General Project Information

Project Title: Property and Inheritance Legal Support for Women Genocide Survivors Living with or Affected by HIV and AIDS

Organization: Association des Veuves du Genocide Agahozo (AVEGA), Rwanda

Implemented in: 3 Districts in Kigali City; 8 Districts in South Province

Grant Amount: $145,000

www.avegaagahozo.org

Context

Although several laws affirm the rights of women to own and inherit land, a general pattern of discrimination in accessing and securing those rights persists in Rwanda. In particular, large numbers of widows of the 1994 genocide have been unable to claim their rightful assets. Research by AVEGA has shown that more than 70% of widows and orphans in the areas of Kigali City and the Southern Province have been unable to access their property and inheritance.

Objectives

AVEGA sought to sensitize women living with HIV and AIDS on their property and inheritance rights, and to build the capacity of paralegals to provide legal assistance to widows involved in property and succession disputes.

Key results

- Enhanced knowledge and awareness of 1,111 community members (782 women and 329 men) and 64 opinion leaders, including local authorities, judges, and police officers, on the need to protect women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS.
- Increased legal literacy and awareness of 6,741 widows, including 1,712 women living with HIV, about their property and inheritance rights.
- Enhanced knowledge and skills of 102 paralegals to support women’s access to property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. 72 women have been supported by these paralegals in their property and inheritance cases. 28 of these women were reunified with their assets, while 44 are awaiting responses.
- Establishment of the Coalition Rwandaise pour l’Acces des Femmes a la Terre (CRAFT), a consortium of civil society organizations working to promote and protect women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. CRAFT is currently advocating for an amendment to extend recognition of customary marriages and protect women’s property and inheritance rights.
- Mobile legal clinics established by paralegals and local authorities broadened the project’s reach to engage more women. Sensitization meetings, organized by these mobile clinics created spaces where women and local authorities work together to resolve property and inheritance cases.

Lessons Learned

- Experience during the project highlighted the need for better training of legal professionals regarding the laws of the gacaca courts. The non-execution of decisions from the gacaca courts poses the greatest challenge when advocating for women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Currently there are 2,410 unexecuted cases of property and inheritance rights from the gacaca courts.
- Community sensitization meetings that included local leaders and other members of the local population were a powerful tool to share experiences and brainstorm ideas and solutions for property and inheritance issues in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Partnerships

The members of the CRAFT coalition include: Reseaux des Femmes; Haguruka; Association Nzambamariya; Reseau Rwandais des Personnes Vivant Avec le VIH/ SIDA (RRP+); and Reseau des Citoyens Network (RCN).