

Hellen's Story

Hellen has 161 dependents. 161 people who rely on her for care and support.

Hellen came to IJM after a lifetime of everyday violence. Her family had fled their plot of farmland during a devastating war that raged across northern Uganda, led by Joseph Kony. When the war subsided and Hellen's family began returning home, they were met with another conflict: greedy neighbours who claimed her family's land as their own and refused—violently—to relinquish it.

Years of angry conflict boiled over in 2013, when these neighbours rallied members of the community to violently attack Hellen's family. They beat the children and threatened to rape the women. The assaults left them terrified to sleep in their homes and farm their land.

Hellen bravely reported the attack to local authorities. When nothing was done, however, she felt isolated and feared they wouldn't survive another attack.

IJM took up Hellen's case and began fighting for her safety. It has been a long and tough battle in Gulu, where the justice system is still rebuilding after the war.

The legal case dragged through the courts, stalling again and again when lead witnesses demanded payment and possibly burnt down Hellen's brother's home.

After two years, the criminals who had attacked and intimidated Hellen finally pled guilty to abuse - nearly unheard of in northern Uganda. They were sentenced to six months of community service, a major victory in a community where crimes against women are rarely punished at all.

After the case, local officials helped demarcate the boundaries of Hellen's land so she and her family will be safer in the future. Her 161 dependents—siblings, children and grandchildren—now have a secure place to live and to support their families.

With our help, Hellen sold fish in a local market until she was able to save up enough money to start a small restaurant in her village. With her café and the family's farmland, they are on track to stability once again.

Today, IJM is working to restore a well in Hellen's community that will provide hundreds with clean drinking water and save them from walking miles every day. Cathy and other staff have also supported Hellen emotionally, and she's steadily gaining confidence and overcoming fear again after the attacks.