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# Women's Rights Centres

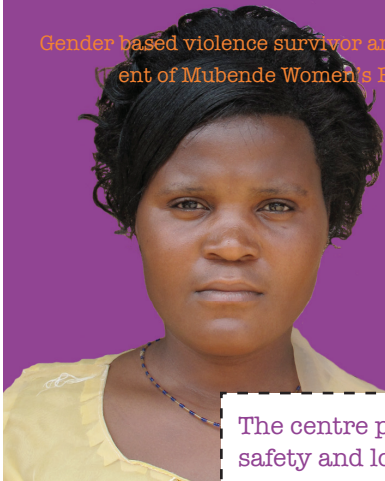
**Women WON'T Wait**  
End HIV & Violence Against Women. NOW.



“The Women’s Centre changed the world for me. I feel like a person again; I got justice, I have control and I can walk on the street without being embarrassed of what happened to me.”

**Gertrude**

Gender based violence survivor and former client of Mubende Women’s Rights Centre



“I got my land back.”

**Naome**

Widow and land owner

“We rebuild violence torn relationships. It is important for us to ensure that all parties of the conflict at the Women’s Rights Centres are here to create peace and not to split up families”.

**Angela**

Chairperson, Nebbi Coalition

“My two nieces and I stayed at the centre for three days where we went through counselling and the girls received medical treatment.”

**Jane**

The aunt to Angellah and Grace - victims of defilement



The centre provides immediate access to safety and long term justice.

## Introduction

The Women's Rights Centre is a crisis centre for abused women and their children. It is a one-stop centre that provides a safe space for women to heal, to learn and to change the situation for the benefit of themselves, their families and communities.

Each day violence affects more than 68 percent of women and girls in Uganda. This makes women vulnerable and marginalised, and constitutes as a treat to public health and sustainable development. The Women's Centres support women and their families to secure evidence, seek justice and help them plan for a safe future.

### The Women's Centres benefit everybody.

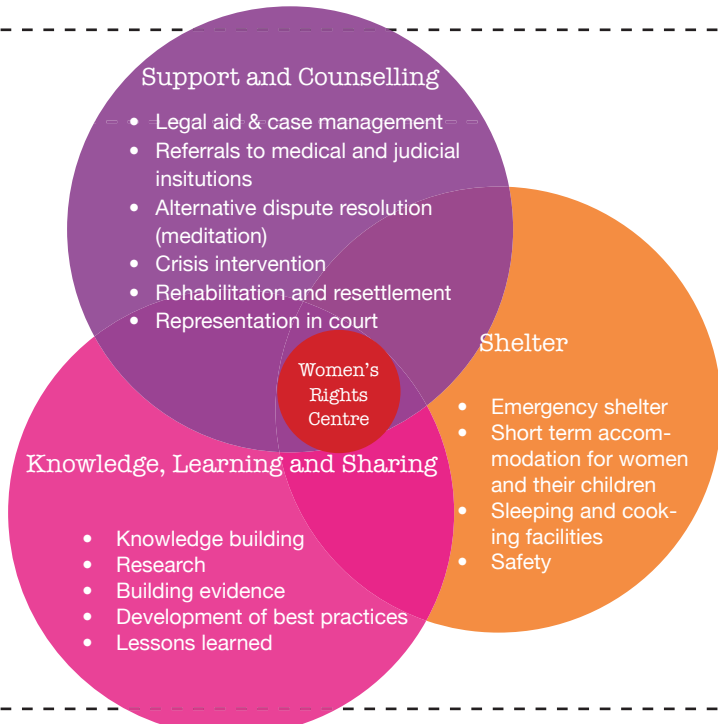
Although the immediate focus is to assist abused women and girls, long-term benefits trickle down to all layers of society including improving health, creating an accountable response mechanism to violence and better conditions for economic growth.

Three centres have been established in Pallisa, Mubende and Nebbi districts. These are among the very few facilities of this kind in Uganda and they have created a high demand for expansion, replication and adoption by the government.

### Number of cases

	2008	2009	2010
Pallisa	79	314	287
Mubende	13	413	468
Nebbi	13	63	65
Total	105	790	820

The Women's Right Centre model is a product of the Women Won't Wait Campaign (2007-10).



## The Model

- Support and Counselling
- Shelter
- Knowledge, Learning and Sharing

Each of the above components are essential in responding to, fighting, and overcoming violence against women and girls.

It is a unique approach in Uganda, the women's rights centres combines the three components into a complete model from where abused women and girls can seek refuge and receive treatment and counselling to claiming their rights and improve their own and their family's life through informed decisions.

## Local ownership

To ensure local ownership and community acceptance, each centre is run by a coalition of local stakeholders.

The centres work to bridge the gaps in the current institutional framework by promoting collaboration and coordination between all involved actors such as the police, formal and informal courts, medical units, district probation office, etc.

## Samalie

“When my husband died my neighbours chased my of my land. I reported it to the police and the local government, but they kept referring me from one office to another without giving me the support and advice I needed. In the end I gave up.”

The women’s centre in Pallisa supported Samalie to get her land back. The centre model is designed as a one-stop service entity to link the involved institutions. The centre staff is trained to navigate in the institutional and legal systems and they have full capacity to counsel and advise women without judging them or their families.





## Naome

“I felt welcome at the centre from the beginning. The staff listened and took my case very seriously. They arranged a meeting with my husband’s family where they informed everybody that they were peacemakers. In the end I got my land back.”

Naome is one of the women who has benefited from the counselling and legal aid of the women’s centre in Pallisa. Like many other widows Naome was deprived of her land after her husband’s death. After a failed attempt to report her case to the police, she came to the women’s centre where she and her husband’s family received counselling and legal aid.

## Services

- Information
- Legal redress
- Psychosocial support
- Crisis intervention
- Representation in court
- Referrals for medical treatment
- Therapy
- Rehabilitation and resettlement
- Peer to peer learning
- Life skills enhancement
- First aid to survivors of gender based violence especially that linked to HIV/AIDS.

## Support and Counselling

The Women's Rights Centre offers support and counselling for women in need. The centres are equipped with legal personnel, social workers and counsellors who are trained in all forms of gender based violence and case management.

When a woman reports to the centre, her case gets registered by the case worker. Depending on the matter, the case worker will proceed to make the necessary arrangements such as contacting the involved parties in the conflict and the local authorities, referring her to medical treatment, etc. At the same time the woman will receive counselling to cope with her situation and to plan for the future.

To ensure successful resettlement and prevent future conflicts, the women's husband and family are in most cases invited to participate in counselling and negotiation sessions. Particularly important is it to recognise the key role men play in creating solutions in gender based violence conflicts.

**Types of cases:** physical battering, sexual violence, psychosocial violence, severe neglect, land disputes, and traditional cultural forms of gender based violence like early marriages and widow inheritance etc.

“When I realised I was HIV positive my husband threatened to kill me. He beat me everyday and I knew I had to do something if I wanted to survive. I went to the women's centre and through couples therapy our marriage has improved greatly. My husband also took an HIV test, he was positive and now we remind each other to take the medicine.”

Aidah

Survivor of gender based violence

The women's centres support abused women by acting as a link between them and the local authorities.

One of the major challenges in fighting violence against women is the attitude and capacity of the local response mechanisms. Numerous of women have experienced humiliation and corruption when reporting cases, which has led to abandoning the case because the woman either did not have money to pay or the strength to go through with the case. As a result, many women in Uganda suffer in silence.

“I was continuously raped by my husband. One day I managed to pull myself together and I went to the police to report him, but the officers didn't believe me and instead of registering my case the female police officers humiliated me in front of everybody at the station. I was mortified when I realised that they were not going to help me. All I could do was to walk back home to my husband”.

Provia

Survivor of gender based violence

“The centre helps many women and families. My case was solved within a month and even though the process can be longer for others it is comforting to know that you can trust the centre's staff”

Jowita

Survivor of gender based violence





**Healing together** Group counselling is one of the most effective methods to overcome and reduce future incidents of violence. The women's centres organise peer to peer learning groups where women are invited to share experiences and learn from each other.

The group sessions contain a combination of social counselling, techniques in conflict resolution and informal discussions. Many victims of violence are isolated and do not have any peers to share concerns and experiences with; here women have a secure space where they are allowed to talk about the things that trouble them the most. The groups build solidarity among the members and mobilise will to continue the fight.

*Members of the Karambiwa Reflect Circle in Nebbi. Beneficiaries at the centres often join a reflect circle as part of their recovery.*

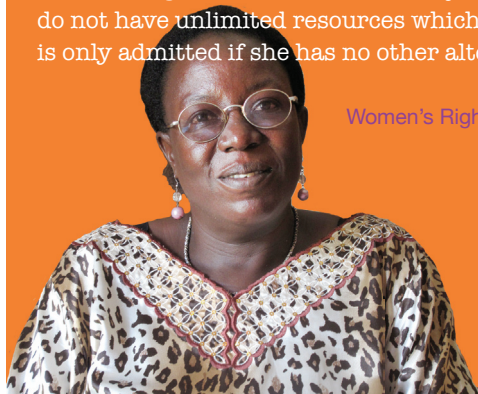


## A Safe Shelter

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“The shelter is for abused women in severe need; women whose life are threatened. We want to help these women and in order to do so it is important for us to explain that this is a shelter - not a home; that we are a women’s rights centre - not a charity organisation. We do not have unlimited resources which is why a woman is only admitted if she has no other alternatives.”

Alice Esiat  
Women’s Rights Centre Councillor  
Pallisa



The Women’s Rights Centres are located in easy access locations and open to everyone. The centres offer shelter facilities for abused women and their dependant children who are in profound danger of violence at their homes and have no other safe housing alternatives such as family and friends. The shelters provide safe surroundings which allow the women and the centre staff to focus on sustainable future solutions.

During their stay women participate in safety planning and training in self awareness skills through regular counselling processes and interviews as well as they take part in training needs assessments for rehabilitation and resettlement.

At the same time, the centres’ legal and social advisors are working to build documentation and evidence collection and secure that the women get the needed medical examinations and treatments, police case registrations, legal formulas, and court appointments.

## The Shelter

- Safe accommodation including beds, mattresses, and blankets
- Basic kitchen facilities
- Full time security
- Friendly and competent staff

## Joyce

“Two years ago my husband tried to kill me. I did not know how to seek justice or how to protect myself. The attack left me crippled because I did not receive any medical treatment. If I had not been referred to the women’s centre in Nebbi, I would have died of my injuries.”

After hospitalisation, Joyce stayed at the women’s shelter for one month where she received medical and psychological treatment. To prevent any further conflicts and potential danger for Joyce, the centre facilitated a community meeting prior to her return to sensitise about gender based violence and women’s rights. After the meeting it was safe for Joyce to return home.



## Jane, Angellah & Grace

For several years, Jane's nieces were defiled by a family member who threatened them to keep silent. In spite of this, Jane reported the abuse to the police but could not raise the funds for medical examinations.

The police, however, reported Jane's case to the women's centre. Jane and the two girls moved into the safe shelter and a few days after the defiler was arrested. The trial is yet to be settled.

"We stayed at the shelter for three days. The counsellor told me to be cautious around men; to run away if I feel scared and report to my auntie Jane if a man is hurting me again. I trusted the staff and I felt safe at the shelter."

Angellah  
Victim of defilement



"For safety reasons, we stayed at the shelter during the police work and the girls medical treatments. Today, we are safe at home; the girls are still healing and we attend regular counselling sessions at the women's centre but for the first time in many years I am at peace and do not have to worry about my nieces."

Jane  
The aunt to Angellah and Grace

“Many women chose not to report violence out of fear of the consequences; the judgement from the community, the humiliation at the police station and the increase in violence when the husband learns about the reporting. At the shelter, the women do not have to worry about these issues. We have a safe, non-judgemental environment. I hope this will inspire more women to speak up.”

Janet  
Programme Officer, Mubende

“The women’s centre supports women and we are treated like equals. The staff care and listen to us.”

Oliver  
Survivor of gender based violence

## Shelter Rules

To be admitted at the shelter, two circumstances must be fulfilled:

- Acute risk of severe danger
- No other housing alternatives

To enable staff to maintain a friendly and rewarding atmosphere at the shelter for the benefit of all clients, women must obligate to:

- Maintain confidence about other clients
- Maintain good relationship with the staff and other shelter clients
- Take care of her children (with help from staff and other clients)
- Participate in shelter activities

Shelter staff



## Knowledge, Learning and Sharing

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Every day the women's centres assist women in need. The many successes in family and community conflict resolution and legal case management prove that local action and response is not only possible but also creates sustainable solutions.

**Knowledge:** The centres collect information to document all types of violence against women and girls. The knowledge is used for local capacity building, research and evidence based advocacy to raise awareness of gender based violence and women's rights.

“Information sharing has made the system stronger and more accountable. It is invaluable.”

Dr. David Okoth  
Pallisa Hospital

When a woman is hurt it involves numerous sections of society and the women's centres' many achievements are for a large part results of enhanced information sharing and coordination between the centre staff and a number of local authorities such as the district probation officer, the police including the Uganda Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU), medical officers and local civil society organisations (CSOs).

Thereby, the centres work on the local level to fight violence and strengthen local response mechanism while at the same time contributing to promote women's rights by influencing the political agenda with focus on long-term solutions for violence against women and children.

“The women’s centre has helped women to be more confident and independent. They no longer hide because now they have a chance to win their cases.”

Benina Elizabeth Arionget

Pallisa Police



Ugandan police woman

## Gertrude

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“The women’s centre supported me to realise that I have rights.”

Gertrude was abused by her husband and his family; she lost everything and lived on street. After many failed attempts to report her case to the local authorities, she was referred to the women’s centre by a coalition member in Mubende. The centre supported Gertrude to get back on her feet and she is now ready to start her life again.





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