Access to Justice: Securing Women’s Property and Inheritance Rights

General Project Information

Project Title: Increasing Access to Property and Inheritance Rights of Women Living with and Affected by HIV and AIDS in Ghana

Organization: International Federation of Women Lawyers, Ghana (FIDA-GHANA)

Implemented in: Wenchi and Sunyani in Brong Ahafo Region, Agormanya in Eastern Region and Ho in the Volta Region

Grant Amount: $144,022

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Context

Although the constitution upholds the rights of women to own and inherit land, a pattern of discrimination in accessing and securing those rights persists in Ghana. Gender discrimination in land and home ownership is underpinned by cultural beliefs of both patrilineral and matrilineral societies, which do not permit women to own land directly. Results of the project’s baseline study revealed that the majority of respondents believed that men are the custodians of family property, and women and children are dependents. Moreover, women living with HIV and AIDS are especially vulnerable to violations of their property and inheritance rights due to the stigma associated with HIV.

Objectives

FIDA-Ghana seeks to addressed the structural inequalities that preclude women living with HIV from accessing their property and inheritance rights. FIDA-Ghana provided women with information on property and inheritance rights; increased their access to legal aid; and engaged and built consensus among policy makers and gender advocates to ensure that national AIDS policies uphold and promote women’s rights.

Key results

- Enhanced knowledge and awareness of 108 local authorities (57 men and 51 women), 89 traditional leaders, 61 community level leaders (30 men and 31 women), and 737 community members about their obligations to protect women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Local municipality leaders committed to set aside funds for legal aid provision for women’s property and inheritance rights cases in the context of HIV and AIDS.
- Increased legal literacy and awareness of 107 women living with HIV and AIDS about their property and inheritance rights. 76 women living with HIV have initiated legal cases to restore their property and inheritance rights. Seven of these women have been reunited with their assets.
- Enhanced knowledge and skills of 197 legal service providers, including paralegals, to support women’s access to property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS.
- Engaging traditional leaders was a crucial strategy to mobilize community members to participate in community outreach programs and to support women’s property and inheritance rights. In some areas like Ho and Sunyani, traditional rulers provided venues for outreach programs.
- Through radio, the project was able to reach and engage individuals from different educational levels, incomes, and social groups to participate in discussions.

Lessons Learned

- FIDA-Ghana learned the importance of empowering women living with HIV and AIDS to lead project activities. This opportunity allowed the women to build their self-esteem and exercise their leadership skills.
- Engaging men to advocate for women’s rights encouraged and engaged other men to support protection of these rights.
- Services and resources must be available in local languages, as the majority of the target population is illiterate or semi-literate and may not speak English.
- In Abessim, in the Brong Ahafo region, the local council of churches have added education on women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS as part of their monthly educational programs.

Partnerships

In addition to working with paralegals and traditional and religious leaders, FIDA-Ghana partnered with Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit; Commission On Human Rights and Administrative Justice; Legal Aid; and Ghana Health Service.