**General Project Information**

**Project Title:** Women’s Property and Inheritance Rights in the Context of HIV and AIDS  
**Organization:** Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC), Nigeria  
**Implemented in:** Ebonyi and Cross River States  
**Grant Amount:** $142,318

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**Context**

While women in Nigeria have statutory rights to own and inherit property, a general pattern of discrimination exists in accessing and securing those rights. In many communities in Nigeria, including Ebonyi and Cross River states, traditional laws and norms preclude women from inheriting or owning property.

HIV-affected women are particularly vulnerable to violations of their property and inheritance rights because of the stigma associated with HIV. Widows are coerced into harmful customary practices, such as “wife inheritance,” where a widow is taken as a wife by a relative of her late husband, or ritual “cleansing,” where widows are obliged to have sex one time or over a short period of time with a man that increases their vulnerability to HIV infection as well as gender-based violence.

**Objectives**

CIRDDOC advocated for the enforcement of existing legal frameworks and for the development of new ones in Cross Rivers and Ebonyi states to promote and strengthen women’s property and inheritance rights, especially in the context of HIV. CIRDDOC also facilitated women’s access to justice by strengthening a cadre of community and legal service providers; sensitizing communities and women living with HIV and AIDS on these rights; and addressing customary laws which discriminate against women.

**Key results**

Through extensive lobbying and advocacy, CIRDDOC helped to pass the Anti-Stigma Bill into law in Cross River State and advance the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill in Cross River and Ebonyi States to its first reading in the House of Assembly. To advance these bills, CIRDDOC engaged key members of government, including the First Lady of the State, with targeted lobbying and distribution of policy papers. These bills are anchored in human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, on the basis of sex, including the right to own and administer property. The project also enhanced knowledge and awareness of 147 local authorities, 63 community-level opinion leaders, and 142 community members (70 women and 72 men) on the need to protect women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. As a result of this enhanced awareness, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Cross River and Ebonyi States now hold monthly meetings where community leaders and chiefs are invited to discuss gender issues, including women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Anti-violence against women (VAW) committees also serve as a monthly mechanism for dialogue within communities and served as watchdog groups to monitor violations and advocate for women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Membership of the committees includes government officials, traditional leaders, police officers, community services officers, women living with HIV and AIDS, and service providers. Engaging traditional leaders was an effective strategy to promote women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Some traditional leaders now facilitate meetings between local authorities and gender equality advocates to discuss how to advance women’s property and inheritance rights.

Legal literacy and rights awareness was increased by 48 women living with HIV and AIDS regarding their property and inheritance rights. As a result, more than 30 women sought assistance and had their property restored with the help of the anti-VAW committees. The project built capacity by enhancing knowledge and skills of 70 (39 men and 31 women) legal service providers, including paralegals, to support women’s access to property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. By the end of the project, paralegals had handled 37 cases of women seeking to assert their property and inheritance rights.

**Partnerships**

CIRDDOC partnered with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Ministry of Justice in Ebonyi and Cross River states; Ebonyi State Action Committee on Aids (EBOSACA); Cross River State Agency on Aids (CRSACA); International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA); and Legal Aid Council.