWUTI project, and a number was sent to me. I received an SMS which was followed by a call to listen to my case. I was given legal advice and steps to take, and I can tell you that I free myself from domestic violence. I have also used the same method to recover the land that was taken from me by my stepbrothers" (Anyayo Hellen, FGD1, September 2021).

All the women who participated in the FGD1 were happy that more cases were attended to by reaching out to a lawyer through the free SMS platform and the toll-free number. Digital technology has increasingly been employed to disseminate general legal information (Beqiraj & McNamara, 2014). The existing system falls far short of providing access to the knowledge, resources and services that allow people to deal effectively with civil and family legal matters (Farrow, 2014: 6). From the analysis of the information gathered from the FGD1, the emergence of digital technology help equips women, in particular those that are vulnerable and underserved, with requisite legal knowledge and awareness that can be used to protect themselves from violation of their human rights. Women who have access to digital technologies are better able to resolve their legal needs because they can access lawyers easily at the comfort of their homes to seek legal advice and guidance, and the lawyers can always refer them to other partners (Bafana, 2019).

4.3. Knowledge and Rural Women's Legal Empowerment

According to Deininger et al. (2008), legal knowledge is crucial to realizing individuals' fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, many of the rural women lack this knowledge, therefore, do not know their rights. Several studies (e.g., Nessa, 2012; Abrar-ul-Haq et al., 2017; Banerjee et al., 2020) have revealed that women that possess fair legal knowledge on issues that affect them or their community feel more empowered because it helps them to make informed decisions on what to do at the right time and what not to do. This is the case of Aparo Nighty, 26 years old participant from the FGD1, who is uneducated, but through the digital technology platform, she was able to receive information about her rights that she never thought existed in the first place. She was denied her right to the inheritance, which was protected by Uganda Constitution by her male siblings as they informed her, she has no right to the inheritance of their late parents because she is a female. According to her statement;

"Without information that I got from the lawyers through SMS, the land that I am using to farm today would not be there. I believe now that information is power. Linking you to the people to support you is also power. Being able to send an SMS for free and the SMS being responded to is also empowerment" (Aparo Nighty, FGD1, September 2021)

Other participants shared their experiences of using digital technology has saved them from unnecessary cost and helped them make the right decisions concerning specific issues. For them, the ability to secure relevant legal knowledge on positions that they initially thought were out of their reach or that they were on the right path means a lot to them. Ajok Joice, a 45 years old woman, was able to get help from BarefootLaw through the Toll-free number when she reported to them about the neighbour's cows that keep trespassing on her land. She was advised to reach out to the local council leader to help resolve the matter, which she did and ever since then, her issue has been resolved. According to Ajok, before she was introduced to digital means of accessing justice, she would have reported the case to the police, and they would have collected money from her with no guarantee that the issue would be resolve.

"The SMS and call options to seek for legal solution helped me a lot. The stress of going to the police station and later found out that you are wrong on the issue you are complaining about, or when you are right, some of the actions you have already taken have spoilt your case and come with a cost. But this option of having access to legal information and advice at no cost and stress makes me feel confident in myself. This is because I am now aware that before I take any action on any, I need to consult to be sure that I am on the right path" (Ajok Joice, 45 years old, FGD1, September 2021)

As Boone (2019) suggested that the priority interest of legal empowerment is the improvement of the well-being and welfare of the marginalized groups through legal apparatus, the women from the FGD1 expressed how the digital technology has legally empowered them to access justice that has been elusive from them for a long time. Also, Jennifer, a single mother of 2 children, corroborated Ajok Joice position on how digital technology has helped her make informed decisions to get justice on several violations that would have to go un-addressed. She explains that the legal advice she got through SMS and calls from Barefootlaw helped her gather the necessary and required documents needed to file some of her cases in court in which she won some of it, and others are still ongoing. She explained that many women lost cases of violation and abuse because they lack knowledge of the legal procedures and the documents needed to get back their cases. She gave a further example:

"there was this land case that I already lost seven years ago on the ground of what they called technicality even though I am sure I should have won the case. The access to legal free legal advice through digital means helped greatly. I was advised to try and make video recordings of some events as evidence, get some documents and the lawyers that were talking to me on the phone helped me to refiled the case which I won last year" (Alloy Jenifer, 45 years old, FGD1, September 2021).

As documented by previous studies (Namubiru-Mwaura, 2014; Lastarria-Cornhiel et al., 2014), many women lost court cases because of a lack of adequate information on what type of documents are needed to file at the court. Therefore, many of them tend to lose technicality, which makes them lose interest in pursuing the case further. This implies that "legal awareness is the foundation for fighting injustice. The poor and other disadvantaged people cannot seek remedies for injustice when they do not know what their rights and entitlements are under the law" (UNDP, 2004:10). Studies have shown that digital technology has the potential of helping many rural women and other vulnerable groups to overcome barriers of geography, courts' coverage, knowledge and cost that comes with seeking redress in court (Bafana, 2019; Farrow, 2014; Beqiraj & McNamara, 2014). Women seeking justice in rural

Uganda are burdened by the inadequate government resources, remote location, traditional patriarchal values, economic impoverishment, which plague their navigation of the criminal justice system (Holmes, 2015; 23)

4.4. Violators of Women Rights: an End to Impunity

One of the reasons that women in rural areas suffer abuse and violation of their human rights continuously is because those that violate their rights know that the women have nobody or nowhere to go to and make a formal report to seek justice (Polavarapu, 2020; Lawson et al., 2020). All the women in FGD1 were in unison in their opinion on how the emergence of digital technology to access lawyers and Human rights NGOs working against gender-based violence has become a thing of worry for many known perpetrators. Oyella Margret is a 42 years old widow that started using the digital platform last year, said that getting justice is not compulsory that the problem should be solved in courts, but the fact that you can go to court or get a lawyer and file your case with ease send a serious signal to anybody that is planning to take advantage of you.

"What gave many people the effrontery to abuse you is that they know that you don't have the means or resources of reporting the case, or you don't even know that what they are doing to you is against the law. Therefore, the emergence of digital technology is a severe blow to people that loves to cheat and abuse others. For instance, a woman connived with her husband to cheat me by refusing to pay me for the work I did for them on the farm as a labourer. When I said I am reporting you to the authority by taking out my phone; they quickly agreed to pay me what they owe me ". (Oyella Margret, FGD1, September 2021)

Being a rural community, many women are invisible to the formal legal system for several reasons, especially those in more remote villages that would need to pay for transportation since they cannot access the police station on foot (Polavarapu, 2020; Lawson et al., 2020; Naupa, 2017). For example, Evelyn, a participant in FGD1 who was accused of witchcraft was kicked out of the house and had to go and live with a family friend in another village far from her home. She was stigmatized and victimized until she used the digital platform to seek legal assistance. She was out of her village for more than four years because she didn't know what to do or where to go until she was referred to Action Aid to help get representation for the Gender-Based Violence she was going through by a lawyer of BarefootLaw. Evelyn, the only secondary school certificate holder in the FGD1; said that if not for the help she got through the SMS platform and Toll-free call centre, she would still be living away from her village and would have been landless. She believed that the emergence of digital platforms to access justice did not only empower women legally, it also sent a message to violators and abusers of women rights that they cannot continue to act with impunity thinking that their actions are hidden away from the eyes of the law. According to her:

"I think the emergence of digital technology to access justice goes beyond legal empowerment of women; it also changes the attitude of serial abusers to think twice that they can get into trouble that will only cost a free SMS. Many violators of women rights behave the way they do because they are certain you don't have the resources to travel long-distance or lack knowledge to seek justice. Now they are aware that women can access legal help under their nose without them noticing, and the consequences would just hit them like a hurricane" (Atim Evelyn, FGD1, September 2021)

The argument from all the respondents above resonated with the position of Cotlua (2007) that, because there are laws or legal tools that vulnerable groups can explore to ensure that their rights are protected in certain legal system is not a guarantee that they would be able to make use of the legal tools to secure their rights. This is because most women in rural Uganda do not have adequate incomes to fund legal assistance. Therefore, a substantial

amount of their legal needs goes unmet. However, as the findings of the study shows, digital transformation is the way to go; it even has the chance and the opportunity to reduce corruption. It takes less time and may reduce procedural technicalities and other delays, and will make them work for people in the Justice sector much more accessible. Many of the participants received legal advice that saved them from abuse, something they didn't have access to before the emergence of digital technology as a platform to access justice.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been established that digital technology can play a significant role in addressing the unmet legal needs of rural women in Uganda. Women were able to use digital interfaces to access legal help, evaluate their problems and decide whether the problems have legal recourse, and helped them in the preparation of evidence and legal documentation. This allows women to choose which elements of their legal journey can be self-managed and need to be addressed by a legal professional. Also, it helps reduce or eradicate the cost and the financial barriers that have hindered many rural women from giving up on any chance of getting justice when their rights are violated. Besides, the idea that women can now access justice through digital means has put potential abusers and violators on alert that they might not go scot-free if they attempt to violate women they perceive as vulnerable.

Chapter 5. Challenges to Accessing Justice through Digital Technology

5.1. Introduction

In the last chapter, we have seen that the emergence of digital technology can legally empower rural women. However, some challenges can hinder the proactive outcome of technology empowering rural women. In this chapter, these challenges are looked into through women's experiences in FGD2 and FGD3. The FGD2 group comprises women that have undergone training organized by Barefootlaw on how to use digital tools to access justice but have not used the training to access justice using the digital platforms. While the responses from the group participants revealed the different challenges that hinder the use of digital technology to access justice, FGD3 composition was made up of women that are aware of the opportunity to make use of digital tools and platforms to access justice but did not make use of it. They discussed why they chose not to consider digital technology by revealing that many women still found traditional ways of accessing justice more appropriate in the rural areas where they reside. The chapter is organized into three main sections. The first section focus is on the discussion of the challenges. The second section is why some women decided not to consider digital technology even though many of them have the means to use technology to access justice. The last section is the conclusion of the chapter.

5.2. Factors against successful usage of digital technology to access justice

5.2.1. Illiteracy and Inadequate capacity on how to use digital platforms

One of the significant problems discovered as an impediment to digital tools in accessing justice in rural Uganda is the lack of knowledge on how to use the digital tools to navigate the platform where individuals can seek help and legal advice. The findings of the FGD2 group discussions revealed that, although all the women who participated in the discussion had phones, the vast majority of them struggled to use the platform to seek justice. For example, Layet Lilly, a 53 years old widow, said that many people using digital tools to seek legal help are dependent on their children or family members who know how to use mobile phones to help navigate the platform. She said she would have loved to use the platform to resolve some of her problems, but she does not know how to use the phone, and all her children are in the city.

“I struggle to use the phone and the platform; this is a big problem for me because I do not have anybody to help me with it. Although I attended the training at Barefootlaw three years ago, I can tell you that I have forgotten everything they taught us that day” (Layet Lilly, FGD2, September 2021).

Another participant from the FGD2 named Anena Joan supported Layet Lilly's position on the inadequate knowledge and ability to use the digital tools and the platform set up to assist the people who need legal help. She explained how she struggled to use the phone to send SMS because she was not educated and did not want anybody to help her send the SMS because she did not want anybody to know about the issue she was facing.

“I have serious concerns that I don't want to share with people in the village because the abuse is very personal to me, so the idea of asking somebody to help with the SMS or phone call is not an option for me. Yes, I have the phone, but I do not know how to operate it, so I just accepted my fate my abuser go scot-free”. (Anena Joan, FGD2, September 2021).

Several studies (Marambio, 2020; Golub, 2020, Dhar, 2020) have documented the importance of education and literacy of individuals in the realization of legal empowerment. Many of the participants of FGD2 that did not use the SMS platform attributed it to illiteracy among them and lack of constant refresher training on how to navigate the platform. This is similar to the findings of a study conducted in rural India that shows that many women do not and cannot see themselves as expert users of a technological device like a mobile phone (Sultana et al., 2018). Another challenge identified during the discussion with participants from the FGD2 is the communication and language barrier. It was discovered that once you call the toll-free line, it does not necessarily go directly to a lawyer that knows your language. You have to wait and be referred to another lawyer who speaks the same language that later calls you back. In some cases, they don't call back, which has made many women who desire legal help ditch the idea of seeking legal help through technology. Atiku Jackeline, a married woman with two children, shared her experience on how she tried to call more than seven times but the response she kept getting was in English and since she doesn't understand the English language fluently.

“The first time I used the phone to call the Toll-free number, the person that spoke to me answers in the English language, and I told her to please speak in the local language, she promised she would get another person to call me back. I waited for two days, but nothing happened. I called again, and again, and again until the 7th time that I gave up” (Annet, FGD2, September 2021).

The experiences of the participants of the FGD2 echoes Brescia (2018) argument that technology alone is not sufficient or enough to close the rural justice gap, mainly when those in the rural areas are poor or low-income earners (Brescia, 2018:60). He maintained that if people seeking justice “does not understand how to use a digital delivery system without further assistance, it is not an effective system” (2018:61). This argument implies that language barriers remain a grave concern for women while accessing digital technology via the internet or mobile phones allows rural women to share their problems and enhance their chances of solving the problems (Joseph & Andrew, 2007).

5.2.2. Poor infrastructure

Poor infrastructure is one of the major problems that people residing in rural areas have to contend with. Many of the women in the FGD2 complained about how they spend weeks or months without a network service to make a call or receive calls from friends in the city. One of the participants described how network services had been a significant problem.

“When I had a problem that I wanted to use the SMS platform, I asked my son to help me compose the message, but the message refused to go because there was no network. We even walked to the next village to see if we would see network service, but there was nothing. Sadly, I could not get the legal advice that I needed at that particular time because there was no way to communicate even when I have the tools.” (Anonymous participant, FGD2, September 2021)

Another woman said that.

“Network service in this village is like a goldfish, very rare, and you will the way people will start running into their house to take their phone any time the network service is available. When you go out and come back that there is a network today for some hours, it will pain you that you missed the opportunity to call your loved ones staying in the city. The network in the area is so bad that having a phone almost becomes useless.” (Lalam Sunday, FGD2, September)

Women in the rural areas with poor IT infrastructures, lack IT skills, limited experience in operating these tools, and exposure to the internet and ICT. Yet these are the target

beneficiaries of the various digital technology interventions in the country. The ITU *Measuring digital development 2019* conducted between 2013 and 2019 estimates that 19% of the world's offline population lives LDC. This is compounded by the fact that the internet user penetration stands at 36% for women compared to 64% for men in Africa (ITU, 2019) the gender digital divide is still huge. However, it is important to look beyond the physical availability of computer and the internet but rather people's ability to make use of those technologies to engage in meaningful social practice (Warschauer, 2003). Apart from fluctuating phone networks and internet services, the problem of electricity and solar access makes charging phones a big challenge. Many of the women said that there are times that there will be a network in the village, but their phone battery is already dead.

“some of us have turned our phones to torchlight to see in the darkness because we rarely have electricity in this village. So, when you need the phone to make a call or send an SMS to ask for legal help, your phone is already dead. In some cases, you will be speaking to a lawyer on the phone, and the battery of your phone is dead in a minute.” (Ajok Margret, FGD2, September)

Many of the digital technology innovations aimed at helping vulnerable people access legal aid and assistance rely on electronic platforms accessible by the Internet (Sepulveda Carmona, 2012). This implies that the success of digital technology as a tool to access legal aid and justice is highly dependent on the availability of and access to technology in areas (Beqiraj & McNamara, 2014). Unfortunately, in many African countries' rural areas, the communication network and internet services are unreliable. In some rural areas, there are no network services, making the use of digital technology very difficult.

5.2.3. Access to the digital tools such as Phones etc.

While most FGD2 participants have mobile phones, some complained about having difficulties replacing lost phones or repairing the phones when they got spoilt. Many women in the rural areas are poor, and buying a phone can be a significant challenge; because the unstable network service in the area makes the phone almost useless, there is no motivation to spend extra cost to buy or repair the phone when it is stolen or damaged.

“We are very poor here, the phone that I was using before was given to me by my daughter when she came visiting three years ago when it got spoilt; I do not have any money to buy a new one. So, I gave up.” (Aber Proscovia, FGD2, September)

Also, the married women among the focus groups participants shared their experiences on how they do not have total control over their mobile phones. Akello Nancy shared her experience on how her husband constantly monitors her phone, which almost cost her marriage when she sent an SMS to seek legal assistance on a case of land conflict that he has already warned her not to pursue legally.

“I do not know about those among us that are not married, but I can say that most of us that are married do not have total control over our phones. For example, my husband monitors my phone, he knows how to check the SMS and call history on the phone, so I can do nothing without him knowing. There was a time I sent SMS as regard a land conflict case when he was not around; when he came back, he checked the phone and asked me to leave the house because I disobeyed him.” (Akello, FGD2, September)

Studies have shown that apart from the fact that women in rural areas access to digital technology is often limited and/or controlled by their husbands (Sultana et al., 2018), the decision to make personal decisions on the matters that affect them are in most cases taken on their behalf by men.

5.2.4. Attitude of Lawyers and Confidentiality and Lack of Support Mechanism

Legal empowerment interventions include providing legal aid and community paralegals, capacity building and awareness-raising for both citizens and providers (UN, 2011). “When building digital systems, lawyers need to combine their expertise with empathy. They need to understand how the layperson will see the problem and find a way to bridge the expert/non-expert divide through mechanisms that are accessible to the non-professional” (Brescia, 2018:61). Some of the participants said they stopped using the platforms because they have not been lucky to have lawyers who can explain in simple terms to understand their case. Anek Grace, a married woman that attempts to use the digital platform to seek help on a case of defilement of her daughter by their neighbour, shared her experience as regards the attitude of some lawyers that makes some of the women choose not to trust the system of using SMS or phone calls to access justice.

“some of these lawyers do not know how to keep secrets, and you run the risk of getting into trouble if one continues to make use of the SMS service. For instance, one of my friends who run a beer parlour joint told me that a lawyer came with his friends to her bar to drink, and they started talking about my case. They do not know that she knows me, and I have kept my issue secret from a friend”. (Auma Jennifer, FGD2, September)

As discussed earlier in chapter two of this study, in order for the marginalized group to leverage on the existing legal instruments through digital technology, they need to be fortified with the capacity to make use of the law to address the social injustices perpetuated against them. However, the marginalized groups such as rural women cannot be empowered legally without mandatory resources to make legal claims (Domingo & O’Neil, 2014a:8). They, therefore, count on the support mechanism offered by paralegals, pro-bono lawyers, activists, NGOs agents among others groups that provide their services to assist the poor (Domingo & O’Neil, 2014a:8). This means that the behaviours and the attitudes of the lawyers and paralegals have a lot of roles to play if the rural women would by any chance have access to justice. Another participant of the focus group also supported the argument that dealing with invisible lawyers is a risk they are unwilling to take.

“These people are human beings, and they are prone to make mistakes. The fact that you do not know the person you are talking to make it complicated. Who are you going hold responsible if the advice given to you are the wrong ones or they mistakenly expose your issue to people that can hurt you”? (Susan Onena, FGD2, September 2021)

Many countries in the developing world, especially in the rural areas, lack competent lawyers (Maru, 2010b). This explains why some of the participants of the FGD2 did not make use of the digital technology available to them to seek legal assistance. From the discussion, it was gathered that some of the lawyers that they got from the platform when initially contacted demand money or exposed their secrets. Mrs Lapote narrated how one of the renowned lawyers in Gulu city told her point-blank that he studied law to make money, emphasizing that money comes first for him. Brescia (2018) suggested that it is impossible to fully replace lawyers with technology as it currently stands. However, technology-driven tools can provide information and guidance in situations where no support from a lawyer is available and can augment the work of lawyers through automation and platforms, thus reducing cost and increasing accessibility (Brescia, 2018).

5.3. The Futility of Digital Technology in a Corrupt Judicial System

The discussion with women in FGD3 revealed the complexities involved in the justice system in Uganda beyond technologies platform they might have access to. Many of them

expressed the concerns about the corruption that exist in the legal and justice system in Uganda. They were of the opinion that there is no need of using technology to access lawyers and information about rights when at the end of the day they would still need to appear in court that they are certain would not favor them. Therefore, many women opted for the traditional dispute resolution mechanism by reporting to the rwot kweri¹ to adjudicate on their cases, which give them some hope of getting justice. Atuku Jackline, who is a widow said that the experience of women with the national court system need to be fixed before bringing in any technology to access court. According to her statement;

“What is the purpose of technology to access the court when the system is designed to favor the rich? Do you think a woman that need her land to farm can wait for 5 to 7 years to pursue a court case? She would rather go through the rwot kweri to see if she can get something out of the land even if she cannot get everything, at least she gets something (Atuku Jackline, FGD3, September 2021).

While the existence of some laws and constitutional provisions encourages groups or individuals in Uganda to seek legal redress, access to the concrete resolution is quickly coated by the prevailing everyday barriers to justice. To begin with, the duration of time that it takes a case to reach hearing stage not to talk about getting to verdicts within the judicial system remains unaffordable for many poor people (Mpamizo, 2019: 47). "Notably, marginalized groups often have good reason to distrust dispute resolution or redress mechanisms which are often not 'user-friendly' and require complicated legal and bureaucratic procedures, or which are likely to reaffirm the practices and social norms (for instance of discrimination) that are the object of contestation" (Domingo & O'Neil, 2014a:19). During the discussion with the women that participated in the FGD3, it was discovered that corruption in the justice referral pathways have made many women to consider following the traditional justice process, even though they don't usually get all what they desire from the outcome. For many women that participated in the discussion, they considered the solution they get from traditional justice process as half bread that is better than none offered to them by the state court system. Abalo Concy, who is the oldest among the FGD3 participants said that, it is a waste of time and hopeless to think that technology through phone calls and SMS would help resolve legal matters. She maintained that:

“legal matters are not a one-day think, there are other factors that limits access to justice besides the legal information and guidance and barriers beyond the digital tools. These problems have to be dealt with concurrently. Things like corruption among others. Although, the rwot kweri is not perfect and sometime perpetuate injustice against women, I can tell you that the chance of getting favourable solution from rwot kweri is very high than taking your matter to court” (Abalo Concy, FGD3, September 2021).

Lanyero Eunice, who is a mother of four children also expressed her opinion that the poor are the most vulnerable to unfair justice ruling because they lack the ability to finance. Most importantly, the lawyers and other legal practitioners want money and they delay and frustrate the processes so that they keep feeding on the case. She maintained that technology would not deal with corrupt officials taking bribes to sway the case in favour of the rich.

“Please tell me how me having phone and access to free lawyers would fix a situation where the rich may unknowingly buy your land and after realizing that what they have done is wrong, they bribe the court system to rule in their favour. No digital technology would fix that, so the system needs to be fixed first” (Abalo Concy, FGD3, September 2021).

¹ Rwot Kweri means “chief of the hoe”, it is a form of local leadership in rural Uganda

What can be deduced from the experiences of women in the FGD3 was that, Legal empowerment is a process that enables the citizens to actively make use of the existing laws in the state to claim their rights (Roseveare, 2013). However, the fact that courts cases in Uganda takes many years before an outcome can be reach influenced many Ugandans to lose interest in the judicial system. The long period that it takes before a case can be heard and concluded in the court led to backlogs packing of cases to remain untreated and as a result make the judicial system frustrating and distasteful to many Ugandans (Mpamizo, 2019: 47).

Conclusion

This chapter have been able to demonstrates the challenges the women are facing with using digital platforms to access justice in a bid to legally empowered. Obstacles such as lack legal knowledge and awareness, poverty, lack of access to mobile phones, illiteracy, lack of telecommunication infrastructure and other amenities such as power, and attitude of lawyers are major hindrances to many rural women using digital technology to access justice. However, there are women that believes that introduction of digital technology to access justice is just putting the cart before the horse if corruption remain pervasive in the Uganda legal or court system. To many women in the rural area, the traditional justice arrangement, regardless of out flawed it is when it comes to women's right, many women still rely on the rwot kweri as the only system they have a slight chance of getting justice and this does not require digital technology.

Chapter 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1. Introduction

The study set out to examine how digital technology interconnects with women's access to justice and legal empowerment in rural Northern Uganda. Most importantly, it explores the potential of digital technology in promoting the legal empowerment of rural women and assess the factors hindering access to digital technologies as a mechanism for legal empowerment of rural women in Uganda. Three sub-questions were posed to answer the main research question. 1) In what ways does digital technology legally empower rural women in Northern Uganda? 2) What factors hinder the digital transformation of the justice sector in Uganda? 3) What are the needs of Ugandan rural woman concerning digital technologies for legal empowerment? Data were collected from the rural Gulu area in Northern Uganda, through three focus groups discussion for selected women. The data was analysed through the lens of Legal Empowerment (LE) and Access to Justice (A2J) to help make sense of the data collected for this study. This chapter discusses the summary of the findings and proposed recommendations for state and non-state actors promoting digital technology for rural women in Uganda to access justice and in turn to be become legally empowered.

6.2. Summary of the Findings

The findings to the first research question show that digital technology can play a significant role in addressing the unmet legal needs of rural women in Uganda. Women were able to use digital interfaces to access legal help, evaluate their problems and decide whether the problems have legal recourse, and helped them in the preparation of evidence and legal documentation. This allows women to choose which elements of their legal journey can be self-managed and need to be addressed by a legal professional. Also, it helps reduce or eradicate the cost and the financial barriers that have hindered many rural women from giving up on any chance of getting justice when their rights are violated. Besides, the idea that women can now access justice through digital means has put potential abusers and violators on alert that they might not go scot-free if they attempt to violate women they perceive as vulnerable.

The findings for research question two shows that obstacles such as lack of legal knowledge and awareness, poverty, lack of access to mobile phones, illiteracy, lack of telecommunication infrastructure and other amenities such as power, and attitude of lawyers are major hindrances to many rural women using digital technology to access justice. The findings show the experiences of rural women using the digital technologies to unearth the role digital plays in legal empowerment of rural women in their effort to resolve their legal challenges.

The findings to research question three shows that there are far more deeper challenges related to technological access for these digital technologies. Access to courts and lawyers is an essential component to access to justice, however, the complexities involved in the justice system in Uganda is beyond technologies platform the women has access to. For instance, corruption in the judicial system, lawyers demanding for money or collaborating with the rich to ensure that court case is prolonged so that the women would give up on their cases have made the women to lost trust in the formal court system. This in addition to the cost of legal fees, transportation to the court located in Gulu centre. The experiences of women as demonstrated above help to uncover how different underlying factors hinders the beneficiaries of digital technology interventions (women) ability to access and resolve their legal challenges amidst digital tools interventions. These women believe that introduction of

digital technology to access justice is just putting the cart before the horse if corruption remain pervasive in the Uganda legal or court system. Therefore, many of them opted for the traditional justice arrangement, regardless of the flaws associated with non-state justice system when it comes to women's right in Uganda. Many women still rely on the rwot kweri as the only system they have a slight chance of getting justice and this does not require digital technology. The findings show how these factors should be addressed by digital innovators collaboratively with the national justice institutions such as the Judiciary, Legislators who make key decisions towards building strong justice institutions. For instance, making access to justice affordable to everyone, building more courts within the rural areas, the building back trust in the institutions of justice so that people hold it with high regard.

6.3. Recommendations.

While promoting digital solutions for legal empowerment of women to enhance access to justice within rural communities, socio-legal start-ups, NGO'S, INGO'S and the Judicial systems embracing the use of technology ought to work towards addressing first the social and technical barriers to access these technologies. Not only sensitize women on how to use phones to send SMS or access to different technological platforms but also sensitize the entire communities to demystify misconceptions that hinder women's access to this digital equipment such as phones.

Strengthening the referral pathways with other legal institutions to deliver a holistic package for rural women seeking to resolve their legal needs. Digital transformation has brought the law closer to communities, however, the JLOS institutions such as police, judiciary are still slow and inaccessible to deliver timely justice. Legal innovators ought to work collaboratively with national legal institutions to connect the justice pathways and deliver evidence-based impact. For instance; through focusing on conflict resolutions and prevention of disputes. The technological platforms can be used to create safe space for negotiations, arbitrations between conflicting parties.

Several women highlighted concerns on language barrier while accessing these digital platforms. Socio-legal start-ups should establish separate direct lines for the different languages other than step-wise dials to access a platform with a local language of one's choice. These will enhance communication for the rural women who may not be well verse with English often use in deploying these digital tools.

The research has shown that the formal Justice mechanism do not adequately meet Justice needs for people. A number of rural women still rely on grassroots (informal justice) systems to resolve their justice needs amidst the limitations that come with it. Digital technologies can be used to supplement the existing local justice structures through equipping the trust persons in the villages such as local leaders, Rwot Kweri (local chiefs) with these digital technologies who can act as nodes or agents for digital legal consultations to help guide their decisions making with human rights values. Further, women who lack these technologies can gain access through their immediate local leaders or chiefs within the villages. But there would be need to align their practices with human rights based-principles.

Women are frustrated by formal justice system because of the complexities and cost. However, technologies also come with its limitations. There is need for socio-legal innovators to clearly define problems that needs to be solved in the justice pathways and assess how digital technologies can be used to fill the gaps/complement the existing justice infrastructure. Focus should be put towards making digital tools work efficiently in resolving legal needs. For instance, by improving the response time; providing easy to read legal

information. This can be done by setting short response timeframe and conducting monthly audit of compliance with timeframe. In addition, working hours for call to technologies platforms be set and ensure calls are immediately answered during the working hours. Automatic responses to calls beyond the working hours should be set, directing the clients to call during the working hours. This will minimize frustration due to delayed response or unanswered calls.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Consent Letter for the Research

Consent Letter Robert Okello, MA Candidate

Dear Respondent,

REF: Consent letter

I am a student pursuing Masters in Development Studies, majoring in Human Rights, Gender and Conflict: Social Justice Perspectives, at the International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, The Hague, The Netherlands. I would like to ask for your collaboration in the study I'm conducting for my research required for the partial fulfilment of the MA program.

The United Nation (2018) has emphasized the need to adopt technologies usage to leverage the far-reaching potential of the transformative 2030 agenda of sustainable development goals. The emergence of digital innovations in the justice sector has promised to revolutionize the legal industry in Uganda, by advancing creative methods that are supposed to propel access to justice, close gender gaps by advancing legal empowerment. This research contributes to the contemporary discourse on the advancement of disruptive digital technology on the justice sector. It is focusing on "The impact of digital transformation on the Justice sector in Africa" using case study on the Legal empowerment of Women Using Technology and Innovation (LEWUTI) project implemented by Barefootlaw in Northern Uganda

I have identified you as a beneficiary, participant or stakeholder during the implementation of the Lewuti project. Therefore, I would like to collect some feedback in relation to the impact and the operationalization of this project. The overall study will involve answering a short interview survey with my research assistants Rubangapewany Joel and David Lukwiya through face-to-face interviews, Focus group discussions in conformity with local regulations on COVID-19 or otherwise virtual calls on phones, zoom, skype etc.

The short questionnaire takes 30-40 minutes to complete, and will be completed in person by my Research Assistants at a time and location convenient for you. I'm unable to travel in person to Uganda because of the evolving Covid-situation, which is why I hope you will be willing to provide responses to the questions in the interview document. When meeting

with my Research Assistances, she/he will take notes in hard copy anonymously, so that you can speak freely. The questionnaire focuses on your experiences and opinions on using these digital platforms to resolve your legal needs.

I would like to stress that your participation in this research is voluntary, and that all efforts will be taken to protect your identity. All the answers I receive from you will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Although there is no monetary reward for participation, I would like to sincerely thank you in advance for your valuable assistance, and hope that the resulting study will help further

Kindly sign below to affirm that you understand the study's primary aim and that you agree to take part, whilst retaining the right to withdraw without prejudice at any time, should you so wish. Thank you so much for your participation.

Respondent Signature: _____
Date: _____

Add your e-mail and/or WhatsApp here (in case you want to discuss this further).

Appendix 2. Interview Questions for Beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Section A: Interview survey for Beneficiaries (WOMEN)

Chosen Name-----

Unstructured questions.

Ask about experiences with LEWUTI and legal issues they faced
Ask them to talk about these issues and how they experienced them.

In the conversation, use prompts to follow up on points they may not elaborate on
e.g., education, land, work, marriage, children, income, inheritance etc.

BENEFICIARIES/ WOMEN

Structure questions.

1. What is your level of education?

- Not studied Primary Level. Tertiary/Secondary Level. University

2. Have you experience any legal issue in the past 2 months?
 Yes. No If Yes-----Continue to Question a)

a) What was your legal issue related to?

- Land Rights Contract and Agreements
- Family conflict Domestic Violence

Any other.....

3. Do you trust the available justice process when seeking legal remedies?
 Yes. No If No. Why?.....

4. Where do you go to resolve your legal issues?

- Courts of Law
- Local leaders
- Traditional Leaders
- Clan leaders Other mechanism.....

5. Have you attended one of the LEWUTI training?

Yes. No If Yes..... Continue to a)

a) Do you have a phone or have any gadget that connects to internet?

Yes. No If No. Go to question 6

b) Do you use the available digital platforms provided to consult a lawyer for free to access legal support?

Yes. No If Yes. Ask question b (i)

b(i) How do you rate the efficiency and use of the platforms available

- Very easy Easy Moderate Somewhat Hard Hard
- Difficult

b(ii) In what ways has the digital platform help you resolve your legal issues.

a)

b)

c) Have your legal issues been resolved since you started using the available free digital platforms?

Yes. No

If Yes. How?.....

d) Do you trust the online legal consultation with a lawyer?

Yes. No

If No. Why?.....

6. What are the challenges you face when using these digital tools to access legal support?

a)

b)

c)

d)

Questions for Other stakeholders (Magistrates, local leaders and Innovators).

7. Has the immergence of digital technologies in the Justice sector made your work easier in facilitating access to justice?

Yes. No

If Yes. How?.....

8. Do you think women who have access to digital technologies are better place to resolve their legal issues?

9. Do you think digital technologies are improving legal empowerment of women?

Yes. No

If Yes. How?.....

10. Do you think women who seek legal support through digital platforms reach an outcome/resolve their legal needs?

Yes. No

If Yes. How?.....

11. What do you think is the main factor hindering digital transformation in the Justice sector?

a)

b)

12. What is your opinion about digital transformation in the justice sector?

.....

Thank you for your feedback