MCJL
MUSLIM CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND LAW

Justice without discrimination

MCJL ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AIDS	Acquired Immounodeficiency Syndrome
CBS	Central Broadcasting Service
CLE	Clinical Legal Education
CSO	CIvil Society Organization
DGF	Democratic Governance Facility
FIDA	Internation Federation of Women Lawyers
FoRB	Freedom of Religion or Belief
F2A	Faith to Action
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practice
JISRA	Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action
LASPNET	Legal Aid Service Provider's Network
MCJL	Muslim Centre for Justice and Law
PCVE	Global Programme on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PGM	Participatory Grant Making
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights
UGANET	Uganda Network on Law Ethics and HIV/AIDS
UJCC	Uganda Joint Christian Council
ULS	Uganda Law Society
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network

Foreword - Message From the President

It is yet another honour to present to you the 2023 MCJL Annual Report. MCJL has continued to enhancing access to justice, promoting human rights and contributing to peaceful co-existence. We thank dedicated Board, staff and development partners for enabling us fulfill the co-mandate. The civic space in Uganda has continued to shrink. The Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) that funded our work for a decade was wound-up in September,2022. The DGF closure not only affected MCJL's work but also the work of our strategic partners including CSOs and JLOS institutions. MCJL remains indebted to her previous donors and we commit to sustaining interventions under the previous projects.

In 2022, we have largely undertaken peacebuilding interventions under the JISRA program with support from the Faith to Action Network and Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We have worked closely with the District Local Governments in Yumbe, Mayuge and Bugiri to extend services to the communities and contribute to sustainability. We also implemented the Participatory Grant making micro grant through 5 vulnerable women groups were support with technical and financial support to contribute to peace building work.

Amidst the challenges, our struggle to advancing justice for all continues. Enjoy reading the Annual Report!

Nyanzi Umar
President

Foreword-Message From the Board Chairman

“Determination and hard work is the key to success. MCJL is a professional competent organization that motivates and perpetually promotes a learning platform for both individuals and the organization at large. This report is evidence of the commitment exhibited by the staff and therefore a representation of progress for MCJL's key achievements during the year.”

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL), I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report. We have focused our efforts on enhancing access to justice for the poor and marginalized, peace building, Sexual and reproductive health rights, and human rights/ legal education in the districts of Kampala, Butambala, Mpigi, Bugiri, Mayuge, Omoro, Yumbe, Gulu, and Lamwo. As ever, we remain committed to MCJL's Vision, Mission, and Values and have successfully been able to deliver on our mandate of promotion of rule of law, and human rights protection as well as developing intuitional capacity for efficiency in service delivery. It is this commitment that drives the contemporary programs that MCJL implements which are geared towards ensuring access to justice for the indigents, vulnerable, and marginalized in grassroots communities.

Our success is deeply rooted in cherished principles of accountability, mutual partnership, and community engagement. Working with a professional competent team is motivating and perpetually promotes a learning platform for both individuals and the organization at large. This report is evidence of the commitment exhibited by the staff and therefore a representation of progress for MCJL key achievements during the year. I take pleasure in extending my sincere thanks and gratitude to my colleagues for their teamwork, and commitment to serve MCJL with diligence and being very reliable. I also thank the President and his entire Team of Senior and Junior Staff for serving MCJL so well to provide growth and sustainability to MCJL and for building useful networks. Finally, on behalf of the Members of the Board and the entire MCJL family, I was hoping you could permit me to acknowledge the support from each one of you for the success we recorded through the year 2023. To our development partners, stakeholders, government allies, district leaderships, and donor agencies together with well-wishers, who contributed financially and technically, we very much appreciate your support, without you we would not have been able to achieve the results we are reporting today.

Musa Kabega

Chairperson-Board of Directors

INTRODUCTION

OUR VISION

A Ugandan society that upholds universal faith-based principles in ensuring equitable Access to Justice, Human Rights and observance of the law

OUR MISSION

To facilitate observance of Human Rights, Justice, Peace, and Good Governance through promotion of public interest, civil liberties, and obligations under the law

BACKGROUND OF MCJL

Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL) is a Ugandan faith-based NGO, established in 2009. The organization promotes justice, tolerance, and human rights in Uganda. The primary focus is on poor and vulnerable members of grassroots and diverse communities, such as youth, women, and Muslim clerics. To effectively advocate for the rights of these communities and for duty bearers to deal with social challenges, especially within the Muslim communities, it is important to strengthen their capacity.

MCJL works with local communities and also in partnership with both the public and private sectors, and operates in the Central Region (Kampala, Butambala, and Mpigi districts), Eastern Region (Bugiri and Mayuge districts), and the Northern Region (Omoro, Gulu, and Lamwo districts). By using sensitization, advocacy, lobbying, and intervention powered by technology, the organization tackles human rights issues. MCJL works with issues regarding access to justice, gender-based violence, sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR), good governance, and peacebuilding, through the promotion of public interest, civil liberties, and obligations under the law. Furthermore, a multi-faceted approach is used by MCJL to solve issues in the areas of focus.

OUR CORE VALUES

Popular Participation and Social Responsibility

Tolerance and Accomodation of Diversity

Collaboration and Teamwork

High Ethical Standards and Professionalism


JISRA
JISRA
JISRA

ACESS TO JUSTICE

Acess to justice aimed at enhancing rights, justice, and peace within the Muslim community is strategically focused on improving access to justice and legal protection for indigent individuals with a specific emphasis on Muslim communities. The primary objective is to foster sustainable access to justice, advocating for best practices in administering justice through informal Muslim justice centers. It seeks to provide comprehensive and high-quality legal aid services, ensuring that the poor and vulnerable in the targeted communities, particularly within the Muslim population, have meaningful access to justice. In addition, the initiative aims to enhance the understanding and advocacy of human rights among rights holders and duty bearers. It also strives to improve the functionality of selected human rights institutions, contributing to a more robust human rights framework within the project's scope.

The emphasis on citizen empowerment is fundamental to creating a participatory and responsive governance structure. Therefore, MCJL aspires to enhance citizen competence and confidence, enabling them to actively engage and demand improved service delivery from local and national governments.

The organization has driven a project regarding access to justice for 10 years, it has included court representation, legal advice, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), advocacy, sensitization, and community outreaches. The project was supported by the Democratic Governance Facility and continued until 2022 of September with the closure of DGF. MCJL has continued operating despite the closure of DGF, which has meant the withdrawal of instructions for some ongoing cases, closure of field offices, and laying off staff. Despite the challenges met, MCJL continues to offer legal aid, support individuals with legal advice, ADR, court representation, registration of documents, and the toll-free line, which is conducted by legal officers, legal assistants, and clerks. MCJL has been handling 813 cases throughout the year.

MCJL attended different trainings during the year to make sure that the organization stays abreast of evolving laws and regulations, while also fostering continuous learning and networking opportunities. One session was by CBS who conducted a training in Kalangala on land rights, GBV and conflicting cultural customs and rights with the laws of Uganda. MCJL also attended two trainings in Masaka and Jinja regarding advocacy for the rights of the persons living with HIV/AIDS. These invitations were sent out by UGANET and LASPNET. The advocates also attended CLE trainings that were organized by ULS.

PEACEBUILDING/PCVE PROGRAM

Under MCJL's focus area of the Peacebuilding/PCVE program, the organization creates a religious pluralist and tolerant society nationally, regionally, and globally. Through the program, tolerance and peaceful co-existence are enhanced among youth from different religions while also engaging young Muslims, women, communities, and those in leadership who are outside mainstream institutions and are susceptible to radicalization and violence. This is to provide alternative opportunities and safety. Working with community mosques, schools, and families through referrals of individuals who are seen as most at risk. This can help increase the capacity of communities to challenge and resist extremists and work towards peace.

MCJL has successfully implemented the Participatory Grant Making (PGM). The PGM was introduced as a method to transform power dynamics between funders, implementers, and communities to shift the roles of community members from that of beneficiaries to that of leaders and decision-makers. With the enrollment of the PGM, MCJL held meetings with the District Local Government who accepted the program. On 11th May 2023, the Executive Body had a courtesy meeting at the Bugiri District Head Quarters in which positive feedback regarding the program was received.

The PGM enables people and communities to take a more active role in achieving wanted change and grow their capacity. MCJL in collaboration with UJCC identified groups to participate in the PGM through a mapping process that involved partnership assessment of stakeholders in the district which supported the identification process. The team provided technical guidance on interfaith activities to be conducted by the groups to enable them to develop competitive proposals that will win the PGM grant. Generally, the PGM achieved shifting the power to rural women and youths through the various activities undertaken by the groups. The program enhanced the capacity of the youths and women to independently make decisions in programming. The youth and women groups were able to integrate FoRB into their programs, which was sustained even after the conclusion of the PGM.

Muslim Centre for Justice and Law, with support from JISRA, implemented a mentorship program aimed at inspiring youth to take part in learning leadership skills and getting leadership positions with support from their religious leaders. In a large number of communities in Bugiri and Mayuge, youth are not involved in participating in leadership and decision making and as a result, their voices could not be heard on FoRB issues. Through the mentorship program, the youth that have been mentored have now started leading prayers in the absence of their Imams. Furthermore, conducting sermons, and counseling against HTPs, has promoted peaceful co-existence. Youth are now to a larger extent involved in decision-making processes at the mosques and have been engaged in various work to earn money thus reducing on engagement in HTPs. Intra and inter-religious conflicts such as Land conflicts have been resolved amicably through dialogues and mediations.

There have been challenges regarding the mentorship program as religious leaders who mentor need more capacity building on mentorship, youth involvement, and gender. This will enable them to conduct more informative mentorship and pass on adequate knowledge to the youths.

Properties are one of the core problems that are starters toward disputes in the district, therefore MCJL conducted a training on property rights targeting religious leaders in the district, and the participants were able to understand the rights of men and women on property ownership and the different types of property. After this activity, participants can help solve cases and disputes addressed to them and engage other stakeholders. Religious leaders testified that they applied the knowledge from the previous training on property rights to resolve land conflicts in their localities.

International Peace Day was celebrated on 21st September 2023, with the theme; “Action for peace, our ambitions for global goals“, by MCJL in partnership with F2A and a number of other organizations. The event was celebrated with a sport for peace tournament (football and netball) that took place in the Mayuge district, Minoni Primary School football pitch. The event was also conducted to educate individuals, with a focus on religious actors and youth, regarding the importance of peaceful coexistence and conflict prevention. Through Sports for Peace a total of 1000 participants were reached.

Advocacy initiatives

At a country level MCJL, alongside its collaborative partners, played a vital role in shaping the Uganda Advocacy Strategic Plan. The primary goal of this strategic plan was to enhance the inclusion, participation, and representation of women in decision-making processes within religious institutions. Additionally, a secondary objective focused on advocating for Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) within schools. At the country level, the Legal Aid team is currently dedicated to the implementation of this strategic plan.

At an organizational level MCJL has continued to engage other CSOs on matters pertaining Muslim Personal Law which have a direct impact on FoRB. MCJL entered into a collaboration with FIDA Uganda in which we supported FIDA with expertise on getting a Position Paper on Human Rights Issues in the Qadhi's Courts System. Meetings were held with UWONET and the Legislative Committee of Parliament regarding the Marriage Bill in the offing. The discussions in parliament revolved around aspects of Do-no-harm definitions in the proposed law, Justifications for promotion of laws that affect Muslims FoRB and aspects of repugnancy between the religious practices and the secular laws. On the overall, the Civil Society has become more receptive and responsive to Muslim FoRB issues.

At a local level MCJL remains committed to enhancing the capabilities of religious leaders to advocate for FoRB responsive practices within their communities. The efforts have resulted in fostering positive mentorship for more than 30 young individuals, empowering them with leadership skills within their religious contexts. The bonds of interfaith collaboration have been reinforced in the areas where our initiatives are active. As the program progresses, the expectation is that these religious leaders will actively advocate for positive change within their communities by the program's conclusion.

HUMAN RIGHTS/LEGAL EDUCATION

At the core of this component is the promotion of good governance, human rights, and the fostering of peace and stability in Uganda, all achieved through the application of the Rule of Law. Within this framework, MCJL has been actively engaged in facilitating dialogue between two essential legal traditions: human rights law and Islamic law. This endeavor is instrumental in harmonizing and reconciling legal perspectives to enhance understanding and cooperation.

A significant focus of this initiative is directed towards advocating for the realization of women's rights within Muslim communities. MCJL is dedicated to drawing attention to and addressing the unique challenges faced by women, with the aim of fostering inclusivity and equitable rights. Furthermore, the project extends its impact by promoting human rights education and training within Muslim theological institutions and community-based organizations. By instilling a comprehensive understanding of human rights principles, the initiative aims to contribute to a culture of respect and protection of individual rights within these contexts.

MCJL facilitated dialogues and webinars on legal traditions at community mosques in the districts of Kampala, Mayuge, and Bugiri: for discussion on human rights law and Islamic law. Women's political leadership rights in, and the framework of, Islam and human rights. There are clear differences between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Islamic law's approaches to women's rights. The differences require that bridges be built between the two sets of laws to engage in constructive dialogue that will help protect and enhance the political rights of Muslim women. Islamic law's approach and treatment of women's rights is often justified based on the protection of women, their security, and their dignity. Therefore there are religious, cultural, social, and economic rationales behind Islamic law, its interpretations and its implementation. These interpretations of Islamic law are perceived as discriminatory regarding international and regional human rights instruments. Looking at women's political rights, there is a better understanding of how Islamic law and universal human rights seemingly conflict. Men and women are considered equal in relation to Allah: they are both Believers and have duties and responsibilities toward Allah, as well as rights resulting from the fulfillment of these duties. Therefore, it is important to draw attention to the realization of women's rights in Muslim communities and promote Human Rights education and training in Muslim theological institutions and community-based organizations. Further, facilitate information-sharing and networking among strategic actors, through the provision of tools, such as the database and the resource collection on human rights and law

Learning articles were also written by LDC students under internship placement for legal education awareness on the right to decent burial and burial rights of the deceased, the law regarding the use of electronic evidence in Uganda and the recent developments in the law regarding matrimonial property and rights.

SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

The initiative is dedicated to making a significant impact in the reduction of new HIV infections and the prevention of unintended pregnancies among Muslim girls in school and women aged 15 to 49. Focused on the districts of Kampala and Wakiso in Uganda, the project was strategically designed and progressively implemented to prevent unintended pregnancies. It also seeks to bolster community advocacy for gender equity in both education and health, particularly for positive mothers and their affected families.

Engagements were conducted at the mosque level with women leaders, commonly known as MUSTAASIBA. These women underwent training on Islam and sexual reproductive health and rights for four days. The training aimed to understand and appreciate the relationship between what Islam says from the Quran and Hadith, and sexual reproductive health and rights from a health perspective.

Under this comprehensive program, MCJL has been actively involved in advocating for improved access to affordable and high-quality reproductive health services within the Muslim community. Another key aspect of the project involves promoting the uptake of contraceptives to effectively reduce unintended pregnancies and mitigate associated consequences among Muslim communities. Additionally, MCJL is forging alliances with various Muslim sects, aiming to collaboratively address the challenge of unintended pregnancies among Muslim girls and women of reproductive age in schools. Through these concerted efforts, the project endeavors to create positive and lasting changes in the reproductive health landscape within the targeted communities.

KEY STRATEGIES

HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

A human rights-based approach emphasizes the inherent dignity and equality of all individuals. This approach considers human rights as both a goal and a means for development, prioritizing empowering people to claim their rights, fostering non-discrimination, and promoting accountability. It focuses on addressing root causes of inequalities and involves principles such as non-discrimination, participation, accountability, and empowerment, aiming to create a just and inclusive society where every person can enjoy their rights without discrimination or oppression.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy aimed at integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of policies, programs, and activities. It goes beyond addressing issues solely related to women and men, seeking to understand and address the ways in which gender norms and roles impact individuals differently, promoting gender equality and challenging existing inequalities. This approach recognizes that gender is a critical aspect of social structures and endeavors to create more inclusive and equitable outcomes by considering and addressing gender dynamics at every level of planning and implementation.

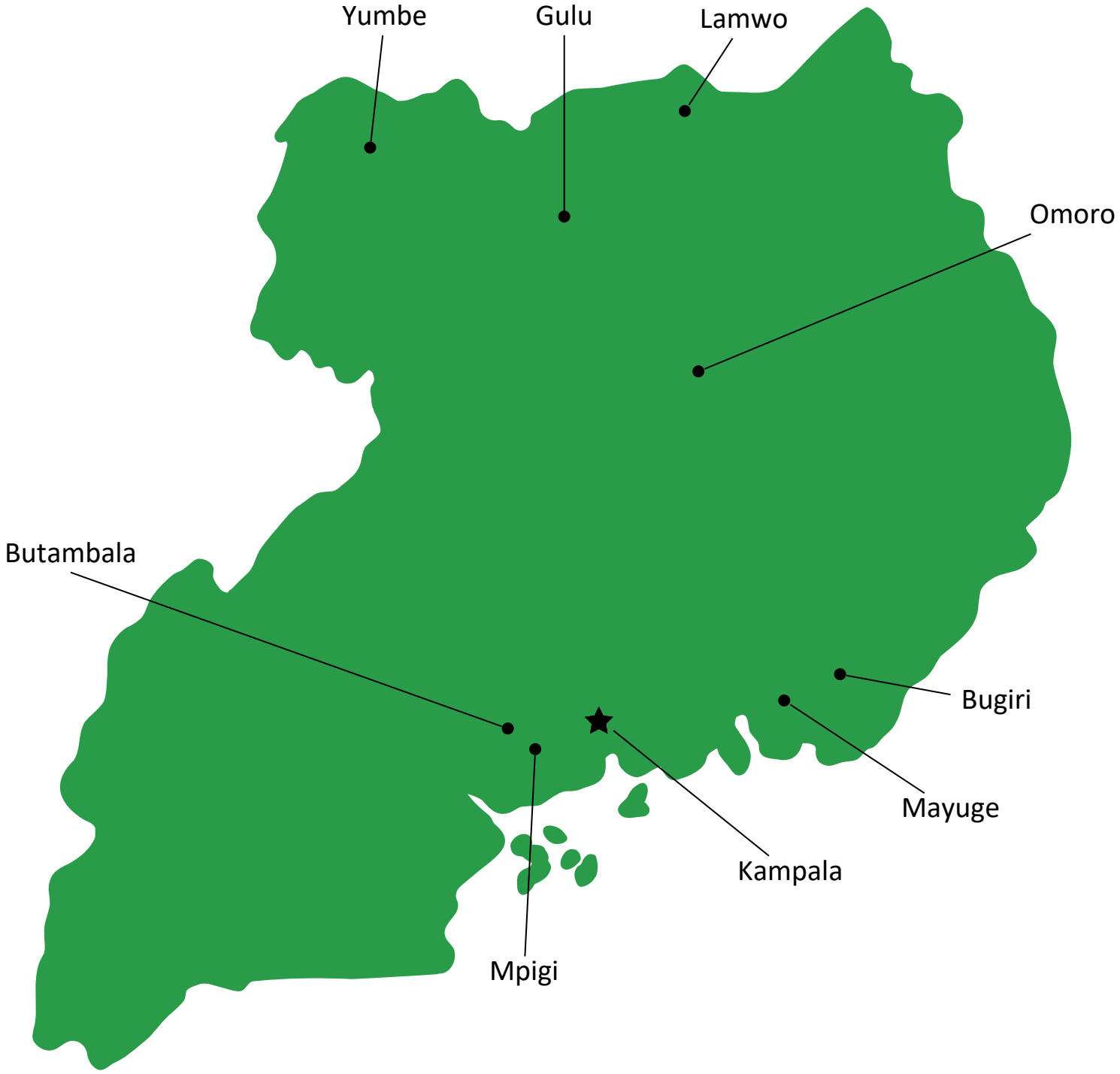
YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Youth empowerment as a strategy focuses on providing young people with the tools, skills, and opportunities to actively participate in and contribute to their communities. It involves fostering a sense of agency, self-confidence, and leadership among young individuals, enabling them to make informed decisions and take control of their own lives. The aim when investing in the empowerment of youth is to develop a generation capable of shaping a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

The Leave No One Behind-strategy is a commitment to ensuring that development efforts prioritize the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals and communities. Originating from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this principle emphasizes inclusivity and targets efforts towards addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged populations. By addressing the needs of the most marginalized groups, such as those facing poverty, discrimination, or inequality, this strategy seeks to create a more equitable and sustainable world where the benefits of development are shared by all.

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE



KEY ACHIVEMENTS

In the reporting time, MCJL accomplished the following achievements:

To effectively deploy Participatory Grant Making (PGM) as a strategy for reshaping power dynamics among funders, implementers, and communities. This aims to transition community members from beneficiaries to leaders and decision-makers.

The implementation of a mentorship program aimed at inspiring youth to take part in learning leadership skills and getting leadership positions.

The forging of alliances with various Muslim sects to collaboratively address the challenge of unintended pregnancies among Muslim girls and women of reproductive age in schools.

The sustained trust of stakeholders enabled MCJL to adress 813 cases through out the year.

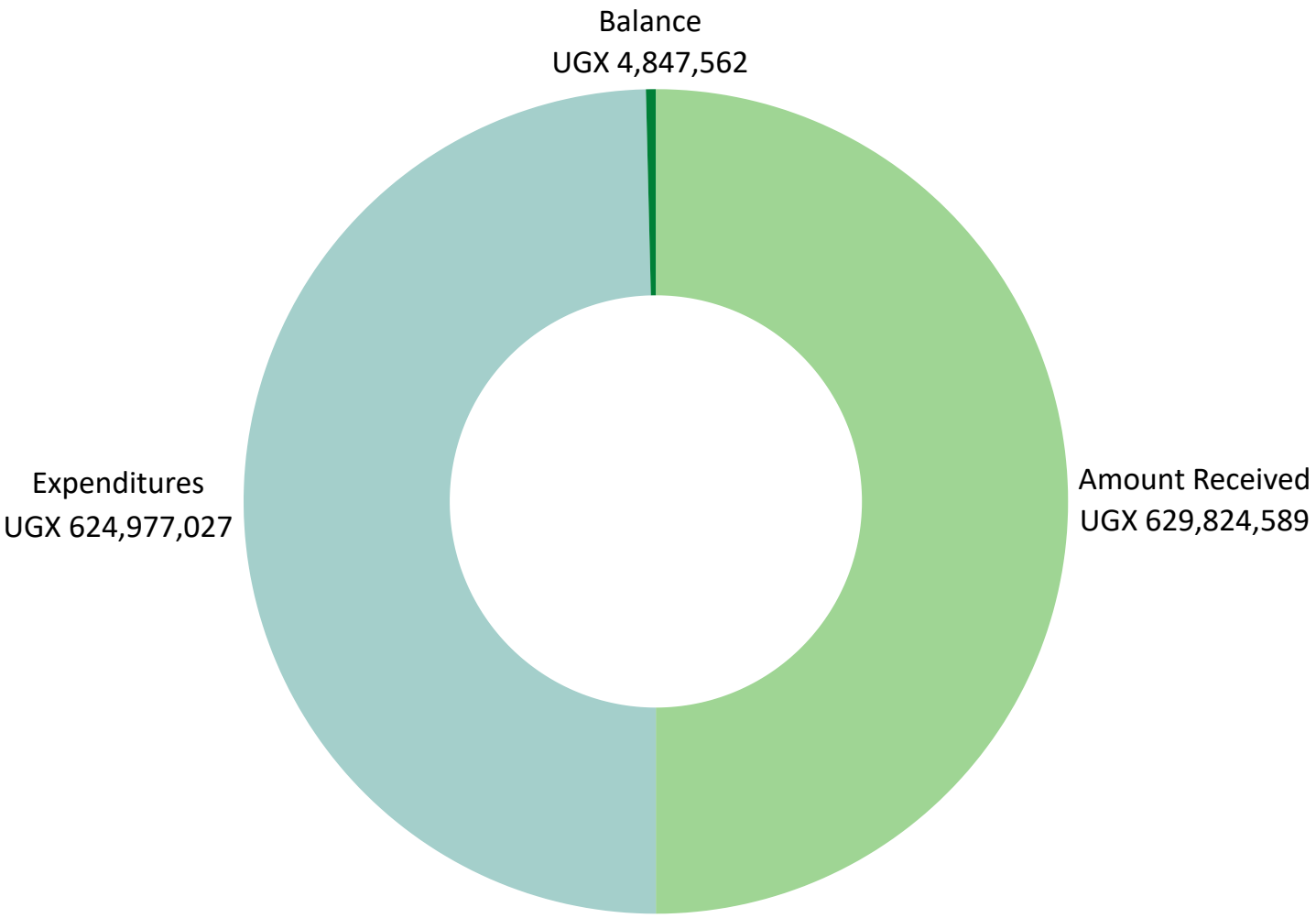
MCJL FUTURE PLANS

Muslim Centre for Justice and Law, will move forward by continuing to strategically follow the organization's vision, mission, and values/objectives to keep supporting areas such as access to justice, human rights/ legal education, sexual health and reproductive health rights, and peacebuilding in Uganda. However, MCJL encounters challenges regarding the current shrinking civic space which impedes MCJL's work toward a sustainable future in Uganda. Unforeseen changes in government policies and regulations affecting NGO operations have been seen. There have been previous experiences where Human Rights actors' offices have been closed down or met resistance, i.e. the UN Human Rights Office and the DGF. Further, new strategies are therefore needed to understand how to develop and work during a shrinking civic space.

The scale and urgency of the global climate crisis and natural resource degradation demand an effort to promote climate justice and sustainability. MCJL has therefore integrated seven principles of Strong Climate Change Planning to produce high-quality climate change plans based on Goals, fact base, strategies, public participation, coordination, implementation and monitoring, and uncertainty. MCJL works to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls to the effects of climate change and promotes their meaningful participation in sustainable natural resources governance. MCJL addresses structural gender inequalities caused by climate change and natural resource degradation and promotes women and girls' meaningful participation in the governance of climate change. MCJL looks forward to adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction as well and natural resources governance initiatives.

MCJL awaits approval for funding from the Danish and Saudi Arabian embassies to kickstart projects at the beginning of 2024. The pending financial support represents a crucial step toward realizing the organization's goals and initiatives. If successfully secured, this funding would not only provide a greater financial foundation but also establish partnerships with the Danish and Saudi Arabian communities. The potential collaboration holds great promise, signaling the MCJL's commitment to creating positive change.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



OUR PARTNERS

LASPNET Uganda

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

URSB UGANDA REGISTRATION SERVICES BUREAU

DGF Democratic Governance Facility

UGANDA LAW REFORM COMMISSION
Modernising the Law

Uganda Muslim Supreme Council

FIDA UGANDA

OFFICE OF THE SUPREME MUFTI

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, praises and thanks to the God, the Almighty, for his showers of blessings throughout my survival and protection of the work and impact we successfully create on local communities especially in Yumbe, Mayuge, Bugiri and Kampala districts.

We recognize the Board of Directors' effort in steering the organizational direction and the transition of the workforce with a "quintet of change" in data, digital, innovation, strategic foresight, and behavioral science with the purpose of building stronger skills and expertise to effectively deliver on our mandate.

We appreciate generous funders of our programmes, especially F2A for the continuous support and giving us the opportunity to implement with flexibility and providing invaluable guidance throughout the programming life cycle management processes. This dynamism, vision, sincerity and motivation have deeply inspired the organization.

We are extremely grateful to management, staff, volunteers and interns for their passion, love, prayers, caring and sacrifices for working to meet targets and preparing for the future of the organisation. We very much our families for tolerating us with their love, understanding, prayers and continuing support in the nature of work we do amidst the challenging civil society space.

We are also grateful to our stakeholders in the faith community, peace-building, climate change, and health and justice sector, especially LASPNET who on 27th of October 2023 engaged MCJL in the annual general meeting at its secretariat. The issues discussed on the agenda were: Presentation and approval of the Membership Report 2021-2022; Presentation and approval of Audited books of accounts of 2021-2022; Presentation and approval of the Chairpersons report and the Annual report of 2021-2022 Election of the new Board of Directors on 10th of November 2023. In addition, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs; still engages MCJL under the family justice sub-committee. In the latest meeting with us at Kabira country club chaired by Ms. Jeroline Akubu from Uganda Law Reform Commission we were able to deliberate on need to strengthen sensitization of the succession legislation while providing accurate information to citizenry; Bridging gaps in justice for children in conflict with the law since it impacts on our families; Advocacy for enactment of marriage legislation which have been in the form of proposals for too many years; Engagement on the operationalization of Qadhi courts promoting child justice interventions broadly (including custody, maintenance, adoption, guardianship and birth registration) and the status on implementation of the long-awaited Child Justice Strategy which provides an all-encompassing framework for children in both civil and criminal justice processes.

SECRETARIAT AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS