



Programming Idea 3: Increasing women's ownership of property, assets and securing their inheritance rights

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What it involves: Interventions that help women secure their inheritance rights to land, property (e.g. housing), or other assets include:

- training women about their rights in relation to property and inheritance;
- advocacy and training with police, judiciary and other government officials to uphold women's property rights;
- providing legal services to women whose rights are violated;
- providing community paralegal services including support for will preparation;
- advocacy with policy-makers, media and community leaders to change discriminatory laws and customary practices that prevent women from inheriting property.

Summary of the evidence: Women are often denied access to and control over land and property because of discriminatory inheritance laws or customary practices. Many women without land and property are left economically insecure and susceptible to poverty, as well as reliant on spouses or male relatives for survival. Qualitative research from Uganda, South Africa and South Asia shows that women's access to land and ownership of assets (e.g. housing) contributes to food security, more control over sexual decision-making, and their ability to leave abusive or violent relationships (87,88). It can also enhance women's social status and decision-making role or bargaining power within the household. These factors in turn may contribute to improved health outcomes

for themselves and their families (89,90). Conversely, women who are left without land or property may engage in high-risk coping strategies including transactional sex, or sex work for survival and hence, face increased vulnerability to HIV. Research also shows that women whose husbands die because of HIV-related conditions are often denied access to property and inheritance by relatives. (28,88,91,92).

Several interventions in African and South Asian countries have been implemented to empower women to demand their property and inheritance rights in the context of HIV (93,94). While important lessons have been learnt from these interventions, none of them have been evaluated for impact on reductions in violence or on improvements in HIV outcomes. Instead, evaluations (mainly non-experimental designs) have focused on process measures (e.g. increased participation in will preparation; increased participation in community mobilization around property rights; increased knowledge of laws, rights and responsibilities). Therefore, no examples of this programming idea are provided in the accompanying annexes.

Conclusion: Interventions to increase women's ownership of assets and property and secure their inheritance rights have not been evaluated to assess violence against women and/or HIV outcomes. Therefore, this idea is considered as effectiveness undetermined, and needs to be rigorously evaluated.