

Firelight Newsflash! 23 June 2008

Report Features Firelight Partners' Work in Rwanda Women's Property Rights as an AIDS Response: Lessons from Community Interventions in Africa

Program activities of three Firelight partners in Rwanda, Benishyaka Association, Rwanda Women's Network and Trust and Care, were recently highlighted in a recent report from the International Center for Research on Women. See an excerpt below from the report:

"Securing women's property and inheritance rights can reduce their vulnerability to crises, including those that might result from HIV and AIDS. National and international policies are essential for a legal environment that enables women to realize these rights. Also essential is the social and cultural environment—the norms and practices, which often influence people's decisions related to women's property and inheritance rights. However, creating an enabling environment is inherently complex and difficult to address with a single strategy.

"Transformative and sustainable change occurs when people most affected and with the most to gain build on community resources and respond to community needs. Across sub-Saharan Africa, where communities—and particularly women—have been devastated by AIDS, grassroots initiatives are addressing the links between women's property rights and HIV with impressive results. Though small in scale, these efforts are educating communities about how property rights affect women and girls in the context of HIV, and mobilizing stakeholders at all levels to take action.

"Recognizing the importance of community-driven responses to AIDS, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), in partnership with the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA) and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), implemented a grants program to document and test community interventions to secure women's property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV.

"Program results demonstrate the promise of interventions that harness local capacity and the synergy of networks to secure women's rights to property and inheritance. Findings also suggest practical ways for the international development and donor communities to support these pioneering initiatives and bring them to scale. Ultimately, integrating these findings into new and current programs will go a long way to quell the rise of HIV in Africa and around the world."

To read the full report, see: <http://www.icrw.org/docs/property-rights/2007-wpr->

[community-interventions-africa.pdf](http://www.aidsalliance.org/custom_asp/publications/view.asp?publication_id=229&language=en)

Manual: Tools together now! 100 participatory tools to mobilise communities for HIV/AIDS

This toolkit from the International HIV/AIDS Alliance provides a selection of 100 Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools which you can use for community mobilisation and HIV/AIDS. PLA tools are interactive activities (such as mapping, problem tree diagrams, role plays, transect walks, and many, many more!) which enable communities and organisations to learn together about HIV/AIDS in their community, develop a plan, act on it and evaluate and reflect on how it went. This toolkit is intended to help organisations and community groups mobilise and work together to address HIV/AIDS issues. These issues may relate to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS, or mitigating the negative impact of HIV/AIDS on affected children or communities. People working directly with communities affected by HIV/AIDS will find these tools most helpful.

Tools Together Now! is designed to help put All Together Now! – Community mobilisation for HIV/AIDS, into practice. Used together, these two resources will provide a powerful way for organisations and communities to work more effectively together to address HIV/AIDS. All the tools and approaches described in this toolkit were developed or adapted in the field by Alliance partner NGOs with communities.

To download the manual,

see: http://www.aidsalliance.org/custom_asp/publications/view.asp?publication_id=229&language=en

Excerpt from the Manual: "Transect Walks"

A transect walk surveys the community to explore community key points, problems and resources. It can be used to refine understanding of the community and its vulnerability to the impact of HIV/AIDS, and explore the impact of HIV & AIDS on land use, agricultural production, food security, housing, health and income generating activities. Access to basic services such as water supply and firewood that have a direct impact on the living conditions of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA), and the extent of migration, dissolution of households and housing conditions of PLWHA can be also assessed.

Take care to cover different sections of the community with different conditions

ensuring that information is obtained from men, women, youth, elderly, PLWA and various socio-economic groups. Often issues will emerge that have not been included in community discussions. Compare the completed diagrams with a community mapping exercise.

Conducting a transect walk:

1. Assemble a group to take part.
2. Together list information considered useful to know on a particular issue such as vulnerability to the impact of HIV/AIDS. Remind the group that each participant's contribution is valued.
3. Review the community map and identify area(s) for the transect – it may be helpful to split into different groups, perhaps based on sex, age, etc.
4. Select a starting point for the transect and divide the tasks of note taking and drawing.
5. Start walking, observe and take time for discussions with people living in the area, focus on critical issues.
6. At the end of the walk, the group together draws a diagram of the area noting key features.
7. Discuss the diagram identifying problems, resources and opportunities and the implications of the insights gained.

Stephen Lewis Foundation - Latest Newsletter Available Online

http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/documents/grassroots_COLOUR_REVISED.pdf

The International Service Human Rights Awards 2008

Deadline: 3 July 2008

The International Service Human Rights Awards recognise grassroots organisations, international development workers and activists who work for change at a local, national or international level. The Awards aim to honour organisations and individuals that work at the very grassroots level in promoting human rights and effecting real change in the lives of people. They seek to celebrate the work of the 'unsung heroes' in the struggle for human rights. These Awards are meant to complement rather than compete with other awards honouring people who promote social, economic and political change around the world. For more information, visit the website: <http://www.is-humanrightsawards.org/> or see the nomination form attached.

Organizational Profile: Book Aid International

Book Aid International promotes literacy in developing countries by creating reading and learning opportunities for disadvantaged people, in order to help them realize their potential and eradicate poverty. Working in 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Book Aid International and its partners believe that access to books and information is fundamental education and the eradication of poverty. They work with national level partners that either make the books available through their own network or distribute them to schools, libraries and community based organizations.

To find out whether you can request books from one of Book Aid's national partners click on your country on the [where we work](#) page, (<http://www.bookaid.org/cms.cgi/site/whatwedo/countries/index.htm>). You can direct requests for book support in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda. (Book Aid also works in Zambia and Zimbabwe but does not accept requests for support in these countries.) Information requested will include:

- your organisation's objectives, programmes and/or projects, target groups as well as full contact details including the postal address and country
- need: the sort of books being requested, eg vocational materials, medical texts etc
- how the books will be used and who will use them
- where the books will be placed
- whether there are any libraries or resource centres nearby

Book Aid works to build the capacity and skills of their partners to promote reading and literacy, to use technology, and to create dynamic, vibrant and inclusive community-focused libraries and information services. This helps to strengthen the books and information sector within the countries where they work, so that it is better able to meet demand from local communities, and to build a reading culture and support good quality education in the developing world.

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**"FROM THE FRONTLINE" Interview with Director of the Africa Child Policy
Forum, Assefa Bequele
17 June 2008 - CRINMAIL 991**

To mark the Day of the African Child, Dr Assefa Bequele, Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum (<http://www.africanchildforum.org/>), gives his thoughts on the relevance of the Day, and on the battle for child rights in the region. Dr Bequele is an Ethiopian national with experience in university teaching (USA and Ethiopia) and a 27-year long service in the International Labour Organisation (Geneva, Asia and Africa). Devoted to the promotion of the rights and welfare of children, specifically the progressive elimination of child labour and the protection of working children, Dr. Bequele was responsible for the design and development of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

I have always had an interest in child rights. After I retired from the ILO, I had to ask myself "what do I want to do?" I felt I had to continue my work in child rights, and so I thought about what was needed. It seemed to me that what Africa was missing was a pan-African child rights organisation. There are thousands of NGOs in Africa, but the policy and advocacy links between them were missing.

We work in three main areas. In terms of child rights advocacy, our broad programme works on the extent to which governments are honouring their commitments. We engage in policy dialogue. We also work on child protection, particularly violence and other issues such as child-headed households. And finally, a major area of our work is on child participation. **Africa is too big to generalise as much as people do.** But the same could also be said of any region. We can make some general observations, and talk about some common constraints, as well as opportunities. **There are firstly considerable political constraints.** These are the most important in my view, even more important than poverty. Children are not as important as they should be. In many African countries, 50 per cent of the population is under 18. Yet children's departments are usually junior in the government, and they have a poor allocation of resources. **Secondly, poverty is very important.** This has implications for so much – access to food, healthcare and school for example. Thirdly, harmful traditional practices are a huge constraint on the realisation of child rights across Africa. We have to qualify that by recognising the positive cultural practices as well as the negative ones. Considering the obstacles families face, it is incredible that they do as well as they do on behalf of their children. But we cannot ignore the harm too. Violence against children is a particular problem, as it is in many parts of the world. Many consider that children should be seen and not heard, and issues such as FGM and early marriage correspond with the social status of children in the family and in society. **Fourthly, the weakness of civil society is also an obstacle to child rights in Africa.** Yes, there are thousands of NGOs but they can be ineffective, particularly at the policy level. This may be both because of their limited capacity, and also because governments are unsympathetic towards them, and do not value their survival. **One shouldn't exaggerate the idea that child rights are based on a**

Western notion of the law. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) contains about 85 per cent of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but tries to reflect the African realities such as the impact of FGM and early marriage. It also understands the reciprocity between children and families and the obligations on children, as well as on families and society. **I do believe that interpreting the CRC must be nuanced and sensitive to the concerns of local populations.** It is about articulating the principles in a way that is acceptable. The ACRWC, if I may say, is even more advanced than the CRC because individuals and groups can lodge complaints against violators. This is yet to be tested, but it is there for when the mechanisms are in place. **The CRC has still been used as a basis for when rights have been violated,** even though, for example, the CRC has been ratified by Ethiopia, but not explicitly incorporated into the law of the land. However, the constitution says that any treaties ratified by the government form an integral part of the constitution of the country. A case was taken by the Children’s Legal Protection Centre here. A child was abandoned by the father, and the mother then died so they were adopted by the aunty. But the father then claimed a right to the mother’s property. Local courts ruled that the father was the natural provider and would therefore be given the property. But the aunt thought he was only interested in the property, so the Centre took the case to the federal court and argued that the decision of the lower court was not in the best interests of the child according to the CRC – and they won the case. **I am often suspicious of these days celebrating various things, but the Day of the African Child is surprisingly well known and successful.** There are many events across Africa and it is taken seriously. The Day is one of the things that we can be proud of in this region. **The areas of child rights which need more consideration are three-fold.** There needs to be more legislative reform – there is little harmonisation of the CRC and ACRWC in too many countries. Enforcement is the second problem. There is a huge gap between law and practice and this may be related to capacity. Finally, budgetary constraints are a big problem. Too few resources are allocated to children, particularly in comparison with, for example, defence and security. **If I was not working on child rights, and I was not a man, I would be working on women’s issues.** Equality is so important. You do not have to be a woman to work on these issues, but I think it gives you more credibility. **Child rights is basic to our development.** It should be at the core of our being and our actions as citizens of the country and of the world.

As part of the Firelight Foundation’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Technical Assistance (META) Program, Firelight provides “Newsflashes” to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and

families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org.