



PROJECT UPDATES

END FGM, EMPOWER HER

- Cross-Border Dialogue: Uganda and Kenya Unite to End FGM
- Through Skilling, Leah Lokwang Now earns her own income through Chapati making

Women Empowerment, Action and Voice (WEAV)

- KAWUO coordinates all Karamoja led/focused and rights organizations to Champion Women Access to Justice.
- 6 solar panels installed, a staff recruited at Moruita LC2 through the Advocacy of the WEAV women advocates.

ENDING CHILD EXPLOITATION THROUGH ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE AND TRAFFICKING



ABOUT KAWUO

Karamoja Women Umbrella Organization stands at the heart of grassroots advocacy and community transformation in Karamoja region, Uganda. KAWUO champions gender equity, protects the rights of women and girls and drives a sustainable development. Through visionary leadership and strong partnership, the organization empowers local voices, advances inclusive initiatives and fosters lasting social change.

KAWUO currently implements 3 major projects in the operational areas of Moroto, Kaabong, Abim, Napak and Nakapiripirit all focused on women and girl empowerment. These includes Empower Her, End FGM, Women Empowerment Action and Voice in Karamoja and Ending Child Exploitation Through Addressing Child Marriage and Trafficking all focused on gender equality, women empowerment and child marriage





Championing Women's Access to Justice in Karamoja.

In Karamoja, women's access to justice remains a pressing challenge, with national surveys showing that more than half of Ugandan women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence and nearly one in three have faced sexual violence. Karamoja consistently records some of the highest cases of gender-based violence, yet survivors often encounter systemic barriers such as limited legal aid, cultural stigmas, and inadequate institutional response.

Its against this backdrop, the Karamoja Women Umbrella Organization (KAWUO) initiated a fundraising advocacy campaign to champion women's rights and amplify their voices in the fight for justice. The campaign united women-led, women-focused, and rights-based organizations across the region, creating a powerful collective front against gender inequality.

"Our presence here is not symbolic it is a commitment to stand with women at the grassroots where justice is often hardest to access," said Jessca Ruth Ataa, Executive Director NARWOA

At the heart of this initiative was the Women's Justice Run, an advocacy event spearheaded by KAWUO to mobilize communities and raise awareness. While several Karamoja-based partner NGOs had been invited to participate, Nakere Rural Women Activists (NARWOA), USAWA Frontiers, FIDA-Uganda, actively showed up as society voice. Their presence sent a strong message about reliability and dedication to the cause of women's justice. Far from symbolic, the above partners actively engaged with participants, delivering key messages on gender-based violence, access to justice, and the protection of women and girls issues that remain deeply relevant across the Karamoja sub-region.

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In a region where many women face structural barriers in accessing legal and social protection systems, Partner's visibility carried real impact. The organization bridged the gap between advocacy and community, ensuring that conversations on justice were not only raised but also understood and owned by the people. Through mobilization, awareness creation, and direct outreach, the organization reinforced the importance of consistent civil society presence in community-driven initiatives.

The campaign as a whole elevated the plight of women in Karamoja to regional and national attention, while empowering participants to demand accountability from duty bearers such as local government, police, and judiciary. By rooting advocacy in cultural authenticity and resilience narratives, the initiative ensured community buy-in and sustainability, laying the foundation for continued legal aid and survivor support programs. The Women's Justice Run served not only as a platform for awareness but also as a moment of reflection highlighting the urgency of gender justice issues and the need for dependable partners who can show up when it matters most.



Cross-Border Dialogue: Uganda and Kenya Unite to End FGM

In the quiet village of Nakoyen, Tapac sub-county, Moroto District, a powerful gathering took place that carried voices across borders. The Karamoja Women Umbrella Organisation (KAWUO), in partnership with the National Association of Women's Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU), convened a cross-border dialogue that shone a spotlight on one of the most pressing challenges facing girls in the region-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Despite strict laws in both Uganda and Kenya, the porous borders have allowed the practice to persist. Girls often disguise visits to relatives across the border as opportunities to undergo cutting, slipping through the cracks of enforcement. But this dialogue was different-it was a collective stand, a moment where communities, leaders, and institutions came together to say enough is enough.

Voices of Commitment

The dialogue was marked by bold commitments:

- Law enforcement institutions vowed to arrest perpetrators, including cutters and parents who facilitate cross-border FGM.



Kenyan Law enforcement officers attentively listening during the dialogue

Referral pathways will be mapped between Uganda and Kenya, ensuring stronger collaboration in handling cases.

- Women were encouraged to embrace government livelihood programs like the Parish Development Model (PDM), reducing reliance on FGM as an income source.
- Men were called upon to champion the fight, discouraging the practice within their communities.
- Religious leaders pledged to use the pulpit as a platform for change, preaching against FGM as ungodly.
- Health departments committed to documenting FGM cases detected during childbirth, providing clear statistics to guide interventions.

Beyond Commitments

The dialogue also sparked broader initiatives: committees will be formed to discuss the welfare of children, awareness campaigns on education will continue, and cross-border meetings will be strengthened to sustain collaboration.

A Turning Point

This gathering was more than a meeting-it was a demonstration of the power of cross-border collaboration, community leadership, and collective action. It showed that when Uganda and Kenya stand together, they can build stronger pathways to protect girls, end FGM, and empower women with dignity, justice, and opportunity.

As one participant put it.

“We are breaking borders to break the silence. Together, we will protect our daughters.”



LC3 Tapac Sub/county in Uganda arguing men to champion the fight against FGM by discouraging the practice within their community

RAISING HOPE OF GIRLS BY GIVING THEM A SECOND CHANCE THROUGH VOCATIONAL SKILLING



Leah Lokwang at her Chapati stall making chapati for her customers, and she does this daily.

Leah Lokwang's life has been full of challenges, but her story today is one of hope, courage, and determination.

Leah was born in Kenya but moved to Uganda at the age of two to live with her aunt in Singila, Moroto town. Her parents could not take care of her, so her aunt stepped in and tried her best to support Leah's education. Life at school was never easy, Leah often lacked basic items like pads, soap, sugar, and oil. Friends sometimes helped, but it was never enough.

By Senior Three at Moroto High School, Leah's education came to a painful stop. At just 16 years old, she was convinced by a 26-year-old man who impregnated her. Leah dropped out of school and became a young mother, struggling to survive.

For three years, Leah stayed home, raising her child and facing hardship. But she never gave up her dream of returning to school. She spoke to local leaders about her interest in continuing her education. In February 2025, her chance finally came. Through KAWUO's Empower Her, End FGM project, funded by Embassy of Ireland through NAWOU, Leah was selected for vocational training. She chose bakery, a passion she had carried since childhood.

Leah joined REHH Vocational Training Institute in Soroti, where she finally got the chance to follow her passion for baking. She learned step by step how to make cakes and biscuits, from mixing dough to decorating. Leah even completed an internship at a hotel, baking every day and gaining valuable hands-on experience.

"I was afraid of leaving my child behind in Moroto, but my aunt's support gave me courage," Leah recalls. Her aunt promised to care for the baby while Leah pursued her studies, giving her peace of mind to focus on her future.

After nine months of training, Leah returned home with new skills but no capital. Soon after, she earned UGX 40,000 from participating in community dialogues on child marriage organized by KAWUO. she didnt spend it, Leah invested UGX 38,000 into a chapatti business. On her first day, she made UGX 68,000, with a profit of 30,000. Excited by the success, she expanded into selling sumbusa and eventually rented a stall. Today, Leah earns about UGX 80,000 profit daily, which she uses to pay her son's school fees, buy food, and save for the future.

Leah's journey has inspired many other girls in her community. Six more school dropouts have already joined similar programs through KAWUO, following her example. Leah now dreams of expanding her business to Kosiroi, near Tororo Cement Factory, and starting a cake-baking venture once she has saved enough.

Leah Lokwang is no longer just a struggling single mother; she is a role model and agent of change in Katikékile sub-county. Her story shows that with determination, support, and opportunity, young women can rebuild their lives and create brighter futures

Building Resilient Women-Led Organizations in Karamoja



In the heart of Karamoja, women-led and women-focused organizations are steadily reshaping the landscape of gender equality and rights advocacy. Yet, many of these organizations face a common challenge: the struggle to meet compliance and governance requirements that are essential for credibility, sustainability, and access to funding.

To address this, the Karamoja Women Umbrella Organization (KAWUO) convened a landmark regional coordination meeting, bringing together 17 women-led CSOs from all nine districts of Karamoja. The gathering was more than a meeting; it was a turning point in strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing advocacy, and reinforcing the collective voice of women across the region.

Unlocking Compliance and Governance

The training focused on NGO registration, compliance with the NGO Bureau, URA, NSSF, URSB, and the Data Protection Office, as well as Board of Governance principles. Out of 16 CSOs present, 15 demonstrated a clear understanding of governance standards, paving the way for targeted mentorship.

For many participants, the session was eye-opening. “As Girls at Risk, we at Zero when it comes to compliance, initially we thought Organization Registration ends at the District, now I understand all levels of registrations and compliance to make us a full organization,” shared Ilukol Winnie, Program Manager at GARIF.

Jesca Ataa, Executive Director of NOROWA, emphasized the importance of accountability: “As an Organization, in case you update anything within your organization, ensure to get back to the NGO bureau and keep them updated because it can lead to nullification of your organization.”

Advocacy as a Gateway to Change

Beyond compliance, the meeting also strengthened advocacy capacity. Facilitated by PACER partner ACODE, the session highlighted effective messaging strategies, drawing inspiration from Uganda’s “Black Monday” campaign. CSOs learned practical steps in advocacy—from issue identification and evidence gathering to message development and monitoring.

Jennifer Awor, an organizational leader, reminded peers of the personal commitment required: “Organizations don’t have budgets for compliance, kindly use your personal money or implementation money and always have passion, commitment and loyalty.”

Achievements at a Glance

16 CSOs trained on compliance, governance, and advocacy.

15 CSOs demonstrated mastery of Board of Governance principles.

Organizations gained knowledge of compliance with multiple regulatory bodies.

Testimonies underscored compliance as a gateway to funding and sustainability.

CSOs embraced advocacy tools such as opinion papers, media engagement, and campaigns to amplify women’s voices.

Lessons Learned

The meeting reinforced that compliance is not a bureaucratic burden but a foundation for sustainability. Donor support for compliance costs emerged as a critical need, while mentorship and networks were recognized as powerful enablers of resilience. Regular policy alignment with donor expectations was highlighted as key to maintaining relevance and strengthening advocacy.

KAWUO’s Commitments

KAWUO pledged to:

Mobilize donor support for compliance costs.

Cascade policy support to all members.

Introduce a virtual mentorship program.

Advocate for Karamoja to host National Women’s Day celebrations.



Mark Otile from ACODE engaging the CSOs EDs on advocacy

Women Advocates Transform Maternal Health in Moruita



Moruita women advocates presenting their achievements on how they influenced change at HC2 through advocacy.

Across Karamoja, mothers continue to face daunting challenges when seeking maternal and child health services. Antenatal care coverage remains low at only 35–40%, institutional deliveries hang around 45–50%, and maternal mortality is still alarmingly high at nearly 300 deaths per 100,000 live births well above the national average. Vaccination rates, neonatal survival, and access to clean water and essential medicines also lag behind the rest of Uganda. These statistics paint a sobering picture of service delivery in the region, where fragile infrastructure and limited staffing compromise the safety and dignity of care.

Yet within this difficult context, a powerful story of change has emerged. At Moruita Health Centre II were mothers once faced daunting challenges when seeking antenatal and delivery services. The facility lacked reliable power, had only 1 delivery bed, no cleaner to maintain hygiene, and inadequate equipment for safe vaccine storage. These gaps meant some mothers delivered in darkness and others feared to go to the facility for delivery most especially at night when its dark hence risking childbirth at home, vaccines were at risk of spoilage since there was no power to keep the storage equipment running, and patients were sometimes forced to clean delivery rooms themselves compromising both safety and dignity. Trained women advocate under the WEAV project funded by 4 embassies of Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands and Sweden refused to accept the status quo. they used their knowledge to mobilize their community and engaging local leaders, raised the issues during local meetings, and engaged directly with the Health Centre In-charge. With persistence and clarity, they presented the challenges affecting maternal health services, prompting the in charge to escalate the concerns to the District Health Office.

Their advocacy bore fruit. In January 2026, the district responded by installing 6 large solar panels, providing 2 additional delivery beds to make 3 beds in total, and recruiting a porter to support sanitation. These improvements have transformed maternal service delivery at Moruita Health Centre II ensuring safer deliveries, proper vaccine storage due to the availability of power, improved hygiene, and restoring dignity for mothers. Apparently, the facility now provides at least up to standard maternal services increasing the number of women attending antenatal and delivery compared to before.



The 6 installed solar panels at Moruita HC2 through the advocacy efforts of women advocates