General Project Information

Project Title: “Chuma Chathu” (Our Property)–Advocating for Women’s Property and Inheritance Rights to Reduce their Vulnerability to HIV

Organization: National Women's Lobby Group (NAWOLG), Malawi

Implemented in: Chitipa, Rumphi and Nkhata Bay

Total Grant Approved: $75,000

www.womenslobby.org.mw

Context

Although recent legal reforms have affirmed the rights of women to own and inherit property, challenges remain for Malawian women. In particular, women living with HIV or affected by AIDS face stigma and discrimination, and are often victims of dispossession and property grabbing. Wills are seldom written in Malawi, putting female heirs at greater risk of violations of their property and inheritance rights. Moreover, the existing Wills and Inheritance Law includes several gaps that disadvantage women. For example, customary and religious marriages are not recognized and distribution of property is based on patrilineal and matrilineal customs.

Objectives

NAWOLG seeks to support HIV-affected women to have written wills, including adolescent and elderly women, and to equip them with knowledge and skills to defend and assert their property and inheritance rights in Chitipa, Nkhata Bay and Rumphi districts, where practices such as property grabbing are common and widespread. NAWOLG also engaged with relevant government partners to initiate law reform on land policy and inheritance.

Key results

- Enhanced knowledge and skills of 75 paralegals (35 female and 40 male) to support women’s access to property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. To support their new knowledge and skills, NAWOLG provided paralegals with copies of its booklet entitled “Making Your Will.”
- Paralegals established 13 community educator groups to provide further outreach and assistance to local women.
- Enhanced knowledge and awareness of 40 traditional leaders and 85 opinion leaders (60 of them women) of their obligations to protect and promote women’s property and inheritance rights. Several chiefs have pledged their support for women’s property and inheritance rights.
- After meetings of the community educator groups, 120 property grabbing cases and 10 inheritance cases were reported by local women to Rumphi district authorities.
- The booklet “Making Your Will” became a key resource to educate paralegals, leaders, and community members alike about property and inheritance rights.
- NAWOLG sought the endorsement of traditional leaders for women’s property and inheritance rights as a means to foster lasting change in cultural norms and practices.

Lessons Learned

- In addition to working with traditional leaders, it is also important to include village-level government leaders as part of sensitization efforts on women’s property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Village-level leaders play a critical role in preventing incidents of property grabbing in their respective communities.