
Inheritance Legal Network in East & Southern Africa

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS—due September 1

Background

AIDS has dramatically magnified the effects of discriminatory inheritance laws and of a legal and policy framework that denies women adequate protection in much of East and Southern Africa. Disempowered and financially dependent widows are more vulnerable to the disease since they may be forced to participate in the practices of widow inheritance, polygamy, and prostitution to survive. Impoverished widows also have reduced capacity to cope with the disease should they or their children become infected. Moreover, women widowed by AIDS are particularly vulnerable to abuse by relatives. Widows have to contend with widespread property grabbing, eviction from their homes, witchcraft accusations, and the loss of their children.

In countries throughout East and Southern Africa, advocates are using law-based strategies to confront inheritance violations and reduce women's HIV vulnerability. Cutting edge work is taking place around strategic litigation and law reform to address discriminatory provisions and legislative gaps that violate women's rights and increase their HIV vulnerability. Advocates are working to make equality provisions in recently adopted progressive constitutions and international conventions meaningful.

National advocates, however, work largely in isolation and hunger for greater access to draft and model laws, good court decisions, and legal strategies. Countries in both East and Southern Africa grapple with similar concerns around women's access to property and a legal environment, where old colonial statutes function alongside customary law interpretations. The opportunity to share resources on a regional level and develop joint initiatives has dynamic potential. It could also help provide a mechanism for a stronger African regional voice in international spaces.

The Network

The Open Society Institute Law and Health Initiative (LAHI), the Open Society Initiative for East Africa (OSIEA), and the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) are interested in supporting an organization ("the Coordinating Organization") to house an informal network for advocates working on women's inheritance rights in East and Southern Africa. This would be both a virtual and in-person network with the following components:

- A website with an electronic library of international, regional, and national resources on women's equality and access to property. This should include human rights conventions and commentary by human rights bodies, national constitutions and legislation, case law, articles, and reports.
- The website should also allow viewers to send questions and requests to the coordinator and to communicate with each other.
- Additionally, the website should additionally include contact information for NGOs working in the area of inheritance rights and links to useful websites.

- A newsletter with news and developments from advocates working on women's inheritance rights shared both in hard copy and electronically.
- An in-person meeting with country advocates, focused around a particular theme of interest to them.
- Other components applicants consider useful.

The GBV Prevention Network (www.preventgbvafrica.org), operating in East and Southern Africa and based out of Uganda, has offered the use of their established network structure to support an Inheritance Legal Network. They will be organizing their members into thematic groups and would be interested in working with a partner who would coordinate the thematic group of inheritance and property rights.

This is a one-year grant with the intent to renew if successful.

The Coordinating Organization

The coordinating organization for the Inheritance Network should have the following qualifications:

- Well-versed in inheritance issues and women's rights
- A well developed gender analysis and adequate gender representation
- Legal expertise
- Computer literacy and IT expertise (either in-house or through a partnership with an appropriate party)
- Excellent communications experience
- Either based in East or Southern Africa or a close relationship with organizations in the region.

Proposals

Interested organizations should send a proposal, describing their vision for the Network and expertise in the area. Application forms may be obtained at: http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/law/focus_areas/capacity/guidelines/LAHI_application.doc. Please submit proposals to lawandhealth@sorosny.org (subject line: Inheritance Legal Network) by September 1, 2008.