Access to Justice: Securing Women’s Property and Inheritance Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa

General Project Information

Project Title: Access to Justice
Organisation: Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), Zimbabwe
Implemented in: Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, Bulawayo Metropolitan Province
Grant Amount: $75,000

Context

Although women’s property and inheritance rights are affirmed in various laws such as The Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982 and the Administration of Estates Act of 1997, widespread lack of knowledge about these laws and traditional cultural norms preclude many women from accessing these rights in Zimbabwe. Moreover, there is limited access to legal counsel in Zimbabwe, with a shortage of legal practitioners in relation to the size of the population (approximately 1 lawyer for every 10,000 people). HIV-affected women are especially vulnerable to violations of their property and inheritance rights due to the stigma associated with HIV. Estate disputes and wife inheritance (when a widow is forced to marry a male relative of her late husband) are common, and widows, grandmothers, and young children are frequent victims of dispossession and property grabbing.

Objectives

LRF sought to strengthen the capacity of Zimbabwean women in Matabeleland to assert their property and inheritance rights and to increase access to justice of poor, marginalized, and vulnerable women through education outreach and LRF’s legal assistance centers.

Key results

- Establishment of a peer advice center in Guyu on women’s property and inheritance rights. LRF paralegals now visit this peer advice center monthly to provide technical support.
- When encountering male resistance to women-only project activities, holding community-wide meetings and sensitizations is an effective strategy.

Lessons Learned

- Partnerships
LRF partnered with Matabeleland AIDS Council; Matabeleland Widows; Single Women’s Trust; and National AIDS Council.