



# RAPID FUNDING ENVELOPE FOR HIV/AIDS: TANZANIA



## DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF PLWHAS



“People Living with HIV/AIDS can do anything if we raise awareness and help one another.” These are the passionate words of Lanta Iddy, an HIV+ mother and grandmother living in the village of Mto wa Mbu, Tanzania. Lanta is a recent graduate from the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) voluntary paralegal training. The training, part of ICA’s broader programme support People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs), is supported through the Rapid Funding Envelope (RFE), a multilateral partnership which is dedicated to enabling civil society institutions such as the ICA to participate fully in the national response to the AIDS epidemic in Tanzania.

Lanta, who was diagnosed as HIV+ in 2002, says that serving as a paralegal is one way that she can give back to the community that supported her in her time of need. Extremely impassioned by this work, Lanta believes that the biggest problem for women and PLWHAs is that they are not aware of their rights and are taken advantage of when they are down. Citing the lack of knowledge about the marriage act, inheritance laws, and will writing as the biggest challenges to overcome, Lanta firmly believes that community members can work together to address these issues.

Armed with her new training, Lanta is change in action. One of Lanta’s first cases was that of a neighboring couple, both of whom were HIV+. When the husband died, his family began harassing the wife, saying that the home and possessions should be theirs. The woman contacted Lanta, who held a family meeting, explaining the rights of the wife, and the legal action that she could take if those rights were threatened. The family—realizing that this woman had support, resources, and the law on her side—agreed to drop the issue. In another case, a man’s mother, upon learning he was HIV+, was trying to remove him from his home and take back land that she had given him. Lanta directed him toward formal legal help and continues to support him as his case moves through the local and



Judy Wiegert, 2009

Lanta Iddy, volunteer paralegal in Mto wa Mbu, Tanzania

regional court system. The mother continues to appeal the court’s support of her son, but for the time being the man and his family have remained in their home.

In total, 60 volunteer paralegals have been trained, 12 cases have been filed in the local courts and countless numbers of potential violations are now being addressed. Lanta and her fellow paralegals are using the knowledge they learned to empower their peers and advocate for their rights across their community, in public meetings, in villages, and from house-to-house. Lanta says the work is rewarding because, more than anything, she is helping her peers realize there is nothing to be ashamed of and that together they can be strong and make a difference.

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