General Project Information

Project Title: Promotion of Women’s Property and Inheritance Rights in the Context of HIV and AIDS
Organization: Dialogue on Shelter for the Homeless in Zimbabwe (DOS)
Implemented in: Harare Region—Crowborough North; Bulawayo Region—Cowdray Park; Mashonaland West Region—Chinhoyi, Mhangura and Kariba
Grant Amount: $75,000

www.homeless-international.org/our-work/overseas-partners/zimbabwe-dialogue

Context

Although women’s property and inheritance rights are affirmed in various national laws, a general pattern of discrimination in accessing and securing those rights persists in Zimbabwe. Traditional cultural norms and widespread ignorance about these rights, inaccessibility to legal recourse, particularly for poor women, contribute to considerable barriers to women’s property and inheritance rights. Women living with HIV and/or affected by AIDS are especially vulnerable to violations of their property and inheritance rights due to the stigma associated with HIV. Estate disputes are common and widows are frequent victims of dispossession and property grabbing. Moreover, most marriages are customary and thus not recognized by law, and polygamy is widespread. Dialogue on Shelter supports the Zimbabwe Homeless People’s Federation’s, a community-based organisation that focuses on housing issues and has a nationwide membership of 42,000 families.

Objectives

The Dialogue on Shelter seeks to strengthen the enabling environment at community level by conducting a participatory assessment of women’s experiences related to access to property and inheritance rights in three provinces—Harare, Bulawayo, and Mashonaland West—and to design a community-based education campaign to raise awareness among member organizations and service providers engaged in protecting women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Key results

- Enhanced knowledge and awareness of 6,050 community members, 19 national federation leaders, 205 area level federation leaders, and 83 community leaders on issues related to women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Trainings with federation leaders led to a review of federation group constitutions to ensure procedures encourage the registration of marriages, joint ownership of property for married couples, and writing of wills.
- 312 women openly living with HIV obtained land allocations.
- Enhanced knowledge and skills of 28 paralegals (19 female and 9 male) to support women’s property and inheritance rights. Paralegals handled 132 cases during the project.
- Through outreach activities legal literacy and awareness of 5,817 community members including 347 women living with HIV was increased and 20 community members drafted wills.
- Engaging men was critical to the success of the project. Partnering with Padare Men’s Forum on Gender, which has previous experience in working with men on gender issues, yielded meaningful and sustained engagement by men.
- Community-based paralegal structures have brought legal support, as well as education and awareness raising, closer to women in need.

Lessons Learned

- Instead of encouraging couples to register their customary marriages in the civil legal system, which met great resistance, community leaders and members found that it was more effective to advocate for civil recognition of customary unions, as well as for reform of customary laws to recognize the property and inheritance rights of women and children.
- Empowering women to lead project activities proved to be an effective strategy to build their self-esteem and allow them to exercise their leadership skills.

Partnerships

DOS partnered with Padare Men’s Forum on Gender; the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace; and Legal Resource Foundation.