**BarefootLaw celebrates 10 years of legal innovation that has supported thousands in grassroots communities to access justice**

*This year, BarefootLaw established a full-time presence within The Hague Humanities Hub as it continues its mission to provide legal assistance to vulnerable people in rural communities*

When Gerald Abila founded [BarefootLaw](https://barefootlaw.org/), ten years ago this month, Uganda was reeling from years of conflict. As a recently graduated law student, Gerald saw how the justice system was simply not capable of solving the daily problems faced by many people in his country. So, he resolved to set up a free information service that provided advice on all manner of legal issues, such as property disputes, conflict resolution, and will writing. Articles were initially posted to a handful of SMS subscribers, but Gerald soon found that demand was outpacing supply. He set up a [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Barefootlaw) and brought in friends and fellow lawyers to deal with all the queries. What began with a few articles posted on social media, soon became a sophisticated legal answering service featuring automation, machine learning and AI.

Although BarefootLaw was thriving, and many people were getting the help they needed, there was a clear divide in who was able to access the service. The vast majority of respondents were men living in towns and cities, and Gerald realized that he would need to innovate further if he was to reach the people who needed the legal advice most. Internet penetration was below 15% in Uganda at the time, while literacy rates were also low in many parts of the country. Only 6% of the users were women and many Ugandans, particularly those in rural areas, had simply no way of accessing the BarefootLaw service.

As BarefootLaw expanded its digital model to capture the grassroots communities in a completely unique initiative, Gerald and his colleagues designed the first mobile ‘justice boxes’ - solar powered shipping containers that can be installed in rural communities, and provide a direct line to lawyers working in the capital Kampala, who are on hand to work *pro bono.* This provides instant connectivity,helping local people resolve disputes, gain essential legal information, and understand more about their rights as citizens.

The BarefootLaw boxes have transformed lives in rural Uganda, becoming part of a local ecosystem that improves society. The solar panels create a power grid which has meant villages have better lighting and security infrastructure. Although originally conceived as a tool to help people resolve their legal issues, the boxes are now actively *reducing* crime. They have assisted doing the work of local courts and arbitration centres, where disputes are resolved, advice is imparted, and people are trained in the legal profession. It is a wholly organic drive towards self-sufficiency and connectivity.

A decade after its launch, BarefootLaw has helped almost a million people with their legal queries. It is now looking beyond the borders of Uganda, with BarefootLaw boxes planned for communities in countries across Africa like Kenya, Zambia, and Malawi. This year, the organization also established a full-time presence in The Hague’s Humanities Hub bringing awareness of the project to the international community. As the international city of peace and justice, The Hague is now a touchpoint for this uniquely African initiative, delivering expertise that was hatched in Uganda to new audiences all over the world.

*“When we started BarefootLaw 10 years ago, we thought the perfect logo would be a bare foot marching ever forwards. It symbolises this idea of humanity and technology in harmony, helping people move towards a brighter future. Now we have an established presence in Europe at The Hague Humanities Hub, we see no limit to how many vulnerable communities we can help. We are extremely excited about what the next ten years will bring.”*

**Gerald Abila, Founder of BarefootLaw**

*“ BarefootLaw’s’ presence in the Hague is timely – beyond being a major international legal hub. We aim to use The Hague as a launch-pad to expand our legal innovation programs across the world, build collaboration with global organizations, governments, and Non-Governement Organisations to make access to law and justice readily available in remote communities.”*

***Robert Okello, Europe Lead* of BarefootLaw**