

# VOICES OF THE MARGINALISED

**As we enter the final year of the Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF), there is still much work to be done, but the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalised people have been getting louder, speaking out and driving change.**

## Getting louder

Harnessing the power of the media is vital to challenging discrimination, mobilising support and forcing action. In Brazil, GTF partner INESC (Institute of Socio-Economic Studies) campaigns against the current imbalance of political power, which favours the centralised elite. INESC helped to found the 'National Platform of Social Movements for Political Systems Reform', which campaigns for political reform. Following its launch in March 2011, the website for the initiative was accessed 9.3 million times in its first nine months. The signatures on its petition reveal significant momentum and a wide geographical reach, as remote communities are engaging with information about rights and representation for the first time.

## Speaking out

In Sierra Leone, women's political representation is low, with only 17 of 124 MPs being women (approximately 14

per cent). The Women in Governance project run by SEND-Sierra Leone redresses this imbalance through training and supporting female candidates, and helping elected women to overcome discrimination. Ahead of this year's elections, support for the cause is growing within the District Council, traditional authorities and the media, driven by the network of over 5,000 women from across the district who are pushing to have their voices heard.

## Driving change

In Anambra, Nigeria, the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) formed a Community Empowerment Network made up of community-based monitoring groups. Their participation in local government budget processes led to the discovery that several projects included in the federal budget had never been executed. This included a 2km road and junction, as well as erosion and flood control and solar street lighting worth approximately US\$566,000. Subsequent lobbying led to the completion of one erosion site, while work has started on the second. Furthermore, the Anambra State Commissioner has pledged to build another road in 2012. These projects are vital for ensuring agricultural workers – who represent 65 per cent of the population – have access to markets.



INESC's outreach programme at a camp attended by 4,000 rural agricultural workers



# EAST AFRICA: STORIES FROM THE MARGINS

## Refugees and asylum-seekers speak up in Uganda

Uganda currently hosts more than 150,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. However, displaced groups in the country are often unable to access their rights in accordance with domestic and international law.

As well as providing a vital legal aid service, the Refugee Law Project (RLP) trains and empowers refugees and asylum-seekers to claim their rights from the government. Persistent advocacy has led to important policy changes, such as the issuing of identity cards to refugee minors, and the waiving of registration fees for refugees registering a birth or death. The Ugandan Police Force has also incorporated refugee rights into its training curriculum. By educating officials about their responsibility to support the rights of refugees, traditional cycles of mutual mistrust and human rights abuse are broken.

Lack of access to translation and interpretation services is often a barrier to essential services and human rights. RLP has trained court interpreters at the International Crimes

Division of the High Court to enable legal representation and fair trials at refugees' hearings. Language lessons are also offered to refugees and asylum-seekers. In 2011, a total of 695 individuals took these lessons, enabling them to communicate with authorities and access employment and basic services.

**“This programme treated me as a human being with dignity and rights. I am its product.”**

Maniriho Ignaciana fled Rwanda for Uganda in 2006. Despite having previously worked as a teacher, she could not find a job in Uganda as she did not speak English. However, Maniriho enrolled in RLP's Functional English and Literacy Programme, and has since become a facilitator. She says: 'This programme helped me a lot and [treated] me as a human being with dignity and rights. I am its product; it changed my life positively – now I am a waged worker just like Ugandan citizens.'

## Uganda Debt Network: helping the forgotten farmers

Thirty-five-year-old Magdalene Aguti has nine children. She is one of many who has been helped by the Uganda Debt Network (UDN). 'I produced many children as a guarantee of cheap labour in our gardens, since I couldn't afford [the cost of] sending them to school,' Magdalene says.

In 2001, the Ugandan government created the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) to improve rural livelihoods and increase productivity and profitability. However, marginalised communities such as Magdalene's initially saw no benefit. The process for selecting NAADS beneficiaries lacked transparency, while many who received support were no longer able to exercise control of their land or choose their own enterprise.

UDN's advocacy work has led to many necessary changes in NAADS, while its awareness-raising programme encouraged Magdalene and her community to become beneficiaries. Magdalene now receives the advice and support she needs to manage her land. 'With my improving income levels as a result of citrus farming, I am now in a position to send our children to school,' she says.



Magdalene Aguti and her family

UDN helps people like Magdalene to demand their rights, participate in policy-making processes and hold leaders to account for resource allocation. Their lobbying has also led to further changes, such as the recent scrapping of VAT on piped water and other basic commodities.

## Empowering northern Kenya's communities

GTF partner Northern Aid (NAID) seeks to strengthen and empower the vulnerable communities of northern Kenya through advocacy. The provision of education and training encourages communities to participate in democratic decision-making and demand their rights from the government.

Hassan Ahmed Yussuf, 27, is part of a NAID project that enhances community participation among youth. He received training on how to promote youth empowerment, hold leaders accountable and carry out social audits of devolved funds. In 2011, he opened a Maarifa ('knowledge') Centre, and he now helps other young people to gain IT skills and participate in processes such as budget-making. Since opening, the centre has trained over 100 young people, becoming a focus for community development, communication and learning.

**Northern Kenya is the country's most neglected administrative region. Its pastoral communities are routinely discriminated against, leaving them more vulnerable to the effects of regular and severe droughts in the area.**

## Kenyan Human Rights Council

The Kenyan Human Rights Council (KHRC) created the Human Rights Network (HURINET) in a bid to unify community-based rights groups across Kenya and develop them into powerful advocacy movements.

As well as holding the government to account for its commitment to provide improved access to clean drinking water, KHRC has engaged with the Constitution of Kenya Implementation Commission in the formation and implementation of the new constitution, including influencing key citizenship bills.



Hassan Ahmed Yussuf at the launch of Northern Aid's Maarifa Centre, opened by the District Commissioner

It has also worked with immigration officials on issues such as ID documents and participation. This has broken down previously impenetrable barriers between officials and marginalised groups.

Through rights awareness exercises, advocacy for land reform, increased community access and proper allocation of funds, KHRC works towards poverty alleviation and human rights protection.

## Case study: rebuilding lives

Albino Ekitel is an elder of Shambani village, a pastoral community of 200 households in Kenya's Isiolo district. In February of this year, 400 militia accompanied herders who drove more than 50,000 camels into the village in a bid to displace the people and take their land.

The militias burned houses and homesteads – those who were not killed fled to surrounding areas. None of the 800 security personnel based in Isiolo Town offered any help, but instead they blocked humanitarian aid.

Some village elders, including Albino, approached the Isiolo Human Rights Network (IHRN), which mobilised the displaced people to camp outside the Isiolo Police Station and demand security. IHRN also organised media coverage by the national television networks.

Three days later, the displaced group was accompanied back to the village by security personnel, who still remain there. Schools have now reopened and the people of Shambani village are rebuilding their lives.

# IRAQ: A CHANCE TO BE HEARD

**Almost three decades of sustained conflict have undermined effective governance and the provision of vital services in northern Iraq.**

GTF partner Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health (REACH) helps local communities in the Erbil and Suleimanyah governorates to hold their leaders and policy-makers to account, through mobilising community based organisations (CBOs) and providing them with planning support and training.

Anwar Ismail Omar from Komtal village, Erbil governorate, represents one of 28 families in his local CBO. Komtal, like many other villages in the area, was ruined during an uprising in 1991. But with training from REACH, Anwar was able to get government approval to establish a formal CBO.

Through its new office in the Degala sub-district, the CBO hears the concerns and complaints of the community and takes them to the relevant government departments to demand change.

The CBO has so far secured a school in the community and a reliable electricity supply. It now plans to secure access to safe drinking water as locals prepare for the dry season. 'We are still fighting to have rights,' Anwar says.

For otherwise vulnerable women and refugees, REACH offers a precious opportunity to be heard. This year an important victory was won by REACH working together with another group, the Women's Senior Elite. After relentless lobbying, the Kurdistan Parliament brought female genital mutilation within the remit of the Law Against Domestic Violence. The protection of women in this way is encouraging, as it battles entrenched practice and a history of silence. REACH plans to raise



Anwar Ismail Omar in Komtal village, Kurdistan, Iraq

awareness of this new law at community level through a series of workshops and seminars. The success of its collaboration with the Women's Senior Elite has also inspired it to develop an umbrella network for civil society organisations and CBOs.

In April, REACH's programme manager Saman Ahmed Majeed travelled to South Africa to attend a GTF workshop on 'Civil Society in Fragile States', in Johannesburg. The event highlighted emerging lessons from the GTF programme and shared the achievements of partners across borders. It addressed issues that affect many GTF partners:

- How do traditional ideas of accountability within communities translate to modern concepts of governance and transparency?
- What happens when the political system posited as the ideal – i.e. democracy – is weak and vulnerable?
- How can core state functions be built in fragile states?

**Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives. Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.**

[christianaid.org.uk](http://christianaid.org.uk)



Anwar Ismail Omar with men from his community.