EDITORIAL

Empowerment of HIV /AIDS Women on Property and Inheritance Rights: Key to Gender Equality

The HIV / AIDS scourge has adversely contributed towards the discrimination and vulnerability of women living with HIV / AIDS. At the onset of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Uganda between 1980s and 1990s, women were the most vulnerable. Consequently, domestic conflicts arose that derailed the rights of women to property and inheritance. Today, Government is trying to avert this problem by involving infected HIV / AIDS women in the National Planning process.

On the contrary, little support has been directed to the grassroots level leaving many HIV/AIDS women helpless. Therefore more attention should be given to the grassroots level to lead the campaign of HIV/AIDS women’s access to property and inheritance rights. Grassroots women in urban centres and Slum communities living positively must beware of their rights and possible avenues of seeking justice and

Paralegal training of grassroots women and SWID staff

SWID held a paralegal training intended to equip grassroots and SWID staff with the knowledge in regard to rights on ownership of land, housing and property.

The grassroots trained are the figure heads in disseminating this knowledge; land rights, housing and property to their respective community members. They will be guided and facilitated by SWID in their entire Endeavors.

The roles of community volunteers include:-
- Act as the legal authority at the grassroots level by taking part in resolving land disputes.
- SensITIZE masses on their land law and policy among grassroots.
- Disseminate information material concerning land issues
- Provide technical advice to grassroots on how to process legal documents regarding their property and land.

The participants underwent a series of understanding knowledge including; forms of land tenure, writing a WILL and Women land Rights

A paralegal is a community volunteer who acts as a legal authority at the grassroots or community level in resolving land disputes among locals and sensitizing them on their rights.

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Town Clerk Hails Land and property inheritance rights project

“SWID has given the ordinary woman a voice”

Ibanda Jane, a beneficiary of SWID revolving fund.

I joined SWID in 2007 and started saving to buy land and construct a house for settlement. The beneficiaries of the land and Housing project are determined according to the amount saved. Jane Ibanda a resident of Walukuba East tells her success story of owning a House courtesy of SWID revolving fund. She was the first beneficiary of the House project after saving meaningful sums of money with SWID revolving fund.

Land and Housing benefit: communities helping communities

Like many Nations around the world, Uganda suffers from inequitable land Housing and property policies and practices that subjugate women. Though women bear 86% of food production labor, have higher rates of poverty, are most susceptible to violence and are at a greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Consequently SWID has made a concerted effort on women’s security of tenure through individual and joint land title home ownership.

In 2003, a group of 30 grassroots women initiated the land and housing campaign. The group members were obligated to save with SWID. They were to receive credit offered at a reasonable rate of 2%. This group started a saving and credit scheme to enable it lend money to its members. It was a revolving fund which rotated amongst members. The land and Housing campaign was geared to improve the appalling situation in Jinja that characterized of absolute poverty, overcrowding, moral decay, poor sanitation, poor housing roofed with asbestos among other domestic challenges.

In 2007, Comic relief and later 2008 Huairou Commission joined the fray with funding and support. This partnership boosted the revolving fund ideology widening on their capital base thus increasing on the membership and lending capacity. This has enabled the group to achieve tremendous success. The fund has so far enabled over 60 members acquire security of tenure. Two very good habitable shelters have been constructed.

The architectural design of the housing built is meant to house the house owner’s family and two rent apartments. The rental apartment is meant to sustain the House owner economically as well as service the housing loan. Nevertheless, the revolving fund ideology has encountered stiff challenges, these include; construction works are expensive, income level of members is still low making it difficult to secure a bank loan to speed up the process, increasing number of group members, high expectation from the community and limited resources coupled with high inflation rate.
Local to Local Dialogue empowers Women in Buwenge

In February 2012 SWID held a Local-to-Local Dialogue meeting in Buwenge Sub-county, Jinja District. It was attended by over 45 participants. It involved all stakeholders from the 5 parishes of Buwenge. Each parish was represented. The participants underwent a series of discussions on issues concerning land ownership and property inheritance rights. They were told where to go and seek justice in regard to land grabbing multiple selling and managing estates. The target group was women living with HIV/AIDS in Buwenge Sub-county.

Batega Ruth, a resident of Buwenge, Magamaga Parish says that Local to Local Dialogue meetings have empowered women in her home area. “Women in Buwenge have been empowered. They are knowledgeable of the land system, and can resolve land disputes amicably at the Local level”. She says the local to Local Dialogue meeting was an eye opener for women living with HIV/AIDS to express themselves freely. “Now we are able to stand up among men and solve our land disputes amicably”. In the past there have been family squabbles on issues concerning land ownership and inheritance. The affected women have not been having a sense of direction of where to seek justice.

Ruth urged SWID to conduct more Local to Local trainings targeting the already established small groups of women living with HIV/AIDS. She also suggested that reproductive health should be encompassed in SWID’s training programmes. Batega has managed to make use of the skills she acquired during the Local to Local Dialogue meetings. She has organized other meetings using sub-groups that were formed during the Local to Local to sensitize the Masses.

She says that they have encountered challenges in their quest of sensitizing the masses, she cited, lack of enough funds for facilitation, poor time management and low turn up for the meetings.

Ruth strongly believes that Local to Local Dialogue is the way to go for empowering women on Land and property inheritance rights in the context of HIV/AIDS.

In 2008 with funding from the HUAIROU Commission and Comic Relief SWID conducted a baseline survey that revealed a number of challenges faced by grassroots women. In 2011 with the fund from UN-Women, SWID carried out another baseline survey on Knowledge, Attitude and perceptions of people on property and Inheritance rights of women.

The baseline survey was conducted in all the 5 sub-counties of Jinja District. It was conducted in close consultation with key stakeholders in of Budondo, Buwenge, Mpumudde, Kakira, and Walukuba/Masese within Jinja Municipality.

The overall objective of the baseline survey was to generate, strategic information that will enable SWID and its partners design appropriate capacity building strategies that increase knowledge, skills and ability of community structures and households so that they can access and sustain local response to property and inheritance rights. It was intended to provide understanding into the knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) of selected community on property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The research findings were registered as shown below:

Knowledge on property and inheritance rights

Of the 77%, people surveyed, 29.2 males and 47.8% females have some knowledge of property and inheritance rights.

The survey sampled officials from the local government inclusive of interviews conducted with 5 District Assistant Community Development Officers at sub-county level. Officers from the criminal investigative Department, and staff at district, Courts of judiciary and L.C.1 Chairman. All the respondents in this category are knowledgeable.

Attitude

The female and male respondents preferred to inherit property upon death. 24.8% of the female respondents preferred that their property be passed on to their daughters, while 21.2% preferred to have it passed on to their sons. 0.9% of the males preferred to have their property passed on to their daughters compared to the females of which, 19.9% would allow their sons to inherit their property. This clearly indicates that both men and women have more confidence in their sons than are the daughters in regard to inheritance. Surprisingly, 70.8% against 29.2% of the respondents agreed to the fact that women should inherit property. Women in the communities under study have shown to accept discriminatory norms that exclude women from inheriting or administering estates. Culture and its norms have greatly contributed to the violation of women’s rights to inherit and own property. The women suffer in silence because of such norms and cannot speak out.

Practices

In general the study brought out the fact that violent against women to property and inheritance. It is quite clear that the inherent inequality faced by women within households, communities and society, forms a critical barrier to their access to social protection. Women face barriers that make them more vulnerable and expose them to violations against property and inheritance rights.

There is need to enhance women’s control over land. This is not only based on the important role they play in agricultural production but also because control of land is essential for women to live with dignity. For women to have legal rights on land ownership not only protects them from relative and in-laws who would grab the land a common practice in Uganda, but also enable to have access to credit.

Women access to property is critical for their economic security and for the economic security of their children. When women own their own assets, they have bigger role in decision making in their households and communities. All this helps improve the strength and prosperity of societies. Women all over the world find barriers in their quest to own property. These include tradition which puts all land and property in the ownership of men, inadequate laws, ineffective courts and lack of education. All these barriers and chains of bondage need to be broken.
Local to Local Dialogue Training in Jinja District

Despite the contribution by Ugandan Government little support has been directed to the grassroots level leaving many HIV/AIDS women helpless. Today, the proportion of women owning land and property in Uganda has increased though, with a low impact at community level. A large number of grassroots women are owning land and property but ignorant of the modalities of protecting their assets. HIV/AIDS women are most vulnerable. Therefore more attention should be directed to grassroots level to lead the campaign of HIV/AIDS women’s access to property and inheritance rights.

In August 2011, SWID held Local to Local dialogue training workshops in Jinja District. The targeted community was that of women ignorant of their rights and with a very wide gap between the local people and local leaders. There was need to awaken and build the capacity of the grassroots to be at the forefront in pushing for their rights. The trainings / workshops aimed at enhancing the empowerment of women in the context of HIV/AIDS through Local to Local Dialogue Trainings.

The participants were given a brief background of the local to local dialogue methodology. Grassroots women world over are challenged with similar struggles for recognition respect and viability for their vital contributions and development of families, communities and Nation. The local to local dialogue process is a series of community initiated, locally customized strategies whereby grassroots groups, most often women-led initiative and engage in, ongoing dialogues with local leaders and authorities to negotiate a range of development issues and priorities, plans and programs in ways that address women’s priorities.

The ultimate goal of the local to local dialogue methodology is to support women to redesign institutions and redistribute power, to promote sustained community p a rt i c i p a t i o n and government accountability to promote urban and rural settlements that work for everyone. The participants were taken through a series of trainings on the fields of succession law, leadership and steps of organizing a local to local dialogue meeting. During training participants were able to identify the problems affecting their communities. The problems were diverse varying from place to place. These problems include:

♦ Stigmatization at the community level. Large scores of the infected HIV/AIDS women are still hiding their status. They can’t reveal their status freely to other members of the community. Lust there often discriminated.

♦ Housing: most HIV/AIDS women can’t afford house rent. Consequently, family ties are being broken hence leading to family neglect.

♦ Poverty: they can’t afford basic needs in life such as food, proper shelter.

Other actions have also supported this agenda for instance Uganda Land Alliance (ULA). The AIDs support Organization (TASO). Legal Aid has given support in providing capacity building to the participants for the legal support services workshop. Legal AID has extended legal services to the grassroots especially to those infected and affected with HIV but in the context of property and inheritance rights. All these partnerships and coordination have led to advocacy for gender equality through workshops, Seminars and dialogue meetings on behalf of the grassroots women.

The participants were equipped with skills and knowledge of holding local to local dialogue meetings. At the close of the training, participants were equipped with skills and knowledge of holding local to local dialogue meetings.

The local to local dialogue methodology is a (Process) strategy aimed at giving communities and groups of people a voice to be heard. It is practiced with the principal of the HUAIROU Commission that seeks to promote harmony, partnership and collaboration between neighbor communities and their leaders in a sustainable and meaningful way.

Inadequate Health facilities; there are very few health personnel at the health centre they seek treatment. Patients spend hours in long queues to access treatment consequently; most of them have lost interest in seeking treatment at various health centres in their home areas.

♦ Participants urged Government to intervene and avert in problems they are facing (today). The infected and affected men and women expect Government to change their way of life in a scope of 3 years.

♦ In addition, they resolved that government should steer the campaign of living positively (Up) to grassroots level

♦ Also Government should initiate income generating projects for HIV/positive women.

♦ Further still, government should create a child fund for HIV positive children for the betterment of their education

♦ Lastly health talks should be promoted at grassroots level to give a wide range of knowledge to the infected and affected HIV/AIDS children.

At the end of the training, participants expressed need to organize a meeting to take the campaign to other regions and to other leaders in the community. They felt that the campaign should be extended to grassroots level.

In the light of the different groups of the people affected by the HIV/AIDS, the participants resolved that government should support for the betterment of their lives.

The participants expressed need to organize a meeting to take the campaign to other regions and to other leaders in the community. They felt that the campaign should be extended to grassroots level. The ultimate goal of the local to local dialogue methodology is to support women to redesign institutions and redistribute power, to promote sustained community p a rt i c i p a t i o n and government accountability to promote urban and rural settlements that work for everyone. The participants were equipped with skills and knowledge of holding local to local dialogue meetings.

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